

Art in America

Exhibition Reviews

FEBRUARY 2013

DALLAS

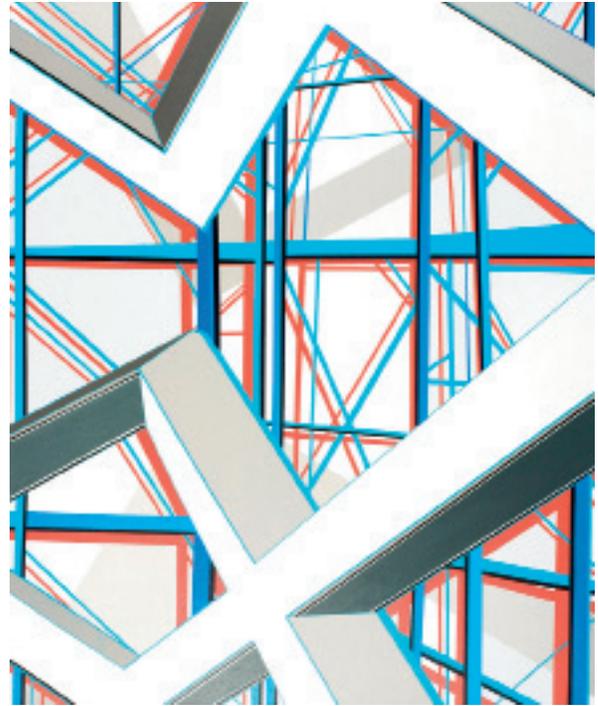
TOMMY FITZPATRICK

Holly Johnson

Tommy Fitzpatrick's exhibition "Electric Labyrinth" consisted of 15 easel-size paintings depicting, in varying degrees of abstraction, a Prada store by Herzog & de Meuron in Tokyo. This six-story, five-sided structure is sheathed from top to bottom in a grid of tinted rhomboid windows. Alternately flat, convex and concave, the glass panes give the building a lively effervescence in the sunlight. Fitzpatrick's paintings eliminate the glazing to focus on the building's structural complexity: its crystalline shape, asymmetric roofline and honeycomb-patterned walls of windows. In a crisp, hard-edge style, Fitzpatrick applies acrylic paint flatly and rarely reveals a brushstroke. Having followed his work for more than a decade, I am impressed not only by his sophisticated negotiation of abstraction and illusion but also by his ever-improving masking technique, which results in a smooth, impersonal but handmade surface.

Most of the paintings (all 2012) fall into two categories. In five of them, portions of the white window grid, bearing complex shading, frame views of imaginary turquoise and red-orange scaffoldlike structures. The others, elevations of the entire building or sections of the gridded facades, are line drawings in paint on monochrome grounds. The title painting, *Electric Labyrinth (The City of the Future Is Its Ruins)*, is an exception. On a small canvas (16½ by 22 inches), two overlapping triangles inscribed with dense linear webs of orange and blue suggest overlaid facets of the prismatic roof. The title is derived from a storied installation by architect Arata Isozaki. Created for the 1968 Milan Triennale, Isozaki's *Electric Labyrinth* featured a maze of rotating aluminum panels and images from historical Japanese woodblock prints, photographs of the aftermath of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and pictures of futuristic cities in ruins. Like the cities it depicted, *Electric Labyrinth* was violently destroyed; in May '68, rioting students and artists disrupted the show's press preview and took over the exhibition space for 10 days, ultimately ruining several works, including Isozaki's installation. The tenuous connection between Fitzpatrick's work and Isozaki's appears to be a notion of urban destruction and commodified renewal in Japan.

Fitzpatrick maintains faith in perspective, creating believable spaces that are drawn from his experiences of the Prada building as well as photographs and other research into its



Tommy Fitzpatrick: *Tectonic*, 2012, 48 by 40 inches; at Holly Johnson.

design. The distant views of the window grid convey a strong sense of spatial recession, establish a point of view and orient the viewer to the represented space. *Transverse* shows a wall from a raking angle, with the white bands rising sharply toward the top right of the canvas. Wide gray sides and black undersides give the rhomboid pattern the illusion of three-dimensionality. Spindly black scaffolding, stray turquoise bars and bands of orange can be seen through 10 or so radically foreshortened apertures. *Tectonic* creates spatial ambiguity by breaking apart one of the diamond shapes, twisting its form and shading the planes inconsistently. Enhanced by a proliferation of orange and blue lines, the zigzagging pattern of white and gray bands is satisfyingly abstract and pushes the painting in its own direction, away from the architecture it portrays.

—Frances Colpitt