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FINE ARTS / ART MATTERS

## Exhibition of Todd Chilton paintings at Raw and Co. features geometric works

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**Dan Tranberg**  
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Artists through the ages have explored the boundless implications of simple linear patterns.

Just as the methodically raked lines of gravel in a Japanese rock garden are said to represent ripples in the ocean, so many artists have used rhythmic configurations of lines to recall timeless natural phenomena or grand notions of a universal order.

Many other artists, especially American painters from the 1950s onward, have used stripes in particular to investigate something even less tangible -- the nature of human perception.

California-born, Chicago-based painter Todd Chilton joins this lineage with a smart series of linear-patterned paintings at Raw and Co., in Cleveland's Tremont neighborhood, on view through Saturday, Sept. 29.

Chilton's canvases are decidedly rough and painterly, recalling Frank Stella's earliest series of stripe paintings, executed in 1958.

Like Stella, Chilton makes constant reference to the act of painting and to the nature of paint. He doesn't mask, for example, paint's goopy quality. Nor does he use his canvases to directly allude to structures in the outside world.

As Stella famously said of his own stripe paintings, "What you see is what you see."

As self-referential as Chilton's paintings can be, they do play with viewers' perceptions. His often-dense configurations of lines, which vary in complexity from one canvas to the next, encourage you to see the pattern first and then to notice subtle areas in which the pattern is broken or violated.

One painting, for instance, is comprised of darker blue vertical lines against lighter blue horizontal lines, creating a simple grid. It is only upon close inspection that a short, vertical lime-green line becomes visible, deliberately hidden, like a needle in a very ordered haystack.

In "Squeeze," one of two larger canvases in the show, concentric rectangles are painted in shades of blue and violet against a bright orange background. While the lines themselves follow the contours of the rectangular canvas, up close it becomes apparent that each line was made using a series of short brushstrokes that run perpendicular to the length of the lines, giving them a distinctly wobbly character.

These kinds of effects may or may not interest casual observers. In fact, many may find Chilton's paintings downright childlike. But the same can be said of the work of many of the 20th century's greatest artists, who often mimicked primitive art or even the art of children, looking beyond traditional notions of painterly skill.

For those willing to look deeply, Chilton's work grapples with fundamental concepts that form the foundation for the human activity of looking at paintings and allowing the experience to trigger larger ideas about the vastly complex nature of the visible world.

Raw and Co. is open Saturdays from noon to 4 p.m. and by appointment. Contact the gallery by e-mail at [info@rawandcogallery.com](mailto:info@rawandcogallery.com).

Tranberg is an artist and writer living in Cleveland. Art Matters is a column that runs weekly in Friday covering the area art scene. To be considered for publication, items about shows or openings must be received three weeks in advance. Mail to Plain Dealer Art Critic, 1801 Superior Ave., Cleveland, OH 44114, or fax to 216-999-6269.

To reach Dan Tranberg:

[trandan@core.com](mailto:trandan@core.com)

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