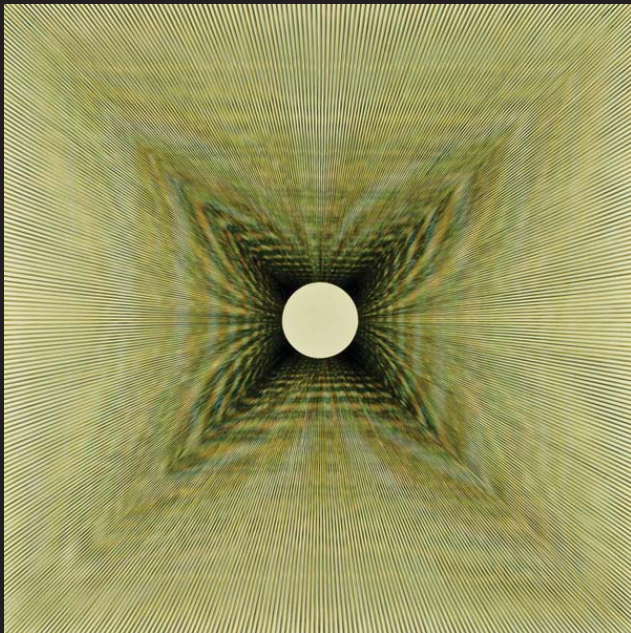


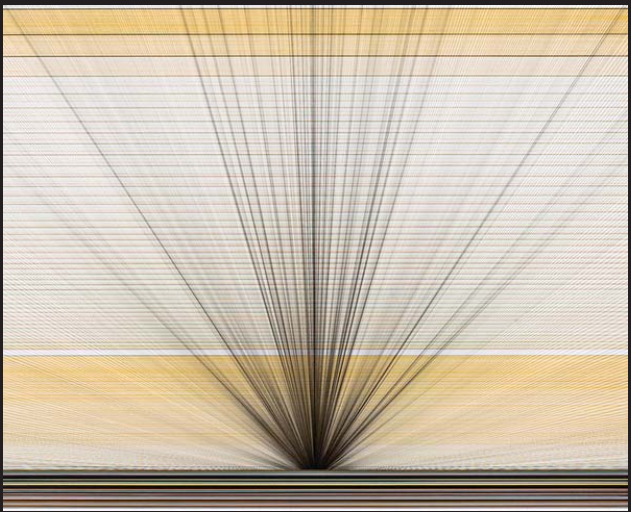
INTERVIEW: ALEX ZECCA
by Franz Schnaas

Some years ago, pointillism painting-as-method, enthralled my mind to the point I could barely remember the actual representations rendered in Georges Seurat's work. Experienced in person, I dived for the granular, mesmerized, analyzing the intricacy of his colored dot clusters and the possible systems implicated to produce such complexity of the impressionistic kind.



Little over a year ago at Gallery 16 in San Francisco, I encountered Alex Zecca's planar, line meshes for the first time. A déjà vu of sorts, as his work instantly drew my attention and invited a closer look. Intricate systems, deployed by a mind who is evidently keen on the phenomenological effects stemming from simple rules, hand-drawn lines, and the programmatic shift of angles, became apparent. Variables such as frequency, sequence, color tonalities –and of course, repetition, carefully orchestrated –and layered, to reveal complex patterns, seemed at the center of the artist's drive.

Whereas Seurat's process applied color and optical theories of the late 1800's and explored the relationships of complimentary colors in particular, it aimed to construct impressionistic representations of the real, the 'dot' was his constant. Zecca's work eschews representation altogether, but it also defies the catch-all labels of 'minimalism' or 'op-art' by honing-in on 'process.' He has defined his own working paradigms and methods, and his constant is not only the 'line' but its projection in time. His work can be seen through the lens of a new pragmatism evident in other contemporary productions, such as strains of minimal, highly structured, electronic music which aptly enough are, by and large, made with digital sequencers that facilitate systematic layering and repetition.



Zecca's new work beams out vortexes and dimensionality. It bit-streams new patterns and projects delicate color waves that unfold at the intersection of every set of hand-drawn lines. I recently caught up with the artist to discuss this new geometric imperative in his work. Show opens Friday 29, 2008, 6- 9 pm at Gallery 16 in San Francisco.

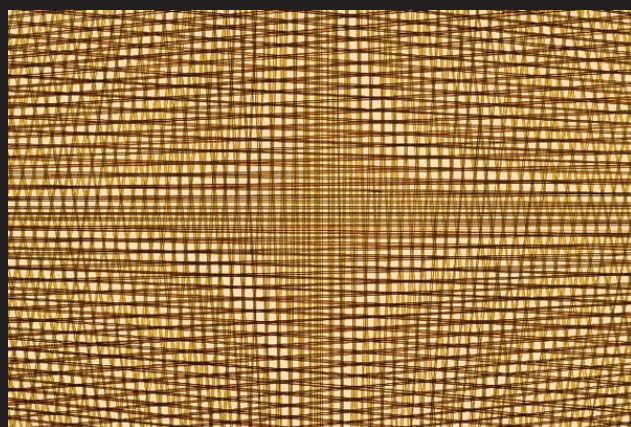
FRANZ SCHNAAS Where does the work begin and when does it end?
ALEX ZECCA The most recent drawings begin with a formula, and specific sequence and spacing of colored lines. After that it's just a matter of executing the processes. A series of drawings may all contain the exact same amount of lines all in the same places, so I know just when it ends. That part of the process is great. It really forces me to work it all out before I begin and then the results are what they are. Whatever happens, hopefully I've learned something from the exercise.

