

Familiar tremors

Art gives lasting form to fleeting impulses, but the record it provides is never perfect. Whether aiming to capture something observed, imagined, felt, or performed, its fidelity relies in large part on the artist's ability to exploit the tools at hand—not the least of which is or her own brain and body.

Artists have long acknowledged and sought to exploit the unique limitations of those tools (and bodies and brains), ceding a measure of authority to contingencies of skill, material, site, audience reception, cultural context, and chance occurrence. Ideals of virtuosity and technical mastery persist, if largely through their periodic rejection, but insofar as they address fundamental tensions between action and intent, initial impulse and ultimate gesture, they have enduring resonance.

In a clinical test measuring “essential tremor”—an isolated but potentially disabling condition most commonly affecting the hands—patients are asked to trace a simple diagram, often a concentric spiral. The drawings that result, with their characteristic, involuntary waves and loops, record failed attempts at fluid motion. While tests can determine severity, the precise location and cause of the underlying neural disconnect have yet to be determined.



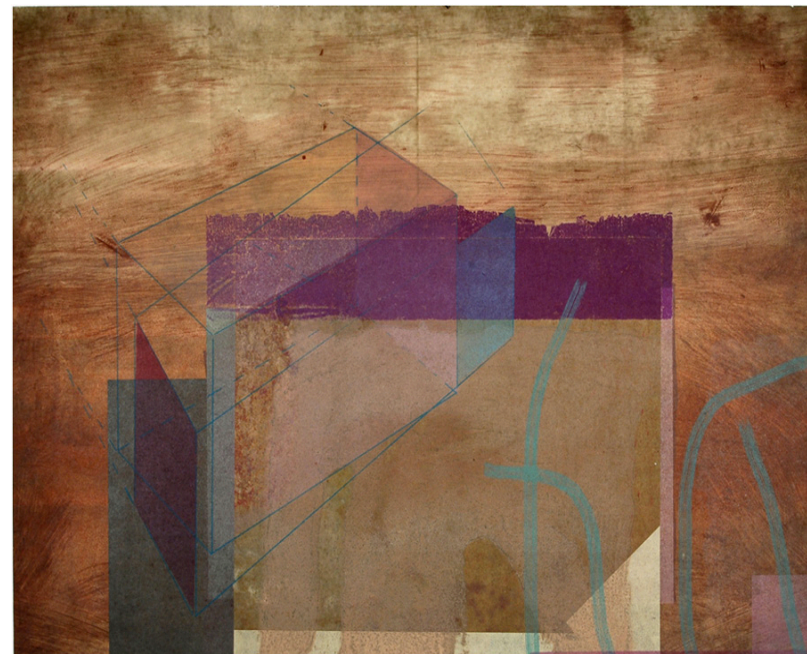
Drawing on family experience, Shawn Reynar's densely-layered abstractions examine issues of mediation and control through the lens of movement disorders like essential tremor. Adopting an experimental approach, he finds visual and conceptual parallels in the techniques and formal qualities of drawing, printmaking, and digital image production. Ambiguous and tense, the prints serve as indexes of flawed systems whose effects are observable but whose exact mechanisms remain obscure.

Reynar's images pulse with remnants of convulsive gestures and allusions to the normative rhythms from which such gestures deviate. Ordered grids give way to frenetic scribbling; expressionistic washes run up against the rectilinear boundaries of the picture plane, while regular shapes and Platonic solids buckle and disintegrate.

Like a radio with a faulty tuner, Reynar drifts among vocabularies

of 20th Century abstraction, ranging from Surrealist automatism and Color Field painting to postmodern pastiche, lingering for long stretches on the static between stations. At times barely perceptible above the background noise, a prevailing (if provisional) order unites the work—a continual return to organizing structures that reassert themselves even as they seem to collapse under their own weight.

In places, marks align to suggest embryonic script or binary code, while elsewhere the line accelerates, gathering in impacted masses. Synchronicities arise among Reynar's own gestures, the clinical tremor drawings, and Surrealist experiments with so-called “automatic” writing and drawing. Combining strains of Victorian mysticism and early



Shawn Reynar – *Untitled*, 2012
multi print media, 17"x12"

psychoanalytic theory, automatism promised to concretely image the workings of the unconscious mind. This mechanistic, purgative model of expression would be taken up by the Montreal Automatistes and blown to heroic proportions by the New York School, both of whose influence can be seen in the rougher, more painterly marks and fields of colour that offset passages of fine-point scrawl.

Reynar inverts the implicit hierarchy of these precedents, however, focusing not on the original expressive impulse but instead on the circumstances of its mediation—the ways in which that impulse is inevitably compromised and the new forms and connotations it acquires in translation. He reconstitutes elements borrowed from historical abstraction in miniature, as

Shawn Reynar – *Untitled*, 2012
multi print media, 12"x17"



agglutinative layers, textures, and figures. The compositions that result owe as much of their logic to the unbounded space of Photoshop as they do to frameworks inherited from traditional media.

The prints incorporate multiple techniques (lithography, intaglio, digital processes, etc.) in varying combinations. Each method has its distinctive parameters and shortcomings, but the interplay between analogue and digital means of image-making seems particularly relevant to Reynar's investigation. Though all printmaking is concerned with reproduction, the precision and endless variation made possible by digital imaging stand in apparent contrast to traditional printmaking's fallible and often irreversible material and chemical processes.

Digital files are vulnerable in their own ways, however, and the glitchiness of Reynar's aesthetic

invites additional readings. In this light, his “abstract” gestures seem less like quotations than corruptions, errant data whose cascading repercussions shudder across the image screen. The prints echo the visual fragmentation and periodic distortion of a damaged JPEG, and it's tempting to draw parallels between the chance electrical misfirings of a computer program and those affecting the human movement.

We rely on systems of staggering complexity to complete the simplest tasks, a fact never more apparent than when those systems break down. Reynar's equivocal, recombinant approach to abstraction engages with the history and material processes of art while reflecting on the vagaries of physiology and embodied experience. The work reveals (and revels in) the surprising complexity of one of art's most basic gestures—the “simple” act of drawing a line.

Shawn Reynar – *Untitled*, 2012
multi print media, 17"x23"