October 8, 2013 Written by Bryan Granger

Grid's World at Locust Projects

In any survey of post-war abstract painting, an inescapable topic of discussion is the grid. Usual examples cite artists such as Agnes Martin and Ad Reinhardt, and the grid as aesthetic style typically bears descriptive qualities like "clinical," "sterile," and "objective"—words that have minimalistic sensibilities. However, as Zachary Cahill points out in an introductory text for *Grid's World* at Locust Projects in Miami, grids are "messy in their anti-hierarchical nature," structurally speaking.[1] The end result of this collaborative group show proves Cahill's declaration a bit of an understatement.

Alexandra Hopf, Odalis Valdivieso, Marcos Valella, Siebren Versteeg, and Gabriel Vormstein. Grid's World, 2013; installation view, Locus Projects, Miami. Courtesy of Locust Projects. Photo courtesy of Zac Balber with Ginger Photography Inc.

Instead of a typical curated group show, Locust Projects invited the five artists involved—Odalis Valdivieso and Marcos Valella, from Miami; Siebren Versteeg, from New York; and Alexandra Hopf and Gabriel Vormstein, from Berlin—to participate in a three-week-long collaborative process in order to organize the exhibition. An experiment in exhibition-making, the artists were given the authority to determine the aesthetic outcome of the show. Naturally, this process involved various disagreements, compromises, and long nights at the gallery. While one of the show's main elements consists of a large grid-like installation encompassing individual works from each artist, there are also collaborative works, including a sculptural installation, a series of wall paintings, and a back-room installation consisting of a generative video work projected on the grid of a garage door and several palm fronds strewn about the floor.
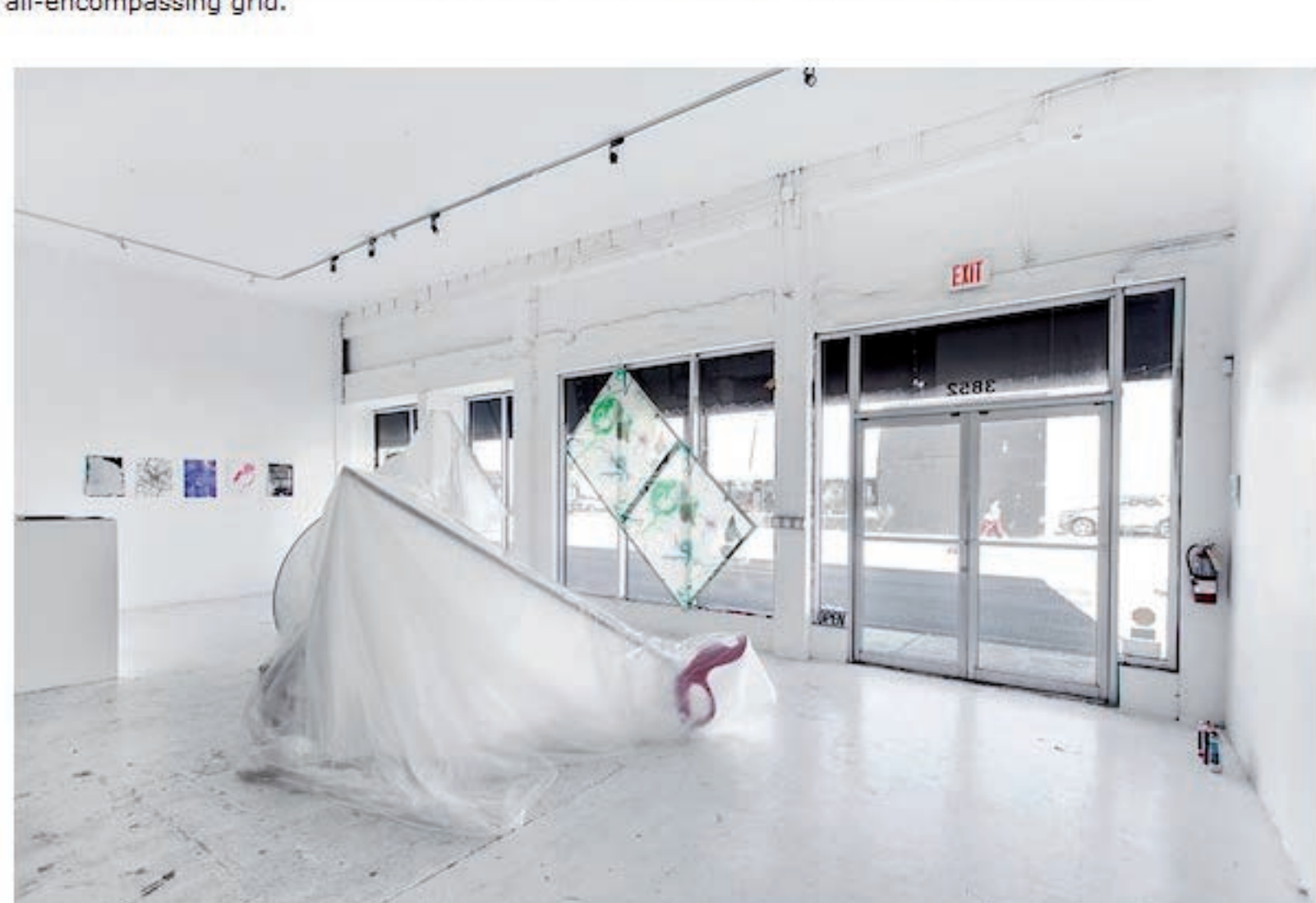

