

Art Now L.A.  
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Michael Tedja: 'The Color Guide Series'  
Navigating Through Disparate Images  
Chimento Contemporary  
January 18 - June 30, 2020

by Jody Zellen



Because of COVID-19, many galleries went into hibernation soon after they opened their winter/spring exhibitions and therefore never took them down. Amsterdam-based Michael Tedja's show at Chimento Contemporary was originally scheduled to close March 24, but was extended first through April 11 and is now on view until June 30.

His installation, *The Color Guide Series* is an expansive display of 280 (25 x 18 inch) paintings on paper. The works are hung edge to edge creating colorful grids five rows high and spanning the width of all the walls. The individual images — in differing styles — are painted on top of reproductions from Tedja's book, *The Holarium – Negeren Series 818:32* (2017). It is a large volume comprised of 818 drawings divided into 32 chapters, along with commissioned texts by curators and critics. In the book Tedja investigates how to navigate through such a comprehensive bombardment of disparate images, "*He is constantly introducing images in new contexts, exposing and manipulating their mutability.*"

Tedja's unabashed recycling and recirculating of his images might come as a surprise, but obscuring the original with new gestural, figurative and abstract overpainting is integral to his visual language and method of communication. All that remains from the reproductions are colorbars (for photography) along the right edge of each page.

Within the large grids, relationships undoubtedly form between the paintings, but more to the point, the grid becomes the container and organizing structure through which to view the work. The power of the installation comes from the immersion—taking it in as a whole—rather than analyzing the individual elements. In essence, each painting is a building block that has a specific place in the overall structure. With 280 images, it is difficult to create a coherent narrative, but this is not his goal. As Tedja states, "*Why do we need a specific connection in order to see things as separate from one another?*"

The imagery ranges from abstracted trees, starbursts and flowers to quirky figures and faces, as well as symbols and objects like hands, eyes, hammers and nooses. The installation also includes numerous expressive non-objective abstractions. The works appear to be hastily painted and gestural, almost like doodles or stream of consciousness mark-making. While Tedja embraces a full palette of colors, darker hues are predominant. In some works, black blobs are trimmed with white outlines, while in others the surface is built up in layers.

The overall effect is a dizzying array of expressive paintings that together invite the viewer on a journey using individual paintings as a guide to a greater narrative. Rather than be pigeonholed as a specific kind of image-maker, Tedja chooses to be all-encompassing, making works that juxtapose new and old, drawing from memory, popular culture and literature and recycling universal, political and personal themes and images from his vast archive to create installations with open-ended meaning.

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