

ARTFORUM

Los Angeles: Lester Monzon

Published: September, 2013

By Natilee Harren



Lester Monzon, *Untitled #26*, 2013, acrylic and graphite on linen, 14 x 11".

For his latest body of work, Lester Monzon cast his vision down, to the horizontal space of the floor. While the artist's earlier abstract canvases pitched the gestural brushstroke against modular "found" patterns, many of his new paintings evoke the gridded expanses of commercial floor tiling replete with accretions and stains. Monzon's palette of muted tones is accentuated by jolts of fluorescent pink and orange acrylic paint, as chromatically overloaded brushstrokes and semitransparent stains interact with partially filled-in patterns of squares, triangles, diamonds, and circles. The all-over designs act as screens or sieves, a middle ground around, on, and through which individual strokes and free-flowing pigment weave, seep, soak, pool, and hover. In *Untitled #2* (all works 2013), a murky green stain coagulates around a jumbled bouquet of brushstrokes undergirded by a drawn lattice. In the exceptional *Untitled #9*, one sees a singular, phallic stain in fleshy pink with a halo of purple hovering in front of a whitewashed grid.

Seemingly all the formal painting devices from the last fifty years have been brought to bear in Monzon's canvases: the gestural brushstroke; the grid as found compositional device; the chance-determined stain; and the diagrammatic line. What's more, as a further gesture to horizontality, errant graphite lines meander through the compositions, and fine, hair-like scratches and burns reveal the artist's use of an electric sander as his preferred tool of erasure. *Untitled #26*, the most complicated painting of the series, has all these figures in place. The interactions of brushstroke, grid, stain, line, and burn produce a vertiginous, almost bilious illusion of looking down over a constantly shifting topographical landscape. With a process vibrantly visible, the paintings come off as obsessively overworked studies. In this, and in their modest scale, they seem a protest against the monumentality and technosophistication of recent abstract geometric painting (Tauba Auerbach and Sarah Morris come to mind) in favor of a more intimate and deliberately lowly—that is to say resolutely human—mode.