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Besides the primary grid-like installation, there are instances of individual works existing largely on their own. Versteeg's signature abstract paintings, ones that are formulated directly via computer algorithms, hang in various configurations, including one in a perpetual tango with an oscillating fan. A number of mannequins also populate the gallery: installed by Hopf, the figures don workers' jumpsuits fashioned out of raw canvas and dyed paper in an homage to Aleksander Rodchenko. Elsewhere throughout the gallery, Valella's gestural canvases and Valdivieso's abstract digital photo prints punctuate the space. Individual contributions from Vormstein include some of his typical paintings on newspaper, one hanging from the ceiling and swaying in the breeze of the air conditioning; he's also responsible—with help from the other artists—for a giant palm frond hastily taped to one of the poles in the gallery. Beyond these examples, most of the other works consist of amorphously similar two-dimensional paintings and drawings.

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The aesthetic similarities of all works are easily seen in the large grid-like installation on one of the gallery's expansive walls. Two-dimensional works by all artists are tiled together without any apparent order; in most cases, the works are even touching each other, leaving the viewer unable to truly view any work on its own. Combined with the fact that most of the works share commonalities, such as loose brushwork and vivid colors, the viewer sees not one individual work but all works at the same time. As a result, ideas and concepts in one work are conflated with others; as an example, a brushstroke in one of Valella's works, which was created when he cleaned one of his brushes when laboring on another work, now reads very similarly to brushstrokes in Versteeg's paintings, which were meticulously created by an automated computer program. Without knowing an artist's oeuvre in depth, it is initially difficult to determine which piece was made by whom, a result of the anti-hierarchical structure of the all-encompassing grid.

Alexandra Hopf, Odalis Valdivieso, Marcos Valella, Siebren Versteeg, and Gabriel Vormstein. Grid's World, 2013; installation view, Locus Projects, Miami. Courtesy of Locust Projects. Photo courtesy of Zack Balber with Ginger Photography Inc.

Instead, these pieces are woven together in a rhizomatic fashion. Mirroring the lack of physical distance between works in this wall installation, the conceptual distance between each has also effectively been minimized. The fact that this review does not spend more time looking at individual works is less of a deliberate measure than a decision to avoid an exercise in futility. That is not to say that the works involved are unspectacular—instead, the aesthetic and conceptual gravity from each propels this rhizomatic circulation of ideas and artistic gestures—something that a more insipid body of work could not have attained. In this case, the sum of the parts does not equal the whole, but it's hard to say which is greater.

The grid-like final appearance closely mimics the collaborative effort in which the show was organized. Five artists are inserted into an egalitarian structure; their collaborations, negotiations, and disagreements create a network likely as chaotic as the exhibition itself. While it may be easy to declare that the individual works of each artist suffer as a result of such an exhibition strategy, doing so would only reaffirm the monolithic model of the gallery group show, one where works are curated in a typical—yet hierarchical—fashion. By flipping this traditional model on its head, this anti-group-show group show demonstrates the value of curatorial experimentation in exposing the underlying structures—authorship, collaboration, installing works side by side, and so on—that exist in any exhibition.

Grid's World is on view at Locust Projects through October 12, 2013.

[1]: Zachary Cahill. "Off the Grid / Out of your Mind." Exhibition brochure for *Grid's World*, 2013. Locust Projects, Miami.