

LISSON GALLERY

Press Release

Tony Bechara

11 January – 17 February 2024
508 W. 24th Street, New York

Opening: 11 January, 6 – 8pm

Lisson Gallery is pleased to present the first solo exhibition at the gallery with New York based painter Tony Bechara (b. Puerto Rico, 1942). The exhibition will present a selection of brand new acrylic paintings formulated by the random placement of 28 colors in quarter-inch squares covering the canvas, a method developed by the artist over the past five decades.

Tony Bechara's dynamic, color-saturated paintings create a pure field of physical perception. Each canvas is meticulously painted with multicolor areas of quarter-inch squares. Using strips of masking tape, Bechara arranges carefully formulated hues into a playful and invigorating optical surface, made up of a multitude of small colored units. The work's overall rhythm is determined by a process that is systematic but designed to allow combinations of color to emerge by chance. Bechara cites influences across art history, including the colors of Matisse and Vuillard, the pointillism of Seurat and Signac, traditions of weaving and crafting, the famed Byzantine-era mosaics at Ravenna, and the precision of hard-edge abstraction, particularly the work of Leon Polk Smith, a previous tenant of Bechara's studio. These influences are evidenced in Bechara's approach to painting: he uses a tile-like grid as the basis for his explorations into the principles of color usage, particularly the intersection of organization and randomness. The division of the surface of the painting into small modular boxes is similar to pixels; the gaze is constantly in motion. Bechara presents the viewer with their retinal and neurological relationship to color, balancing one's immediate impression of hue and the overarching logic of pattern.

Bechara's earliest iterations of the colored grid date to the early 1970s with works such as *Abstract Composition* (1970-71) and *Red Skin* (1971). Around this time, just as Bechara was emerging on the New York art scene, the concept of the grid as a self-referential object regained prevalence as a mode of abstract painting. For Bechara, the grid has proven the ideal vehicle for his central artistic preoccupation – the phenomenology of color. In the ensuing decades, the artist's explorations of the colored grid have evolved into two principal typologies, the monochrome and the random. In both variations, the process begins with Bechara's conception of a color formula, an arbitrary selection of a predetermined number of colors which will fill out the grid. The canvas is divided into $\frac{1}{4}$ inch strips using tape, and the artist then applies dashes of color at will to the exposed areas, square by square. This technique is repeated a total of four times, as Bechara tapes over the painted sections and applies color to the exposed surfaces until the grid is completely filled. The artist refers to this process as "painting blind," since the previously painted areas of the canvas are concealed from his view and he must rely on his memory of the tapped sections to inform his choice of colors. This notion of blindness attests to the artist's keen interest in the role of randomness and chance as a counterbalance to the grid's orderliness in the creation of his work.

The paintings on view in the current exhibition are all composed from the same palette of 28 colors. However, as indicated by their titles, such as *Random 28 (Blue version)*, *Random 28 (Red version)*, *Random 28 (More Yellow version)* in each painting one color clearly predominates over the others. Bechara achieves this effect by deliberately skewing his selections from the color formula towards certain hues to guide the work in the direction of a specific color outcome. When observed from a distance, the eye tends to neutralize these surfaces into a monochrome. It is only upon closer viewing that painting's pixelized squares reveals themselves as discrete units of color. Moreover, in some instances the variations of color between the squares can produce a kind of moiré effect of tessellated swipes and waves. These optical phenomena engage with the gestalt theory of color, which describes the brain's tendency to seek pattern and organize the visual input of disparate colors into an integrated whole. The artist thus subverts the idea of true randomness, as patterns and systems seemingly arise by accident. As Bechara says of the tensions in his work between the elements of the systematic and the unforeseen, "Although my work can be considered to be done by a computer gone mad, it continues to be a very predetermined, very exact process, which always seeks that element of surprise."

About the artist

Tony Bechara was born in Puerto Rico in 1942 and today lives and works in New York City. A graduate of Georgetown University, Bechara attended Georgetown Law School and New York University before later studying at the Sorbonne in Paris and the New York School of Visual Art, benefiting in particular from the lessons of Richard Serra and Joseph Raphael. In the 1970s and 80s, Bechara was included in exhibitions organized by the Boulder, Colorado based Criss-Cross pattern printing collective and featured work in the group exhibition 'Islamic Allusions' at the Alternative Museum in New York. His work was included in the 1975 Biennial Exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. In 1980 he was granted a fellowship by the National Endowment for the Arts, and in 1981 he was included in 'The Shaped Field: Eccentric Formats' at MoMA PS1 in New York. Bechara has had solo exhibitions at the Alternative Museum in 1988; Artists Space in New York in 1993; and el Museo del Arte Puerto Rico in 2008. Recently, Bechara has participated in exhibitions 'With Pleasure: Pattern and Decoration in American Art, 1972-1985; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA, USA (2019), which travelled to the Hessel Museum of Art, CCS Bard, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, USA (2021); 'Point of Departure: Abstraction 1958-Present', Sheldon Museum of Art, Lincoln, NE, USA (2021); and 'Artists Choose Parrish', Parrish Art Museum, NY, USA (2023). His work can be found in numerous public and private collections including El Museo del Barrio, New York, NY, USA; el Museo del Arte, San Juan, Puerto Rico; the Sheldon Museum of Art, University of Nebraska, Lincoln NE, USA; Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT, USA; and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA, USA.

About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Today the gallery supports and promotes the work of more than 60 international artists across spaces in London, New York, Los Angeles, Shanghai and Beijing. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, Lisson Gallery pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Art & Language, Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Donald Judd, John Latham, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long and Robert Ryman among many others. It still works with many of these artists as well as others of that generation from Carmen Herrera to the renowned estate of Leon Polk Smith. In its second decade the gallery introduced significant British sculptors to the public for the first time, including Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary and Julian Opie. Since 2000, the gallery has gone on to represent many more leading international artists such as Marina Abramović, Ai Weiwei, John Akomfrah, Susan Hiller, Tatsuo Miyajima and Sean Scully. It is also responsible for raising the international profile of a younger generation of artists led by Cory Arcangel, Ryan Gander, Van Hanos, Hugh Hayden, Haroon Mirza, Laure Prouvost, Pedro Reyes, Wael Shawky and Cheyney Thompson.

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