

Joshua Aster

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Josh Aster's paintings seem to present a flickering screen or veil between the viewer and some hidden reality. Some reveal more, others misdirect, all are packed with countless moments of tension that builds, relaxes, and builds again in the narrative wrought by the changing distance between the eye and the triangular motif webbing across the surface. Veils often provoke desire, to satisfy the curiosity of what is beneath. One can speculate the possibilities of what is being scrambled or occluded. But Aster's tessellated triangles lend primacy to the veil itself rather than what is behind it.

The foundations of each image are various—empty rooms, found images, words, song lyrics, memories of place and domestic patterns, brushwork informed by the movement of flickering newsreels—and through a process of intuitive occlusion, Aster glazes the underpainting with layers of egg oil tempera mixed with a vast arsenal of pigments ranging from earthy to neon to metallic. A dazzling mosaic appears with its own emergent properties, a matrix of triangles that can be upright and static or drifting and bowed. Each individual triangle hosts colors and facture inflected by what lies beneath while the painting as a whole becomes packed with contrasts and compliments to an electric end. The essence of the origin remains, but ultimately sensation reigns over scrutability.

Aster's triangular matrices conjure glimpses of a long lineage of geometric abstraction, but suggest an aporia in the Bauhausian impulse to interrogate visual perception by reducing it to formal relationships. Perception is messy. Aster's line and brushwork aren't by any means cold or surgical. Geometric abstraction may expose some underlying truth about the eye, lived experience is something else altogether. Our subjective relationship with the world may at times hint at some underlying order, but lived experience is tempered by immediacy, exigency, urgency, and hopefully the occasional moment of awe at the complexity of it all, and the



wonder at the relationship between the foundational mathematics of the universe, and an accidental glimpse into someone's living room on a walk down the street. Perception in all of its messiness is crystallized into these tessellated triangles, but without giving up the ghost.

Of the triangles, Aster has said they were simply a means of filling up the space of an empty room. What has emerged has become something far more. The web, screen, veil, however you might call it, suggests a moving outward, away from an orbital center of origin and passing through some new valence of perception. This emulates Aster's practice as a whole. His Inglewood studio bursts at the seams with work that is likewise in the process of becoming, moving ever outward without obliterating what came before. Of the painting *Airwaves*, he has said it began as words that have but a fleeting presence amidst stuttering towers of aqua and teal. As suggested by the title, it is like a broadcast: the expanding signal permeates empty space, leaving a wake behind it. As the signal weakens, the words and their meaning may stutter or wane, but the information is still there, and not necessarily less of it. In fact there may be more.

–Reuben Merringer

Artist Bio: Born in Brooklyn in 1976, Joshua Aster is a Los Angeles based artist and abstract painter who received his MFA from UCLA in 2007. Composed of memories of place, patterns, and current events, his egg oil tempera paintings feature triangular grids that obscure specificity. He has been featured in numerous exhibitions including solo painting exhibitions at Gattopardo, Cuesta College, Southwestern College, Edward Cella Art, Karl Fine Art, Carl Berg Gallery and LAXART. His work has been featured in *LA Weekly* and *The Los Angeles Times* amongst other publications. He was awarded a MacDowell Residency in September 2014. He is also a founding member of the artist collective OJO, and has presented work at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles and LACE. His 26 foot long painting can be seen at the W Hotel in Hollywood. His paintings were also featured on the 22 Amazon Prime TV show *Cosmic Love*.

