

ARTFORUM

<https://www.artforum.com/events/david-malek-2-209056/>

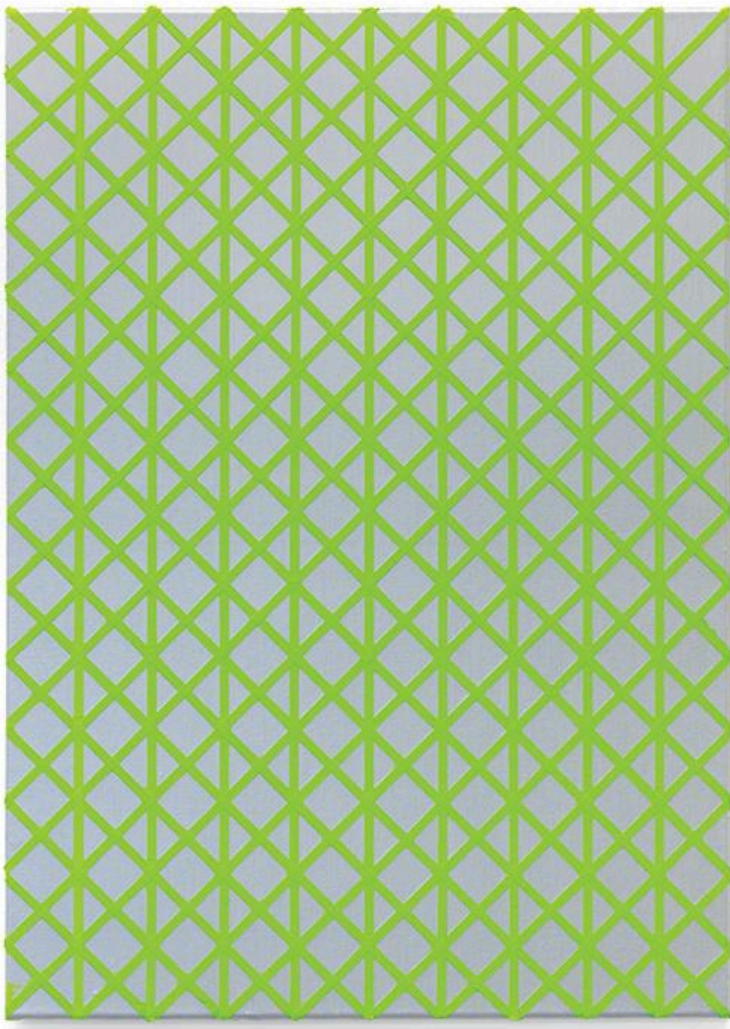
REVIEWS

PARIS

David Malek

TRIPLE V

By Mara Hoberman



David Malek, *Scanner*, 2014, acrylic on canvas, 27 1/2 × 19 1/2".

Masquerading as pure abstractions, David Malek's latest ensemble of bright and glossy acrylic paintings feature either single large shapes or all-over geometric patterns. Painted in electric shades of pink, blue, green, and yellow, along with gray, black, and silver, the eight canvases that were on view simultaneously channel the detached cool of 1980s neo-geo paintings and the meditative quality of ancient Indian tantric designs. These apparent Minimalist and mystical connotations are complicated, however, by the fact that Malek's titles connect each painting to a tangible, real-world subject. Using descriptive (albeit somewhat cryptically so) terms such as *Scanner* and *The Swimmer* (all works cited, 2014), Malek coaxes the viewer to associate circles, ovals, and crisscross patterns with people, places, and things. Resembling pared-down or zoomed-in versions of Peter Halley's geometric Day-Glo landscapes and circuit boards, Malek's paintings are even more radical distillations of quotidian objects and experiences.

According to the artist's statement (which also served as the show's press release), *Mercure*, a cornflower-blue grid painted over a bluish-silver background, represents a high-rise hotel near the artist's home on the outskirts of Paris. Paradoxically, by reducing his subject to just two hues and a pattern of perpendicular lines, Malek widens rather than narrows his frame of reference. Lacking a sense of relative scale, the painting's orderly composition of lines and rectangles could just as easily refer to the building's glass and steel facade as to its tiled bathroom floors. Inviting varied interpretations, the work supports a mercurial relationship between abstraction and representation and reveals unexpectedly elegant formal qualities of bland corporate architecture. By contrast, *Illinois Memory*, a large square dominated by a magenta orb set against a gray background, was inspired by nature: a sunset the artist saw more than a decade ago while driving in his home state. With this narrative clue, Malek's Minimalist circle-in-square composition reveals itself as a dramatic landscape in which a radiant late-day sun hovers over an asphalt road.

A masterful colorist in the tradition of Josef Albers, Malek mixes his paints carefully and makes calculated decisions about the placement of hues in order to create optical vibrations. In *Illinois Memory*, the area where the pink disk's circumference meets the gray appears to quiver, strengthening the impression of glimmering

sunlight passing through atmosphere. Another illusion of light and motion appears in *Scanner*, in which a neon-green diamond pattern sheathes the entire canvas like a protective chain-link fence. The green lattice, also vibrantly set off against a silver background, evokes scintillating laser beams emitted by supermarket bar-code scanners.

The key to Malek's flirtatious back-and-forth between abstraction and representation is given by the aptly named *Black Mirror*, a delicate oval outline in bright safety orange on a glossy black background. The work's title refers to an eighteenth-century optical device, also known as a Claude glass—a favorite tool of landscape painters. The handheld convex mirror aided artists by reflecting a distorted image of reduced colors and simplified forms. In other words, the device abstracted reality into the picturesque. Itself an extreme illustration of this practice, *Black Mirror* gives only a faint suggestion of the physical object it represents, but in doing so, underscores the real-world roots of Malek's geometric abstractions.

—Mara Hoberman