



NEW YORK

Driss Ouadahi

Hosfelt Gallery // September 30–November 13

MELDING ABSTRACTION with landscape, the Algerian-born painter Driss Ouadahi presents a vision that is distinctive, although potentially repetitive. The works in “Densité,” most dating from 2010, portray obscured urban landscapes overlaid with fairly rigid grid patterns, as if the world had been covered by colorful scaffolding. When Ouadahi succeeds, the result is an exciting mix of figuration and insistent patterning. When he fails, the grid conceit seems simply a trick to complicate an otherwise humdrum view of our built surroundings.

The artist experiments with color schemes throughout. In *Hot Night*, it's variations on crimson; *Parking* uses pastels, lavenders, tans; *Vis à vis* deploys rectangular slabs of yellow, green, and blue. The overlaying lattice is not always complete; occasionally a line will disappear or dissolve without warning. The tension between its geometric precision and the wilds of what it covers up is often thrilling, especially in the larger works, like *Désenclavement*. But it's easy to tire of the series, which shares a spirit and tone—of

kinetic architecture or of blueprints come to life—with Julie Mehretu's work.

Luckily it's not all grids and cities. Two paintings, *Fence IV* and *Fence V*, take as their subject a simple chain-link barrier. Up close, the line work is simple, almost naive. Step back a bit, and a warped pattern emerges. In *Traces* and *Red on White*, Ouadahi depicts subterranean spaces bleached with artificial light—subways, evidently, although they could equally well be locker rooms or slaughterhouses. The pattern of the wall tiling is the focus here, interiors transformed into mathematical abstractions marred with the occasional slash of blood-red paint. Interestingly, they bear a strong resemblance to new, more monochromatic work by the young artist Danny Jauregui, who currently has a show at Leslie Tonkonow Gallery, a dozen or so blocks south.

Overall, “Densité” is a strong exhibition that simply could have been edited down. Ouadahi's principal motif here is certainly fascinating, but after the seventh or eighth rendition, it can start to seem like an empty formal gesture, an academic exercise. There's still plenty of life in the grid—Ouadahi just needs to branch out beyond its occasionally limiting strictures.

—Scott Indrisek

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Johnnie Winona Ross

Stephen Haller Gallery // September 10–October 16

YOU COULD CALL Johnnie Winona Ross a landscape painter, but don't look for actual depictions of the countryside. Ross, who lives and works in Aboyo, New Mexico, strives to evoke a place through heavily worked and highly polished abstractions.

The dozen or so canvases in this show are all based on the same structure, in which horizontal bars, rounded off at the edges of the canvas, dominate the remnants of scraped-away vertical drips. Despite these grids, Ross is not an heir to Mondrian and the geometric abstractionists. Most critics point to the influence of Agnes Martin. In their evocation of the American southwest, however, Ross's paintings also recall California Minimalists like Peter Alexander and Larry Bell, who sought to capture the light and space of their beloved West Coast. Again like many of those artists, Ross smooths his surfaces to a fine finish. But while the former used industrial materials to achieve their sheen, Ross burnishes his canvases with a Pueblo potter's stone.

If there were a time signature in Ross's pictures, it would be geologically slow. *Deep Creek Seeps 08*, for example, was completed over two years and contains more than a hundred layers of paint. Its subdued palette is typical of Ross's canvases; soft blues, reds, and yellows are heavily mellowed by layers of zinc and titanium white. The horizontal bars call to mind striations in a cliff face; the vertical traces echo minerals seeping from old rock. There are no sharp edges; the borders between the bands of color are like fog on the horizon, evident but hazy. On the side of the stretcher, near Ross's signature, are his personal notations: petroglyphlike tally marks that tracked his progress as he plodded along.

Ross is a consummate craftsman. His wood stretchers are hand built; his linen canvases are river-stone smooth; even the tacks he uses to attach the one to the other are handcrafted of copper. His laborious practice demonstrates a rare degree of patience and persistence. Although the work is hardly anti-intellectual, it conveys the sense that intuition and even instinct—gut feelings—are Ross's principle guides. And they appear to be leading him to good places.

—Charlie Schultz

