WILLIAM HOLMAN GALLERY

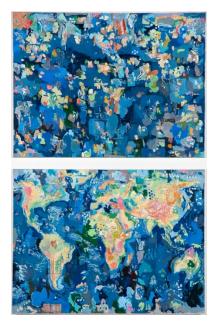## 5.7.15 — *BEYOND EXCESS*

Topics: Anton Kern, Clare Grill, Kes Zapkus, Morgan Lehman, The Painter of Modern Life,Twenty by Sixteen, William Holman, Zieher Smith & Horton

Excuse me for an *extra post* this week, but sometimes a lot of work leads to sensory overload. Op Art went for it, and so in a very different way did Pattern and Decoration. So, too, do some fine younger artists who keep one's eye moving across the surface, as with delightfully large and splashy paintings by C. Michael Norton at Brian Morris through June 6. They are not so much calling attention to themselves as keeping one off balance. Sometimes, though, a lot of work can calm things down. Take just two painters more than a generation apart, Clare Grill and Kes Zapkus.

Grill, recently at Zieher Smith & Horton through April 25, approaches monochrome, while Zapkus, at William Holman through May 22, approaches a grid. Her surfaces, even at their brightest, come off as subdued. She might almost have rubbed them down until nothing remained but the weave of the canvas and their luster. His rely on short strokes and incomplete cells that function as gathering places for color. Splashes of paint never quite fill their cells but often exceed them. They allow one to appreciate the excess without taking leave of one's senses.

Both highlight what goes into their art's making or unmaking. They accept repetition, but also accident and self-effacement. They both relate painting to finding one's way in the world as well. Grill's compositions look like paving stones worn away by time. Zapkus finds inspiration in mappings and symbols, from Paris streets to sheet music. One diptych sets the standard projection of a world map against its abstract counterpart.

If one does not make the associations on one's own, fine, for he is also challenging the fixity of codes and the world. He has been at it a long time, too, starting with Soho gallery pioneers like Paula Cooper and John Weber in the 1970s. One can take him for granted or for business as usual, but he is still very much in business. Although he has had a show of large paintings at O. K. Harris a few years back, one may also not appreciate just how much his incremental processes works on a large scale. One early work on paper presents a row of parallelograms, progressively leveling off as they march from left to right. Larger color fields help give shape and rhythm to new and larger paintings in much the same way.

Today's fondness for overload extends to well-meaning but outsize group shows, like "The Painter of Modern Life," recently at Anton Kern through April 11, and "Twenty by Sixteen," at Morgan Lehman through May 2. The latter refers to the uniform size of its paired canvases, but it could equally be called two by forty for the number of its artists. For all their solid choices, mostly abstract, they all but dare one to pause for long, to indulge in fresh discovery, or to remember half one's favorites. They rebel against those who mistake big money and big press for a new canon. Yet they also risk replicating the experience of the art fairs, and who am I to tell you where to begin? My job is to get you to look and to think—and so, I like to believe, is an artist's.

This is not about "slow art." Sure, one has to slow down now and then, but that tag can amount to a smug dismissal of art since Andy Warhol—or of simply whatever art one happens not to like. Pop Art, Minimalism, conceptual art, and Dada long before them all have their share of one-liners, but one-liners that come back to haunt one long after. The immediacy of a drip painting once felt like a betrayal, too, and even *The Last Supper* for Leonardo presents a moment in time as an explosion. No, this is about dealing with the quiet after the explosion is over and the moment has gone. And then one can honestly start looking and talking.