

## DAVID RYAN: GUTCHES & FIXES

**David Ryan's colorful abstract** wall sculptures lead us through graceful imaginary landscapes reminiscent of topographic maps and three-dimensional jigsaw puzzles. By combining MDF (Medium Density Fiberboard) or Corafoam with the tools of modern technology (Adobe Illustrator, laser cutting machines, and CNC routers), the artist creates interlocking, layered, and brightly painted compositions that bring forth a unique contemporary vocabulary that seduces us with its fancy and playfulness, yet also reveals the fragile line between chaos and order that is currently shaping the graphic impact of our environment.

Each of these constructions demonstrates Ryan's remarkable ability to create both visual motion and meditative states. Whimsy is grounded by thoughtful focus. Energy is subdued by a sense of containment. This paradox brings us deeper into every work, enabling us to stop and reflect on the artist's poetic fusing of drawing, painting, and sculpture, generating unexpected and challenging content. There is a classical sensibility in these constructions: Ryan's lines—straight, curve, or zig-zag—become the skeletons on which biomorphic shapes and positive and negative space find structure.

The artist received his MFA from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, where he was mentored by Dave Hickey, whose perceptions on art, art history, and culture are nothing short of brilliant. Hickey is able to find the extraordinary in the ordinary, an ability that Ryan shares. Ryan also references art history while simultaneously responding to popular culture. A choreography of many shadings of bright red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and violet pulses

off the walls—especially in the largest work, *Chumbley, Fass!*—suggesting a link to California Finish Fetish artists and the rich neon lights of Las Vegas. In fact, the brilliance of Ryan's colors suggests a luminosity generated by light, not pigment. *TNETENNA*, composed of layers of organic shapes of blue, mustard yellow, white, pink, red, and black, evokes broad associations with the biomorphic works of Jean Arp and Wassily Kandinsky and the color theory of Josef Albers and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. These combine with an inventive nod to billboard iconography and urban signage. *PIBAC*, cloud-like shapes of bright blue, yellow, black, and white—including an accent of a thin red circle—feels like a riff on Jean Dubuffet with a thread to comic book bubbles and cartoon explosions.

