

David Row

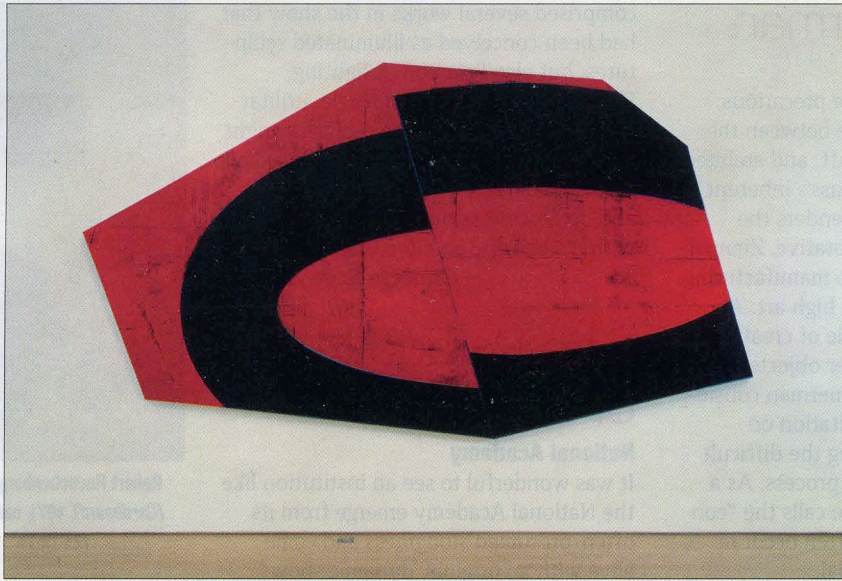
Loretta Howard

"There and Back," David Row's title for his stunning show of six shaped canvases, is mysterious because it seems to refer to a departure and a return. But judging from these irregularly shaped canvases, Row's work has followed a consistent, albeit evolving, course: we know his work when we see it, but it is always new.

And these irregularly shaped canvases confirm it. In Loretta Howard's space, they looked like bizarre Viking shields, clearly intended to attract rather than repel. *Maya* (2014) is a large 51-by-91-inch piece painted predominantly in a complicated, acidic green that Row long ago made into a signature color.

Just visible at the center of the seven-sided canvas is a faint line, a kind of datum plane or horizontal axis. Inscribed left and right of center are yellow-orange vector lines leading the eye up to distant corners. Bisecting the equatorial line is a vertical axis reminding us that the principal tension in a Row painting is between a centripetal motion whirling toward chaos and a grid work that holds chaos in place.

Row's shields could also be aerial views of fortifications, as exemplified by the magnificent *Thingamajig* (2014), a massive 107-by-133-inch, black-and-white composition. The eye travels upward to the remote acute angle at the top of the canvas, as if to a place where it might meet danger. It's all, of course, an illusion, Row's way of fixing the energies of action painting with



David Row, *Pooka*, 2014, oil on canvas, 84" x 148". Loretta Howard.

the discipline of geometry: nature subdued by art, as it is, stunningly, in *Pooka* (2014), where a vivid red threatens to burn down the fortress-canvas but remains restrained by its own form.

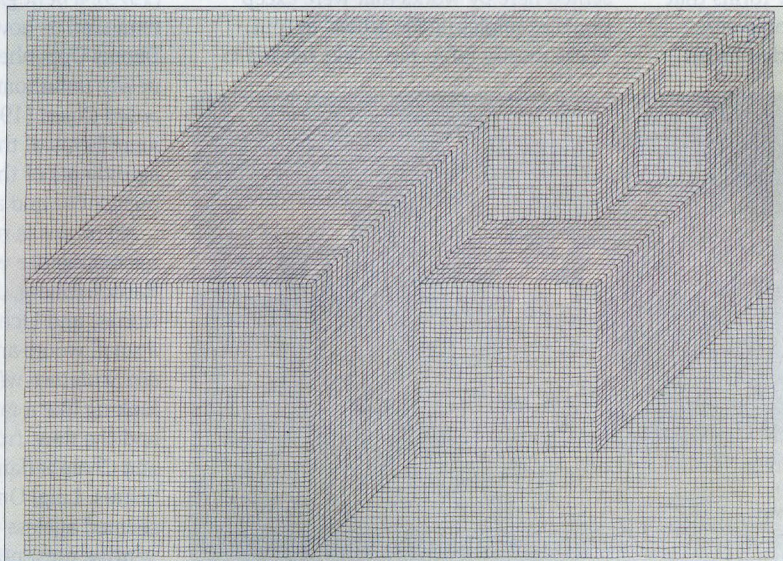
Row never left, but he sure is back.

—Alfred Mac Adam

Sam Messenger

Davidson Contemporary

Sam Messenger challenged the accuracy and capabilities of the human hand in this spectacular show of nearly 20 early drawings. In each labor-intensive construction, the British artist employed repeated lines and geometric forms to achieve striking



Sam Messenger, *Untitled*, 2006, ink on paper, 22" x 29". Davidson Contemporary.

visual effects and optical illusions.

Inspired by the rule-based practices of Sol LeWitt and Agnes Martin, Messenger set himself precise, tedious objectives for these drawings. A precursor to the artist's more recent "Veil" ink drawings, these works—all created between 2004 and 2007—represent his initial experiments with Fibonacci numbers and the golden ratio.

In several architectural drawings from 2004, all untitled, Messenger executed a Fibonacci sequence on a meticulous, hand-drawn grid. He began each work by penning four small, right triangles to form a square near the center of the paper. Next to that square, he made another to form a rectangle. In a Fibonacci series, the following number is calculated by adding up the two integers that precede it, so Messenger then drew a rectangle made up of eight triangles, then 12. He continued the series hundreds of times to create painstaking, three-dimensional drawings that resemble structural blueprints. Viewers had to look closely to identify each original square, which multiplied like an amoeba

to form something so much larger than itself.

As careful as Messenger is to present precision and mathematical certainty, in each work the limitations of his process could be seen. In the subtle shakiness of a straight line on a grid or the slight variation in thickness from one line segment to the next, the artist proves that even with slight errors, something can still appear to be flawless. —Stephanie

Strasnick