

# **BROOKLYN RAIL**

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

## Devin Powers, Paintings

by [Jonathan Goodman](#)

LESLEY HELLER WORKSPACE | OCTOBER 24 – NOVEMBER 25, 2012

For those of us still interested in keeping the practice of painting flourishing, the show by Devin Powers, located in the front room of the Lesley Heller Workspace, makes it clear that the art form is indeed live and well. Creating psychedelic, nearly mandala-like oils on canvas, Powers looks to disparate sources of imagery, including the sacred geometry of Arabic art, the Western stained-glass window, and mathematical problems of the first degree, making use of influences on a formal level without succumbing to the spiritual content the forms suggest. By dint of hard work informing his technique and conception, the artist creates genuinely new, genuinely memorable images that stun us with their technical complexity. It is especially interesting to see how Powers uses geometric form to create art that references preceding artists, particularly the painters of the New York School, albeit building his shards of cubes on top of the past to create innovative works in oil. In conversation, Powers is quite modest about the considerable amount of study required to bring his paintings to this high point. It is clear from his art, however, that he has continued beyond these studies, recording his thoughts in considered notebooks in order to build a body of work that is remarkably accomplished for so young an artist (Powers is in his early 30s).

In “Storm” (2012), we can see Powers build upon a black background with nodes of interest formed by mostly white but also colored lines that emanate from points throughout the canvas. Additionally, rhombuses are filled in to add a bit of weight to an otherwise evanescent structure. Maintaining the celestial implications of the “Storm” is the painting’s center—a roughly circular black space, or

hole—penetrated by a few blue lines emerging from the scaffolding-like imagery that circles around the void. At seven by six feet, “Storm” is an ambitious painting whose precise imagery begs for a formal analysis but does not necessarily disregard the sense of wonder the viewer may feel about the heavenly implications of the imagery (this takes place despite the fact that Powers claims not to be interested in such things). In “Relation” (2011), the mandala-like beauty of a starburst pattern, echoed in the center and framed by arrangements of geometry that stagger the eye and mind, looks almost like a decorative sand painting from the American Southwest; the close, intricate patterning, in which bits and pieces of larger forms build off each other, is its own justification for existence: what you see is what you get.

“No Title” (2012) consists of narrow, usually triangular bands—often painted red, green or blue—built outwards from single points punctuating the landscape. While Powers’s style is completely his own, it isn’t hard to see precedents in the paintings of Al Held and the wall art of Sol LeWitt here. “No Title” is a jazzy, syncopated work of art, meant to introduce its audience to the pleasures of intricate, variously hued forms. Like most of Powers’s paintings, “No Title” stays with us because of the originality of its composition, which appears to be both highly random and meticulously controlled. “Night” (2012), composed of a dark blue ground upon which green and black triangular and rhomboid shards are carefully imposed, holds the viewer by virtue of its mystery—it is as if the light of dusk brought with it the broken shapes, whose constancy and geometry suggest an order available for view at twilight. Inherent to its conceptual premise is the recognition that the infinite properties of geometry can inspire the artist to work out a complex language of constructed shapes that satisfy the mind’s need for order. Powers’s interest in geometries is, finally, not to be seen as religious statements but as a kind of visual mathematics impressing the mind. Despite his youth, Powers is already an artist of accomplishment; I look forward to seeing what he will do next.