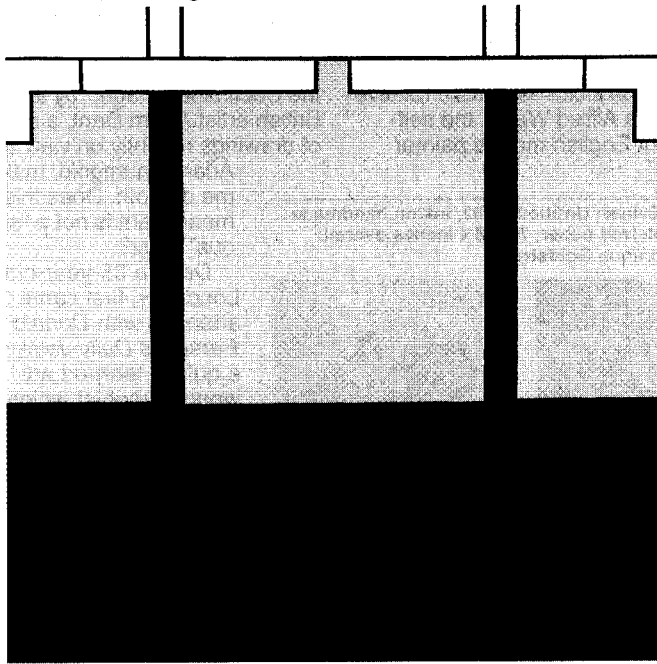


Art in America

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Stephen Westfall: *Memory*, 2003, oil on canvas, 60 inches square; at Lennon, Weinberg.



Stephen Westfall at Lennon, Weinberg

There is formal grace and internal logic to the subtle misalignments of Stephen Westfall's recent abstractions, articulated through a variety of narrow bars, wide bands and other simplified forms in intense colors. Emerging from the abstract grids of his previous work, a new but not implausible development leads the willing eye into planes and grids that frequently resemble urban landscapes. By way of example, a 5-foot-square painting riffing on the grid of windowpanes frames a view of Bauhaus-style architecture. In this work, appropriately titled *Across the Street* (2002), a window with soot-black mullions gives onto a view of geometric shrubbery in the near distance, beyond which the built landscape stacks in blocks and meets the sky. An effect of a dangling cloud bank occupies the painting's upper edge, laid down in square white tiles that, characteristically, never quite align. In passages, the tooth of the canvas support is revealed just beneath the blue flatness of the sky.

Westfall arranges ranks of brightly colored pennant forms in the cool and lively *Miracle Mile* (2003), a title suggesting the eye-catching trappings that deck the parking lots and facades of urban commercial districts. In the new work, four rows of triangles, ranging in hue from ocher to dark green, red, vibrant purple, an almost powder-blue and black, each outlined with different colors from the same palette, are suspended one above the other on narrow bands that stretch across the painting's white field. A lintel and corbel ornament the upper edge of *Memory* (2003) and appear to be supported by two vertical poles of red that cut across the yellow and green horizontal bands of the painting's ground.

References to music appear in four paintings of the same year, two of them abstract, the others suggesting landscapes. Westfall reiterates the bright hues and white ground of *Miracle Mile* in the buoyant, staccato notations of *Canon* (2002), an abstract allusion to a contrapuntal musical

form. Here, he alternates rectangular patches of color, deployed like notes on a staff of narrow black lines. The abstract homage *Mingus* is, at roughly 5 by 7 feet, the largest and arguably the most handsome of these paintings. It resolves as an askew tartan of overlapping grids in ecclesiastical purple over white on black. *Lush Life* refers to the jazz ballad; what seem to be bands of sky at twilight are scored with horizontal black lines and vertical bands resembling telephone wires and poles. *Yardbird* does a turn for Charlie Parker in a barred grid of windows