Fz When you set a formula, do you envision the final result or you leave it as a systemic phenomenon, meaning you set a system and the process unravels and yields a surprise?

AZ Both. When I set a sequence in motion I have some idea or instinct about what will happen but it always yields a surprise.

Fz You described the work as formulaic, you mean there is an algorithm to your work?

AZ Yeah, I guess I'm a little involved or obsessed with the process. Each drawing has a specific algorithm worked out. In the 'cone or cylindrical' shaped pieces in the show, I use the sequence (or algorithm) to mix colors. I follow the somewhat simple, repeating patterns that become condensed as they move towards the same fixed point. Producing a radius form.





Studio Visit

Fz This series involves more geometry than the more planar, grid-like works I have seen before, is your mind lusting over new potential shapes to come?

AZ The changing geometry is a part of that 'surprise' experience. As I make small adjustments, like in the way the angled lines intersect or a slight change in the position of the fixed radius, the effect is profound. As far as my mind, it is usually lusting.

Fz Are the 'sequences' in your work metaphors for other sequences found in art or nature? Music? Astronomy?

AZ Oh yes. Isn't it all made up of the same stuff anyway? I've always been attracted to physics and the planetary sciences, and how it all comes down to mathematics. I take comfort in that. Although I barely get it.

Fz Expand a bit about your relationship to 'the line'?

AZ The line does it all for me. I find the action and the result so right. It's a finite and complete mark. And for this work it's a perfect building block.

Fz Why do you stick to the analogue process? Are you ever tempted to build the same effects in illustrator in the computer? (if not, why not?)

AZ The 'by hand' aspect has always played an important role in my work. Even when I was painting, I spent the majority of my time hand-mixing pigments and fine-tuning the paint-making process. Not to take away anything from computer or digitally generated images, they are increasingly more part of our lives –art or otherwise, for me that's where the connection to an old-world-like, analogue, process holds so much importance.

Fz What other art expressions influence your work? What about it (them)?

AZ Music has such a real power to impact you on an emotional level. The same way visual art can. I'm very involved in music when working. There are moments of a 'Tai Chi', drawing in rhythm, kind of thing that goes on.

Fz What kind of music do you listen to when you work?

AZ It's all over the place... the last couple of months I've been loving the new Shins and new Radiohead albums. But I can go anywhere from, Built To Spill, Deftones, and Ween, to old Goodie Mob and the Roots, and even the occasional Cagedbaby mixed in.

Fz Where does light come into play?

AZ It's an integral component in color mixing, which is where my head is much of the time.

Fz How you negotiate your color mixing? What saturations, primaries, complimentary relationships come into play into the algorithms and how do you dial them for the final effect?

AZ The color mixing within the context of the algorithms has

been a real 'learn as you go' experience. One combination of sequences takes me somewhere, I'll make an adjustment in color or order, always keeping track, and systematically working combinations. I ain't no scientist but I try to work like one.

Fz At what point in the 'process' do you allow shifts away from the formula, if any?

AZ At times I'll allow myself more freedom, to go at it with a looser plan, but it seems the more I work on these drawings the more regimented and structured they become.

Fz What about morays? How do you manipulate or allow them to happen? Where do these fall in the intersection of light/color and your algorithmic approach?

AZ The moray and interference patterns are another wonder of the geometry and the algorithms. And as soon as I stumbled across them I was hooked.

Fz Are there any accidents in your work? Is there room for any? What happens if the process is interrupted by a wrong line?

AZ Oh yes, there are accidents. The pens spit out ink, on occasion a line will go a wry. But no matter how obsessive or careful I am, they are hand made. And any evidence of that serves as an important distinction from things made mechanically.

Fz Do you know the works of any digital/electronic music artists? Who, what draws you to their work?

AZ In terms of electronic music, as a child of the 80's I was very aware of computerized music. From Craftwerk to Brian Eno and others I wouldn't admit. These days I'm crazy about RJD2, Talvin Singh, and D.J. Shadow. They are each purists. And masters of assembling sounds.

Fz Are you familiar with the music of Frank Bretschneider?

AZ No I'm not, but I just checked him out and I should be! I'd love to see it live. The interplay between visual stimulus (light and geometry) and those precise thumping sounds. Thanks for the introduction.

Fz You are a native San Franciscan, what about your experience growing up here do you credit for any direction in your work?

AZ We're all a product of our environment. I was exposed to a lot of art as a kid and my Mom studied at SFAI in the late 70's. Those days were nuts! From chaos comes order. In some way it must have directed my work, but mostly being from SF just makes me cynical about everywhere else in this country. We're out west on an island I'm afraid.

Opening Night

Show opened Friday 29, 2008, 6- 9 pm GALLERY 16 501 Third Street (@ Bryant) San Francisco, CA 94107 415.626.7495