

San Francisco Chronicle

Friday, May 15, 2015



Teo González, *Untitled #687*, 2015, acrylic on canvas over board, 60 x 48 inches

González Crosses a Threshold

Kenneth Baker

In recent canvases at Brian Gross, former California, now New York painter Teo González appears to take a step back from the complete abstraction of his earlier work, but a careful look corrects that impression.

He has introduced into pictures such as “Untitled #687” (2014) a division of the ground color that reads as a horizon. In “#687,” the top half of the picture is underpainted in Naples yellow. Below, a thin horizontal haze of deep red grades into a nearly black lower half. Over the whole rectangle, González has cast a sort of visual net, a signature of his work. He draws freehand countless roughly circular cells of red, the interior of each one touched with a tiny drop of red. Each ovoid traces the bounds of his manual control.

The technique may bring to mind Chuck Close’s manner of fleshing out a grid into an image with dollops or dashes of color, but González leaves the grid implicit. His arrays of cells drift and waver like handwriting over an unruled page.

You may think “landscape” upon first seeing a piece such as “Untitled #687,” but the picture calls for a kind of scrutiny distinctive of González’s process. It, not an image, rules the comprehension of the work.

In “#687” particularly, among the works on view, an observer has to strain to see, or believe — because it is true — that the red delineating the tiny cells and occupying their centers remains consistent as the array showers down over the changing ground colors. That pressure on perception is distinctive of abstract painting, however much we might wish to read imagery into the work. Still, González does not appear to want to fend off associations to the color fields of Mark Rothko (1903-1970), some of which seem explicitly abstracted from recollected experiences of light and land.

In his recent work, González seems to want to test the power of his own reinvention of the pictorial field by veiling starkly divided compositions with the sort of tremulous grid that not even he could duplicate from one painting to the next.