

CRITICS' PICKS NEW YORK

David Malek

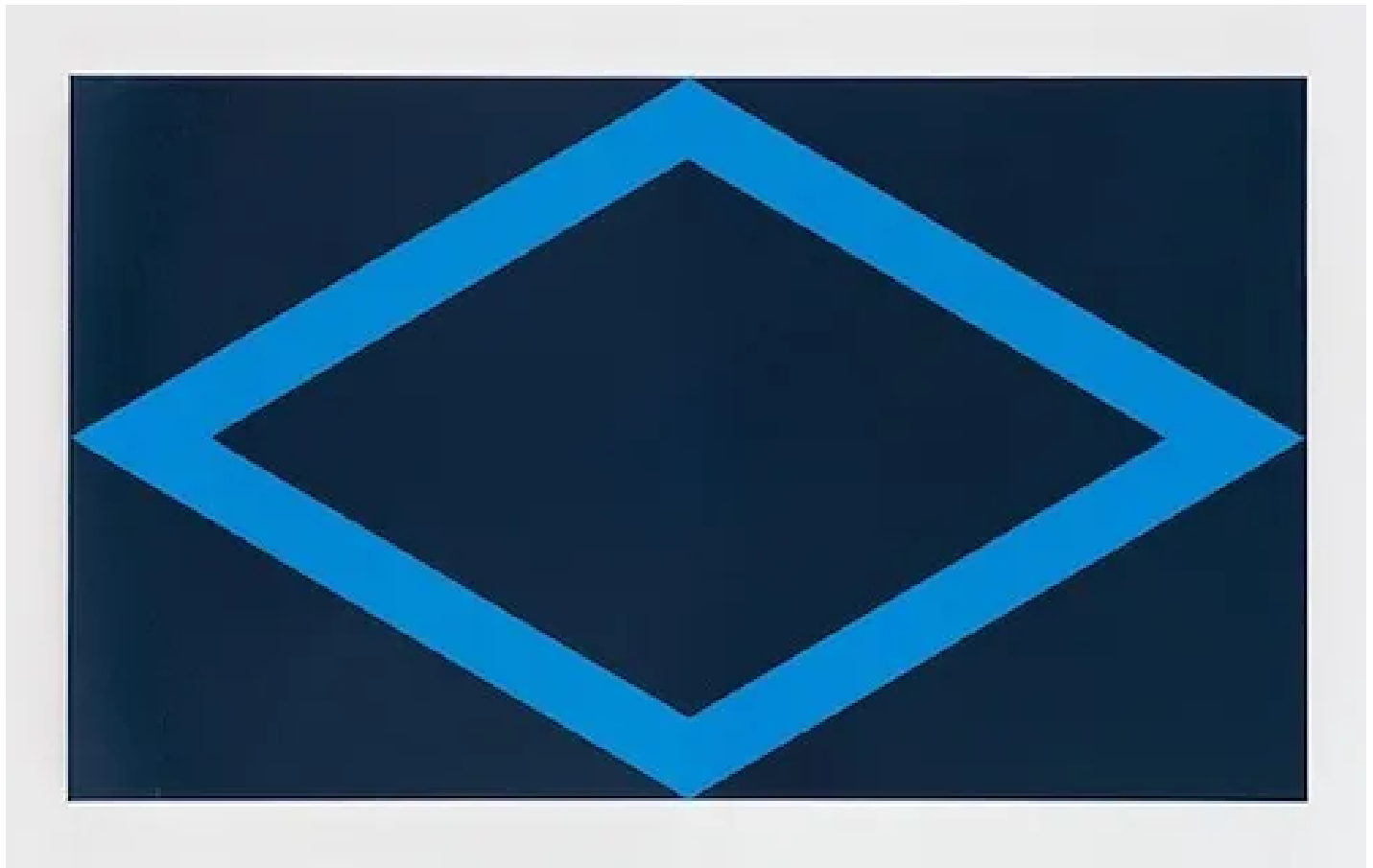
Martos Gallery

Martos Gallery | New York

41 Elizabeth Street

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By Ian Wallace



David Malek, *Blue Lozenge (Erik Roehmer)*, 2013, enamel on canvas, 39 1/2 x 67".

Each painting in David Malek's latest exhibition is composed of enamel in two colors applied with either a roller or a brush. These limitations in palette and texture echo familiar strategies of painting from the last century, but Malek also makes canny use of quasi-subliminal iconographic motifs culled from various ancient and contemporary sources. Some of his paintings, which appear at first glance to be Op art–esque abstractions, use images directly from pop culture: *Mainframe* (all works 2013), for example, displays

the artist's penchant for sci-fi refulgence as it visually mimics a backdrop from Stanley Kubrick's seminal *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). The works' titles act as touchstones for interpretation: *Blue Lozenge* (Eric Roehmer) is an homage to the French filmmaker's production company *Les Films du losange* ("Lozenge Films") and straightforwardly appropriates its blue diamond-shaped logo. Less obvious is the source of *Perspective*, which was inspired by the schematic drawings for André Le Nôtre's landscape architecture for Versailles and Chantilly and mimics their dramatic vanishing points and vibrant green hues, as if the work were seen from above.

Many of the artists whom Malek cites as influences, like Barnett Newman and Peter Halley, were and are frequent contributors to written art discourse. But rather than leaning on written theory or philosophy as a support for esoteric formalism, Malek's new works take up the immediacy of their symbolic referents as visual phenomena, resulting in abstractions of what are already abstract forms. This trick stems, in part, from Malek's personal status as a recent émigré to Paris. *Orbit*, based partially on tantric drawings used for meditation, includes an ellipse shape that appears frequently in Parisian architecture, and *Ra*, which references the venerated sun disk of ancient Egyptian theology, was also partially inspired by the city's famous, unique light. These paintings are the direct result of the artist, with the eyes of a cultural novice, training his gaze not just on the surrounding landscape but also on our entire iconographic vocabulary. To paraphrase Marcel Proust, whom Malek perhaps owes a debt of gratitude for his understanding of the subliminal power of aesthetic symbols: The only true voyage of discovery would be not to visit strange lands, but to behold the universe through another's eyes.

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