

ARTFORUM

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Maxwell Graham: Zak Prekop
By Andy Martinelli Clark



Zak Prekop, *Hazel*, 2024, oil on muslin, 68 × 48"

The title of Zak Prekop's fifth solo venture at this gallery, "Painting What I Did," privileges the notion of painting-as-verb and invokes Harold Rosenberg's 1952 maxim that declared the canvas to be "an arena in which to act." The New York artist's brief statement-*cum*-press release speaks exclusively of procedures, thereby foregrounding one's understanding that, for Prekop, the methods by which a painting is realized are integral to its reception. From this perspective, one might do well not to interpret the frenetic concatenation of jagged labyrinthian forms in the eight oils here as distillations of observed phenomena but to instead envisage them more broadly as the proximate result of the artist's deft hand.

As was the case for all of Prekop's prior exhibitions here, there are no drawings on view, which suggests that each composition is negotiated on the surface of the canvas itself. For some of them, skeins of oil are applied to the painting's stretched muslin support at the outset. Zones that abut these networks of initial marks are then obfuscated by subsequent layers with a kind of digital click-and-fill expediency, à la Photoshop. From there, contours emerge and expand toward the painting's perimeter, as seen in the nearly six-by-four-foot *Hazel* (all works 2024). Its design is topographic and suggests archipelagoes rendered in Kelly green, recycle-bin blue, fire-truck red, and bubblegum pink. Passages of white serve as a reprieve and ostensibly appear as gessoed canvas; but upon closer scrutiny, we see that these areas have actually been painted with a brush or palette knife. At close range, veinlike rivulets of raw muslin peek through, thus complicating one's initial reading of the image's figure/ground relationship. While Prekop's opaque hues don't reach a chromatic state of neon euphoria, their delicious saturation, calling to mind that of silk-screened posters, thoroughly impels one to trace their circuitous path with a finger.