



MATTHEW RICH
BOSTON

Much of the attractiveness of implied dimension on a flat surface lies in its power to make us believe that depth truly exists. *IRE & ICE*, Matthew Rich's exhibition of latex on cut paper paintings, proves that while depth can be successfully—and playfully—represented on a two-dimensional surface, it's much more difficult to achieve depth that isn't an illusion [samsøn; October 23—December 5, 2009].

Rich's first solo show in Boston features seven unframed works, the newest and strongest in a body of work that he began in January 2008. These pieces are developed in a remarkably jocular way—by combining perfectly cut, custom painted strips of paper on his studio floor. Rich's palette is richly kaleidoscopic and his compositional language yields expansive geometric abstractions. Fantastic swarms of cut color converge on a flat pane, like paper puzzle pieces designed to fit "perfectly." They are then attached together with linen tape and hung on the wall. The paper is surprisingly imperfect: scattered across the surface are a smattering of scratches, wrinkles, pockmarks, and other discolorations from contact with the studio floor. The pieces are at once sculptural and painterly, thoroughly characterized by the struggle between these two qualities. Ultimately, however, they are flat.

Both sides of the paper are coated with latex. As a result, the painted undersurface occasionally casts a colorful glow against the wall, and is visible behind the paper edges that are not flush with the wall. At both ends of *Ampersand*, 2009, a couple of vaguely hued ninety-degree-angle shadows reveal nearly hidden white paper panels above them, painted the very same white as the wall. Similarly, the green rectangle donut in *Skew*, 2009, is given a new oval frame by a curvy white panel on the painting's right side, solidifying the desire to question form and depth. *Ampersand* is the tallest and most linear of the works here, evocative of the 1960s shaped paintings of Frank Stella, another Massachusetts native. The multicolored, diamond-like collections of parallelo-

grams and adjacent arches give the impression that the image is somehow more present than it really is—deeper and superior to what a thin, weak piece of paper could ever convey. The imagery is commanding, the medium is light as a feather, and the resulting tension is as engaging as it is mildly off-putting.

The struggle in Rich's work lies not only with dimension, but also between intention and accident. Amid the variety of inadvertent marks on the paper, selected panels feature intended shading and additional painting, making for an even balance of deliberate cutting, intended painterliness, and accidental magic. What's more, some works were originally composed with one side in mind and later abandoned in favor of the accidental composition forming on the opposite side, underscoring the playfulness crucial to their development.

Rich makes paintings like a sculptor, chipping away at each piece, adding and editing, forever sculpting with color. The cut-paper paintings suffer from a lack of three-dimensional quality—eagerly in search of a place to expand beyond the tyranny of a flat piece of paper on a flat wall—but their colorful, painterly, and meticulously formed compositions are brilliant in their own right. In this, the works are as imperfect and endearing as their materials.

—Evan J. Garza

ABOVE: Matthew Rich, *Twist*, 2009, latex on cut paper, linen tape, 33 x 55 inches (courtesy of the artist and samsøn, Boston);