

Art in America

San Francisco

Gary Edward Blum

Dolby Chadwick Gallery

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In his show of new abstract paintings, Gary Edward Blum juggles modes of pictorial reality, creating productive tensions between flatness and depth, and intriguing interplays between fact and representation. He has a painterly feel for a color and surface as well as a gift for gamesmanship.

Each of seven acrylics on canvas, ranging from 2 ½ to 6 feet on a side, is accompanied by a small framed acrylic-on-paper study. Several of the paintings faithfully duplicate the studies, while some are variation on their themes. The canvases display a muted palette and rectangular blocks or bands of color, some of the works recalling the clarity of a John McLaughlin, while others

are more Rothkoesque. All, though, feature an additional painting within the painting that replicates the composition on paper. These replicas seem to hang on the surface of the painting, trompe l'oeil fashion, complete with faux Scotch tape and painted shadows. In several works, such as *A Rarely Loved Thing*, the darker tones at the bottom seem to describe a floor, the lighter upper area a wall on which the replica of the study appears to hang. That "wall" is marked with a grid in subtle shades of off-white and light gray, recalling not only Agnes Martin but also the kind of grid artists use to scale up a study.



Gary Edward Blum: *Solitude*, 2010, acrylic on canvas, 30" x 60"

Blum's play between surface and depth, and his room motif, become at times a bit arch, with the exception of *Get Your Things*, with its reference to depictions of the artist's studio. It could be read as representing the floor and wall of a room in which the replica hangs. The lower part is flecked with daubs of gray, white and blue that look like stains on a floor, but in fact they are the palette with which the replica was painted.

Elsewhere, things are satisfyingly hazier. The study for *Solitude* is divided between fields of deep violet-black on the left and turquoise-aqua on the right. Departing from this composition, the painting introduces a faintly gridded off-white area at the left, which includes the replica of the study; the violet-black that dominates half the paper work is reduced to a central vertical strip that separates the off-white from an expanse of turquoise-aqua at right. In this work, no “floor” corresponds to the “wall” where the replica seemingly hangs, and thus there is less implication of an interior. Instead, Blum suggests a more expansive and ambiguous space, just as the painting’s divergence from the study indicates a freer, looser approach.

-- Mark Van Proyen