

To Wrest the Grid from its Support: Timothy Harding's Manipulated Structures

By Brandon Kennedy



LEFT: Timothy Harding, *87" x 75" on 60" x 50"*, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 66 x 53 x 18 in
RIGHT: Timothy Harding, *87" x 75" on 64" x 52"*, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 67 x 54 x 13 in

Initially, Timothy Harding's explorations with undulating mesh forms began with graphite on paper grids, spilling off the wall or out from a corner, sometimes even gently leaning into one another on the floor as rolled-edged polygons. Some were lit by a scattered grouping of fluorescent tubes and bulbs on the ground below whose cords and forms were then integrated into the work's overall composition. Eventually, these installations gave way to singular works of acrylic on canvas, at once both meticulous and curious in their precision and method.

When I first visited his studio last winter after seeing his "buckled" paintings earlier the same year, he was already pushing elements of those forms back into installation again, never quite content with the permanent state of an art object, its relationship to the architecture of display, or even the combination

of components involved at any one time. Regardless, I circled back and asked about his process regarding the “paintings,” which marries a fastidious and punchy hard-edge abstraction with tablecloth-pulling type of visual ploy.



Timothy Harding, *64" X 52" on 48" X 36"*, 2015, acrylic on canvas, 53 x 40 x 10 in. Courtesy of the artist and Cris Worley Fine Art; Miu Miu satin and metallic platform and leather bucket bag at Forty Five Ten. Opposite: Giovanni Valderas, *Ay Te Miro (See You Later)*, 2016, wood, acrylic, mulberry paper, 36 x 48 in. Courtesy of the artist; Maison Margiela silver dramatic boot at Forty Five Ten.

Harding performs this final transformation by gently flipping the fully painted canvas over and removing it from its original support stretcher, which was pulled conventionally taut during the painting process. He then downsizes to a smaller stretcher with a similar horizontal-to-vertical ratio, and tweaks and

tugs the surface from behind, arranging the larger painted surface into a sculptural relief of sorts. When questioning Harding about this element of his systematic process, he admitted to enjoying the prospect of “flying blind” and “not having to make decisions.”

Instead of safety-pinning the back of a model’s outfit for a photoshoot (to appear more custom and form-fitting), this inversion sees the artist pushing the painted canvas toward the front instead, into folds, peaks, and valleys, eventually letting the paint cure into a yet unforeseen, invented topography. The unprimed edges of the canvas typically stray into the frontal view of one of Harding’s works, creating both a visual and physical tension between the smaller stretcher support and the plentiful canvas, the downward-pull of gravity when drying, and the furrowed surface of the picture plane. The simpler compositions sometimes capture the brash color schemes of the 1980s (I’m thinking skateboard deck palettes or a teenager’s summer apparel.), while other examples can call to mind the sedate tile and-grout combos of suburban homes.

2016 proved to be a breakthrough year for Harding, as he had his first solo commercial gallery show, SKIN, with Cris Worley Fine Arts and was also awarded one of the inaugural Nasher Sculpture Center Artist Microgrants. When faced with the prospect of planning for his exhibition, Harding viewed the opportunity as creating a dialogue between objects within the space of the gallery and not simply creating standalone artworks. Harding used the funds from the Nasher to buy a desktop vinyl cutter, thus freeing him from the arduous hand taping-off involved in his designs.

A rumpled surface can easily be read as a discard or post-utility, and when the formal elements of its surface are accomplished by a means of such a meticulous nature, there’s a certain sense of the absurd or a refusal that comes into play. Furthermore, when I brought up the topic of color choices and how it plays into the equation, Harding stated that he only started reintroducing color back into his compositions about two years ago. When speaking about color, he also mentioned being struck by artist/writer David

Batchelor's *Chromophobia* (Reaction Books, 2000). An introductory quote aptly defines the book's titular anxiety and possibly clues us in to a fact of the same for the artist: "...As with all prejudices, its manifest form, its loathing, masks a fear: a fear of contamination and corruption by something that is unknown or appears unknowable. This loathing of colour, this fear of corruption through colour, needs a name: chromophobia..." After a reluctant reintroduction of multiple hues a few years back, Harding now simply stores premixed colors in yogurt containers, pulling them down for use in an artwork when the timing and combination is right. Yet, almost all the artist's palettes read as monochromatically sound or garishly balanced somehow, not alerting us to the amount of potential unease of decision-making beforehand.

After a successful solo showing of his painted structures in the spring of 2016, Harding decided to combine the playfulness of his all-over paper installations with the medium and colorful palette of his work exhibited at Cris Worley. In the gallery of Tarrant County College (South Campus), Harding presented "paintings as elements of an installation" in his exhibition *Loop*. He laid one large green grid painting on the floor faceup as the central element around which other painted canvas nets, random studio detritus, and multiple paintings affixed to wooden supports (mimicking the form of haphazard totems or makeshift medical stretchers) about which various lights and their cords were strewn. While not exactly reading as a cohesive unit or a grouping simply divisible into commercial objects, the installation reiterates Harding's palpable unrest and continual curiosity about objects and their presentation.

As Harding has recently been involved with the commission of a screen-printed bag design for a collaboration between Patron and the 2017 Dallas Art Fair, I inquired about the process and how it compared with his other artistic practices. "It's not intuitive like the paintings, it's not 'do something and then react to it,' as the design is all laid at once," Harding stated. "I'm curious as to how it will inform the next group of artwork I make," he added. Harding was headed later that week to his first artist residency at Vermont Studio Center, and he already told me that he wasn't packing his vinyl cutter for the trip. Almost certainly, change is in the works.