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Tony de los Reyes: "rio grande/rio bravo" at Angles Gallery

By JODY ZELLEN



"Border Theory (rio grande/scarlet field)," 2014,
dye, acrylic ink and oil on linen.

Tony de los Reyes' new body of work, "rio grande/rio bravo," is the latest development in a continuum of thoughtful, well-researched projects that bring to light political/social issues via the language of painting. Following works made with oil alkyd in a blue and white palette reminiscent of Delftware, and immersion into "Moby Dick," de los Reyes is now focusing on the United States/Mexico border. Rather than make didactic commentaries about tensions at the border, de los Reyes creates sensual abstractions that metaphorically illustrate the politics of the places. Using Google maps as a source, de los Reyes transforms aerial pictures of the landscape -- specifically the natural border as demarcated by the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo (two names for the same river) -- presenting it as a hard-edged line that swipes across the canvas. Layering fabric dyes onto raw linen, de los Reyes creates sensual abstractions reminiscent of Morris Lewis' pours, wherein colors infuse the surface, bleeding into one another forming gradients that flow from

dark to light and light to dark. In his large-scale painting *Border Theory (rio bravo/rancho el comedor)*, (2014), the two halves are separated by an oil-painted line that follows the contour of the river and sits atop striated dyed linen, whose hues range from deep pinks and dark blue-green to a metallic beige. The contrast between the competing shapes that share a common side stands for the conflicts that happen along the border. In works where there is a subtle shift in the background, be it an area of color or a field of dots whose orientation changes in relation to the dividing line, de los Reyes suggests that the cultural differences are a matter of perception, as the landscape of the two countries along the border is identical.

De los Reyes acknowledges that while all the borders are arbitrary, some are dictated by the shape of the the landscape. He suggests that what separates them from us or us from them is often just a thin green line. While his paintings come from looking at maps, a series of eight lithographs titled *Border Field* (2013) come from his own photographs taken at Border Field State Park in which the hills, ocean, and the fence between the US Zone and the areas outside it become a dream-like landscape whose soft edges and blur reflect the uncertainty before things come into focus. In "*rio grande/rio bravo*," de los Reyes has created a gorgeous body of work that embraces abstraction while simultaneously illustrating political conflicts.