

SUMMER 2009

Reviews

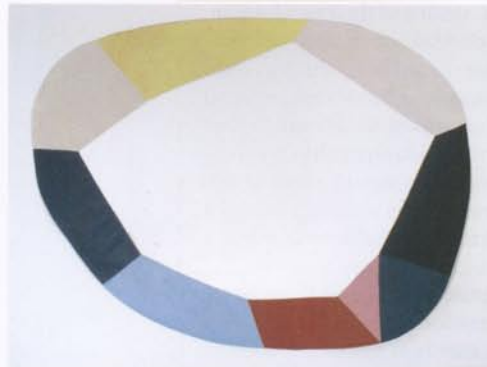
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CHICAGO

## Matthew Rich

DEVENING PROJECTS + EDITIONS

Matthew Rich makes art in patchwork fashion. A pictorial quilter, he stitches—tapes, actually—imprecise geometric forms together, creating compositions that never hide the means of their production. He



Matthew Rich,  
*Octagon*, 2009, latex  
on paper, 33 x 43".

begins by painting individual sheets of paper with shades of latex paint, leaving behind visible brushwork and just barely perceptible shifts in hue. These colorful sheets are then cut into shapes, which he subsequently tapes together to form irregularly shaped abstractions. While referring at once to Color Field and pattern painting, the works never strike an equipoise between part and whole: There is a tension between the prominence of the individual pieces and the playful assertiveness of the final product.

Sometimes, as in *Blocks*, 2008, Rich's scissors work in mind-numbing overtime. Composed of 114 smallish pieces of paper carefully taped together, the work gives the illusion of stacked three-dimensional forms. The artist's usual practice, however, is to use fewer shapes—relatively large interlocked fields that stand out boldly, so as not to be subsumed in an optical trick. *Octagon*, 2009, for example, an egg-shaped construction with a spacious eight-sided aperture, is made from just nine triangular or trapezoidal painted pieces of paper (two three-sided pieces are conjoined to form one side of the octagonal hole). Here, color and line are carefully calibrated to conjure a sense of internal velocity. That phenomenon is also found in *Turbine*, 2009, where shards of color seem to pinwheel or radiate outward from a roughly central point—somewhat like Mark Grotjahn's butterflies—as if the parts were scattering centrifugally. Others works, like *Tilt*, 2008, sit firmly in place on the axis of their loosely defined symmetry.

Despite Rich's predilection for the lighter end of the color spectrum, as well as for fey and upbeat compositions, there is an overarching sobriety to this work, rooted perhaps in the artist's deliberative step-by-step process. His shapes seem random at first, both in their color and their form, but there is often a subtler orchestration offered, a kind of calibration of effect that always keeps these works from seeming as giddy or dreamy as they might. He's committed to his project, attentive to its subtleties, and thoughtful with respect to the possibilities within. Decisions he makes about the ways in which the pieces of painted paper are grouped, what color might repeat in a composition, where to use literal holes in the work, and so forth, all come into play—and draw attention away from the exuberant whole.

Rich's sobriety is also evident in his unwillingness to sanctify the art object: Although he makes them with meticulous care, the works are extremely unfetishized. They're just paper, after all, and have tiny bends and creases; their taped edges pull one way as gravity pulls another, causing the colored shapes to buckle a bit from the wall. Tiny bits of dirt—the residue of the artist's cluttered studio—are allowed to remain embedded in the works' surfaces. And one imagines that a humble material like tape will hold the pieces together for only so long. The moroseness lurking under the surface here reminds one of a jester's motley, where insouciant geometric patterning clads things of a darker and moodier nature.

—James Yood