

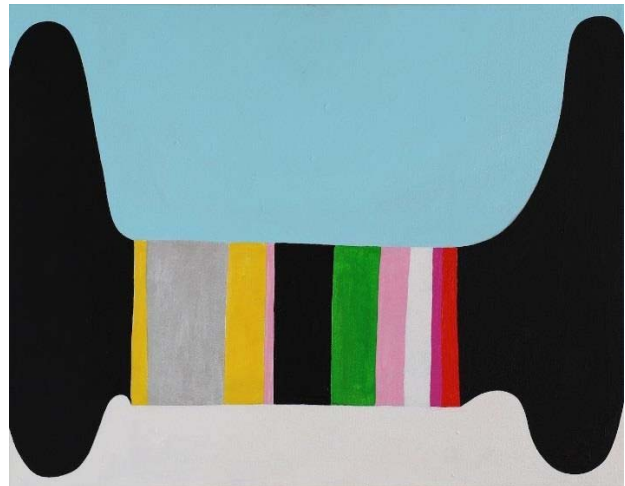
# HYPERALLERGIC

Sensitive to Art & its Discontents

## Two Artists Paint Through Different Philosophies

by Will Heinrich | November 11, 2015

I don't know about you, but I experience adulthood as an unremitting crisis of faith, and I look to art for examples of how to better think about what I'm doing. How can I acknowledge and learn from the past without feeling suffocated or even preempted by it? How can I defend the things that give me meaning from a society determined to strip that meaning away and sell it back to me?



6091 (2014), oil on canvas, 22 x 28 in

In his first solo show at Tibor de Nagy, Andrew Masullo offers one possibility, a meditative focus on constraint. The show begins with “6025” (2014–15), a roll-topped black-on-white panel pierced with nine brightly colored rectangles that establishes his terms: serially numbered, oil-on-linen canvases in handheld sizes; discreetly ambiguous figurative allusions (to me, for example, “6025” looks like a Torah breastplate, though someone else might see enormous brass church doors); and universalist abstractions approached with *haimisher* humility. The Euclidean grid of rectangles in “6025,” laid out by eye, paints itself into a very human corner, squeezing from a brick of glittery graffiti silver on the bottom left to a thin wedge of washed-out Pepto Bismol pink on the top right. Masullo’s palette, an ecumenical union of primaries touching on white, blue, green, and CMYK, knocks everything down half a tone from severity to comfort.

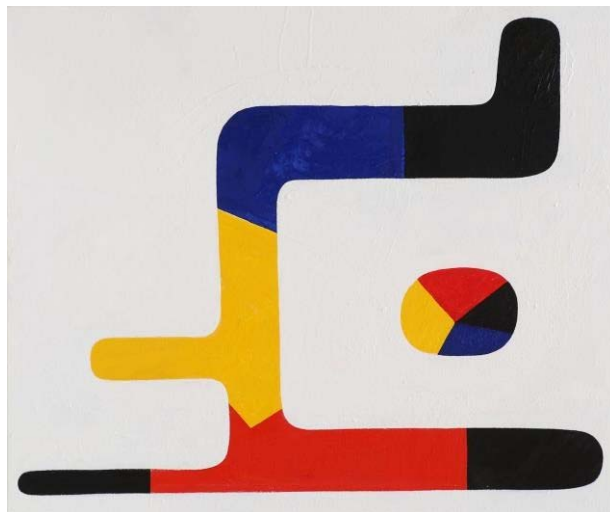
# TIBOR DE NAGY GALLERY

ESTABLISHED 1950



*Installation view, 'Andrew Masullo: Recent Paintings' at Tibor de Nagy*

The great comfort of arbitrary rules is that they're useless to doubt, and Masullo's painting "6052" (2014–15) even looks like a board game. A reversed and multicolored ornamental Hebrew letter *bet* stands against a white background, looking like the path of a fully self-contained mystical journey; a dot of pie-wedge colors in its center resembles the spinner in Twister. Of course, this board doesn't seem to take you anywhere: start at any one of its three black ends, pass securely through a random progress of red, yellow, and blue, and you will inevitably arrive at black again.



6052 (2014–15), oil on canvas, 20 x 24 in

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But the escape comes over time, as given rules resolve into transcendent principles. In “5811” (2013), an infinite world of colors seems to spring from the corners of an abstracted black *aleph* set against an uneven white cross. Slowly the color becomes an optical after-effect, a kind of insubstantial dazzle around the black. Then the shapes lose their superficial variation, so that each segment seems to record the same inexhaustible dichotomy of mark making — figure and ground, push and pull, give and receive.



5809 (2013), oil on canvas, 24 x 30 in

With enough practice, even those principles will resolve — as in “5809” (2013), a cloud of patchwork colors that distinguishes neither figure nor ground — into a kind of ecstatic nondualism, a feeling of undivided and selfevident certainty that depends on nothing else. For the viewer as much as for the artist, sustained looking can be a drill, a way of turning your back on social problems in order to tunnel through to the reality that underlies them.