

Art in America

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Matt Magee at Bill Maynes New York

Matt Magee's beautiful paintings might seem merely decorative were it not for their finely tuned optical and, one feels, spiritual intensity. He achieves an overall luminosity with horizontal rows of tiny disks, ½ inch across, and smaller, set against larger horizontal zones of color. (In some less convincing works these disks cluster within concentrically nested triangles.) The dot-based modularity of the paintings suggests a curious and contradictory range of correspondences: weaving, fields of pixels, molecular configurations, Aboriginal "dreamings."

Each of Magee's units is composed of two colors and ranges in configuration from a dot with a thin outline to a round field with a small dot at the center. Seen close up, the paintings are like a world of finely considered Albersian color interactions or so many miniature Nolands, with each set of center, periphery and ground colors yielding its own subtle pleasure. A disk may recede into the ground or advance toward the viewer, expand or contract, establish a continuity with its neighbors in a line dance or become part of an arcane, glyphlike configuration across several lines. Close inspection also reveals that the disks are not laid out

on an underpainted field, as efficiency would dictate; rather, figures and grounds have been painted together, one disk at a time, often with subsequent adjustments. Magee's protracted, meditative process corresponds to the dreamy, even hypnotic

quality of the paintings. There is clearly an obsessional side to the work, but without the numb, mechanical quality of much obsessively produced art. To discover the paintings' intimate, nuanced facture is to experience the integral relation of process to meaning in his work. No computer program could have produced these.



Encryption 2000

(like Magee) were Texans who worked at a modest scale, with utmost devotion to their peculiar, unfashionable, exigent visions. He is in good company.

ROBERT BERLIND