



Kes Zapkus: *World Cup (The Surge)*, 2006-07, oil and acrylic on linen, 74 by 144 inches; at OK Harris.

KES ZAPKUS OK HARRIS

A member of the generation weaned on Abstract Expressionism and so all but inevitably driven toward a countervailing conceptual rigor, Kes Zapkus has for several decades explored the intersections of structural givens and painterly or draftsmanly spontaneity. His five large paintings at OK Harris covered a 34-year span, from 1974 through 2007, and, for all their differences, they showed a clear consistency of sensibility and approach. Zapkus employs a procedural strategy that usually begins with an ordered geometric template, and then counters this foundation by a more random order of painterly or draftsmanly moves. Notes provided by the artist inform us that each has a back story, a set of references to particular bodies of knowledge that one would not otherwise deduce simply by looking at the painting: various sorts of scientific data, archeology, music, sports and warfare.

The earliest, *Homage to H.M.* (1974-75), is a vast gridded surface, 9 by 30 feet, with myriad small, irregular incidents of color. (The homage, according to a press release, is to Matisse, although this whale of a mostly white painting just as easily conjures Herman Melville.) The most extreme of the five paintings in the disparity of its overall size and its much smaller-scale markings, *Homage* suggests digital code or the diverse notational systems of much New Music.

Bi-Polar Thoughts on Knossos (1996-97) layers multiple grids slicing this way and that into space. Some of the grids read as flat ground plans that were perhaps part of the original arrangement before some fictive eruption that has now propelled the rest of them into disorder. These seem to skim across the 7-by-14-foot canvas, a succession of black, magenta and cobalt-green overlapping geometries on a mostly white ground. The title makes reference to the ancient Cretan site, presumably a starting point for the artist, though not one discernible or necessary for the viewer.

The most recent work, *World Cup (The Surge)*, 2006-07, is composed of irregular geometric shapes. Many of these are defined by selective painting-out with white, as though in reference to the "sculpted color" of Matisse's late cutouts. These small, angular shapes interact with patterns of modular dots; thin, straight, arced and irregular lines; and random staining of yellows, greens, reds and blues. As is true throughout the exhibition, small elements are set on very large canvases, in this case one measuring 74 by 144 inches. Like exploded or pulverized fields of highly structured information, *World Cup* and the other paintings seen here could represent our information-overloaded world, in which only fragments survive, rearranged or, more precisely, rearranging themselves through a fracturing or entropic process. The internal scale of

these outside paintings corresponds with equal pertinence to the molecular or the astronomical realms and the events unfolding there. However, the articulation of these very events requires and celebrates the working space and human scale of the painter.

—Robert Berling