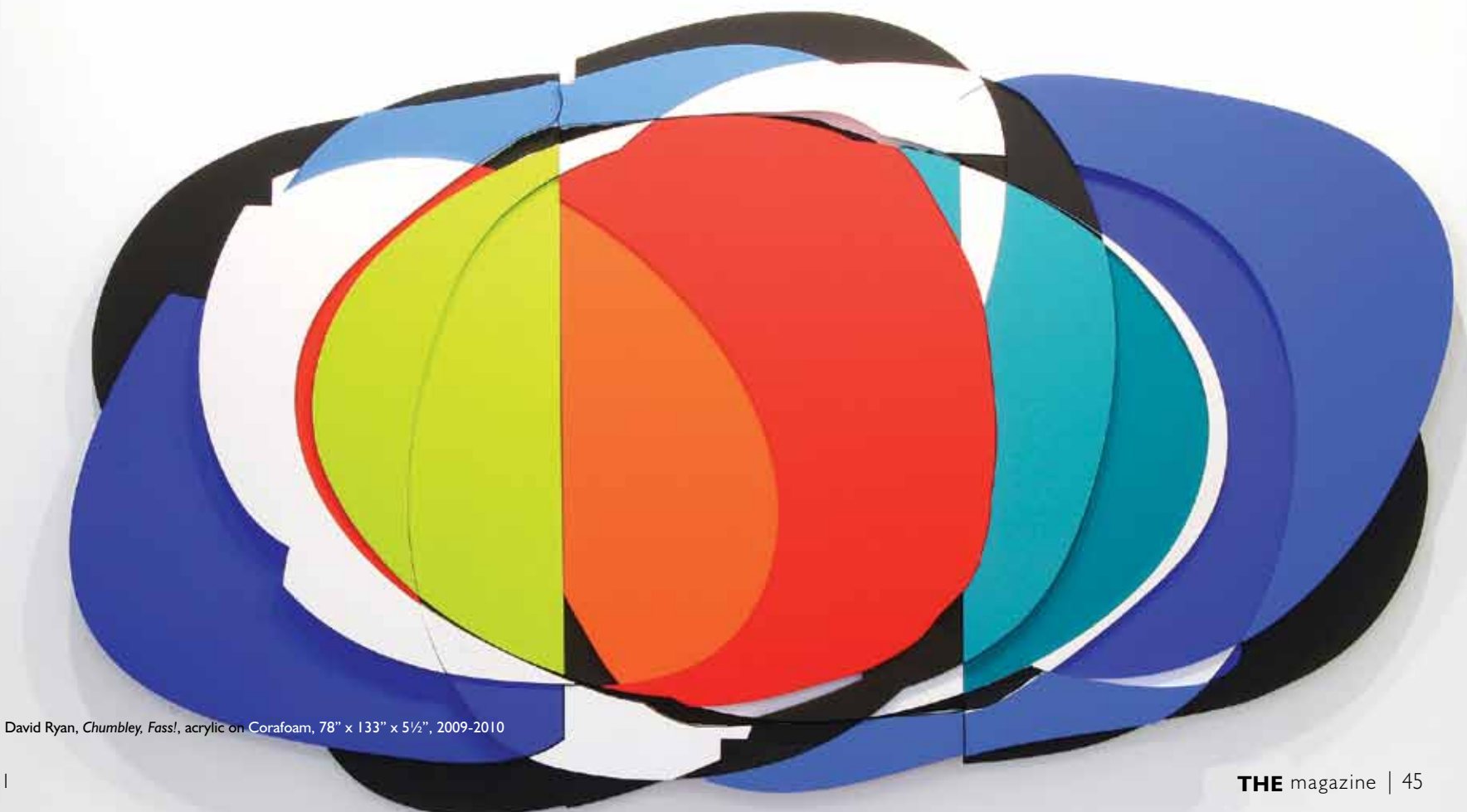
An architectural sensibility also pervades these works. Ryan's compositions look similar to the layering of site contours on architectural models, but they also address much more. Architecture can be a curious compilation of styles and materials on odd sites—like the casinos in Las Vegas. Yet Ryan takes the vernacular iconography of these “glitches and fixes” and moves them to an elegant place, much like the architect and historian Robert Venturi. Venturi's innovative and thoughtful approach to design rejected banal modernism by embracing historic architecture and responding to the everyday context of the American city. His groundbreaking 1972 book, *Learning from Las Vegas*, was the result of a documentation and analysis of the Las Vegas Strip that he and his wife, city planner Denise Scott Brown, conducted with their students at Yale. This radical manifesto, written with Scott Brown and colleague Steven Izenour, was “a call to reinvigorate design with symbolic

content, advocating the study of the commercial strip and the role signs play in conveying meaning to the landscape.” Ryan's imaginative constructions seem to parallel this call.

*Precious Lilywhite* is built up of black, pear-shaped layers, punctuated with a vertically cut yellow ellipse symbolically emerging from within the darkness. The black shapes are arranged with gaps and crevices between them. “Inlaid” squiggles of charcoal grey flow and snake like water meandering along these joints. Straight lines stretch diagonally across the surface of the yellow, the straight elements grounding the buoyant golden energy, establishing an atmosphere of meditative reflection.

*Ultra & Neon* is the only diptych in the exhibition. It's an insightful sculptural exploration of positive and negative space. The pale green central areas of each part have curving lines sweeping across them. The energy of the pale green “body” of the left relief is tamed by a partial edging of purple triangles and fuchsia rectangles, surrounded by a white field. The green “body” of the right is aroused by white on a field of black, accented with a tiny purple triangle and two larger fuchsia geometric figures. Unlike any of the other works in the show, these pieces speak directly to each other. Colors and shapes are not contained within boundaries. They open to one another and the wall, creating a powerful in-between realm like an invisible third eye. Perhaps this diptych may create a whole new avenue for the artist to explore. Will the space between parts be developed? Will shapes and colors flow out into the gallery, energizing the third dimension? Will they spill down the wall? It is always a joy to find a place in an artist's work that takes us beyond the here and now.

—SUSANNA CARUSIE



David Ryan, *Chumbley, Fass!*, acrylic on Corafoam, 78" x 133" x 5½", 2009-2010