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Jim Isermann
Wrapture: Going Beyond the Formal
Pacific Design Center Gallery
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by Jody Zellen



Primary colors and simple geometric shapes in different configurations can create complex patterns and dizzying experiences as exemplified by *Wrapture*, a spectacular installation by Jim Isermann at the Pacific Design Center Gallery. Isermann has been creating and exhibiting colorful, hard-edge geometric works on paper and canvas for years. He also uses vinyl to create shapes that can be tiled to span large walls and become installations. When the paintings and vinyl decals come together, the whole becomes much greater than the parts, especially when the walls and the architecture of the space are integral aspects of the installations. Isermann's work has connections to Op Art, as he is interested in the optical effects between forms and colors, however it goes beyond the formal to resonate on multiple levels. He brings together exacting precision and mathematical computation, craft, decoration, pattern, geometry and color theory to look at the relationship between high and low, intermixed with Queer identity and camp aesthetics.

It is difficult to separate the individual works from the installation here, as the intricacies within the paintings extend to the array of patterns that serve as wall paper or backdrops. The entry wall of the exhibition is covered with orange decals consisting of four sections of a pill / jelly bean shape contained within a square. When tiled together, the oblong ovals join to create complex patterns across the wall. On the opposite side of this wall, an identical graphic — blue rather than orange — has been installed. Two variations of the painting *Untitled (8,4,2)* (2019) hang on the wall to initiate a give and take, back and forth dialogue between the paintings and their relationship to the pattern behind them. This “conversation” continues as viewers proceed up the stairs into the vast main space where they are bombarded with more wall decals and paintings.

Isermann covers one wall in metallic silver— these stickers/decals have excised circles and ovals that reveal the wall behind them. On top of this reflective surface are red, white and blue paintings: *Untitled (hole painting) (1187)* and *Untitled (hole painting) (1587)* both 1987. In *Untitled (hole painting)(1187)*, Isermann builds a pattern around an empty square at the center of the work. Concentric squares in red, white and blue rotate

a few degrees as they get larger and larger to form the rest of the painting. At first glance, *Untitled (hole painting)*(1587) appears to be identical, but in this piece Isermann alternates squares and circles without any rotation.

Each wall is covered with a different configuration of vinyl stickers that range from criss-crossing light blue and orange diagonal stripes to more complicated patterns of wider and thicker lines in different arrangements and colors. These vinyl backgrounds become infinitely repeating patterns composited together from multiple square or rectangle sections. From a distance, the compositing is seamless, but up-close, the individual segments can be discerned. Installed over these complex patterns are paintings created between 1986 and 2019.

The paintings contrast, as well as complement what hangs behind them, and the juxtaposition often creates a kaleidoscopic effect in one's visual field. Isermann understands the complexity of color relationships and geometry, and is deliberate with the oscillations and rotations of shapes within each painting. His surfaces are smooth and the edges between colors exact. What at first glance appears obvious and simple—squares within squares alternating yellow, orange, red and blue— as in *Untitled (yellow 116, orange 1505, red 179, blue 2925)*, 2009 is in fact a mathematical sequence of colors and shapes that both curves and recedes into the distance. *Untitled (0386)*, 1986 is a hexagon-shaped canvas with six triangular sections over which Isermann has outlined abstract petal shapes that are red or yellow depending on where they intersect with the two-toned blue background. But dissecting the geometry of Isermann's paintings is not the point. The point is to appreciate them for their formal beauty, and enjoy the way they play off one another while marveling at their complexity and intricacy.

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