

Nick Aguayo at Vielmetter Los Angeles

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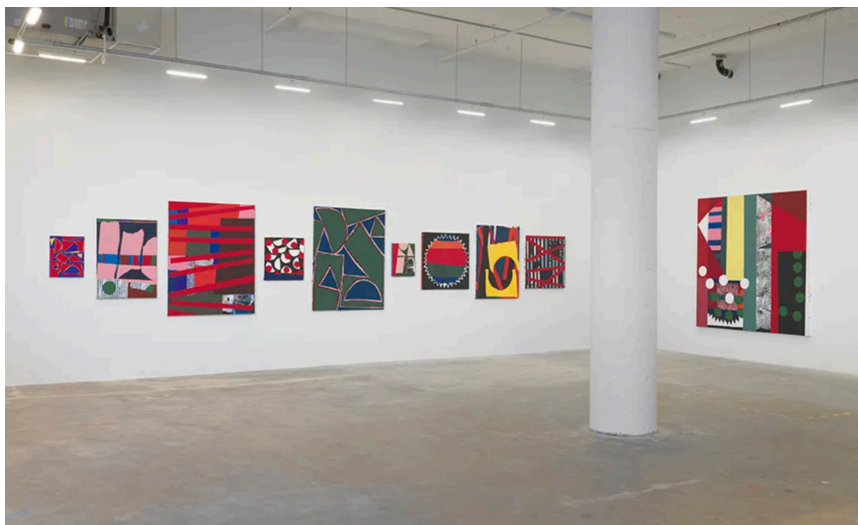
By Kathryn Poindexter | 2 October 2019



Nick Aguayo, *Wake the Town, and Tell the People* (installation view) (2019).
Image courtesy of the artist and Vielmetter Los Angeles.
Photo: Robert Wedemeyer.

Artist Amy Sillman has characterized color as producing “physical propositions,” noting the personality and unique characteristics, such as variance in weight, that are inherent to different pigments. Painter Nick Aguayo seems to align with Sillman’s notion here, as his current exhibition at Vielmetter Los Angeles employs color similar to the way one might cast actors for a production, relying on both their intrinsic character and the constructed relationality to one another to produce a wholly new set of terms. All of the paintings included are loud and frenetic, and are loosely unified by the common employment of straight-from-the-tube red, green, and blue. In *alphabet soup* (2019), textured pockmarks from aborted decisions left in the layers underneath complicate the surface’s seemingly insensate flatness. Aguayo’s works are a palimpsest of arbitrations, in turn both overwrought and understated. This multivalent sensibility of vulnerable deliberation, paired with the stripped-down and flat look of the paint (made hyper-matte with the addition of marble dust) makes the works appear as trusted and honest. It supplants any notions of coldness or staleness (that are often associated with abstraction), with a much-needed post-ironic dose of joy, sincerity, and fallibility.

Color does a lot of the heavy lifting in this exhibition. The *greek tycoon* (2018) hangs within a cluster of paintings on the front gallery wall, and stands out for its jarring introduction of canary yellow. Its flat, colorful forms resemble a set of arches mid-collapse, mirroring one another and flanked by jutting strips of red, black, and midnight blue. Unlike previous bodies of work by Aguayo, executed in more muted tones, the blues, reds, and greens in this exhibition con-



Nick Aguayo, *Wake the Town, and Tell the People* (installation view) (2019).
Image courtesy of the artist and Vielmetter Los Angeles.
Photo: Robert Wedemeyer.



Nick Aguayo, *paper* (2019). Acrylic and marble dust on canvas, 36 x 36 x 1.5 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Vielmetter Los Angeles. Photo: Robert Wedemeyer.

jure the hues of 3D glasses or the RGB effect that comes from sitting too close to the TV. Retro associations, such as Sister Mary Corita Kent's rambunctious prints or the hot blotches of color in Warhol's *Flowers* come to mind. But despite these period associations, the works remain invariably in dialogue with contemporary nonrepresentational painters who leave visible the vestiges of earlier decisions and hesitations. Perhaps this is because, like in the work of L.A.-based painter Allison Miller, it is the compositional acrobatics that inevitably keep the viewer engaged—forms always seem to be acting on one another or undergoing some transformation. Forms are nouns as well as verbs in this context, as they slice, rotate, or obscure what we see.

Aguayo's visual lexicon works because he productively stymies the logic of his own forms and colors before they reach a formulaic point of exhaustion by throwing in red herrings—as with the yellow arches or surprise pops of color painted onto the sides of the raw canvases. The revelation of process, the “editing” of the image made visible, eschews the self-assured heroism of the old guard of abstract painting while upholding doubt as the necessary catalyst of—perhaps the true subject of—experimentation.



Nick Aguayo, *pizzicato* (2019). Acrylic and marble dust on canvas, 86 x 86 x 2 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Vielmetter Los Angeles. Photo: Robert Wedemeyer.



Nick Aguayo, *red lion* (2018). Acrylic and marble dust on canvas, 48 x 48 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Vielmetter Los Angeles. Photo: Robert Wedemeyer.