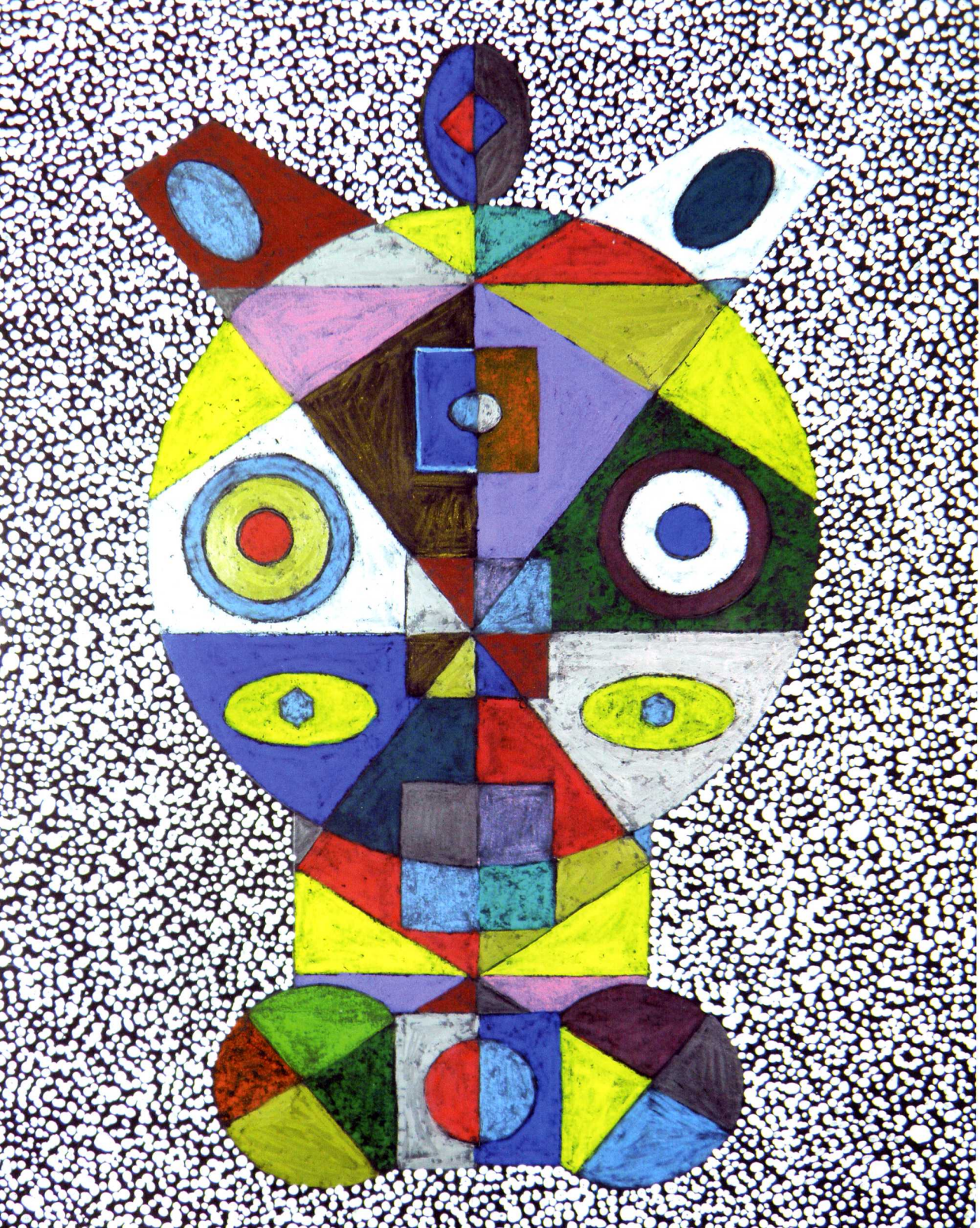


MICHAEL VELLIQUETTE: COSMIC BODIES

2013 feb 22 — mar 27
clough-hanson gallery

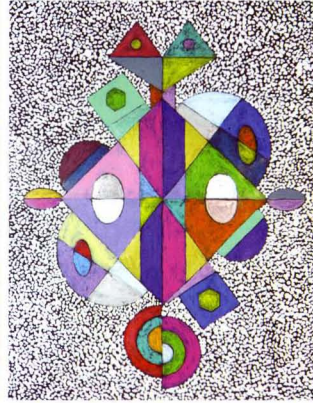
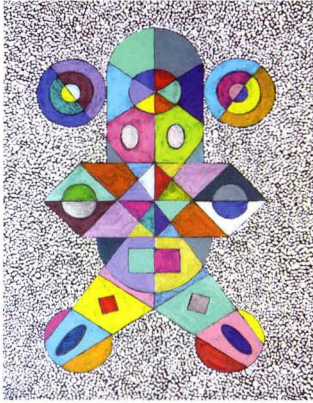
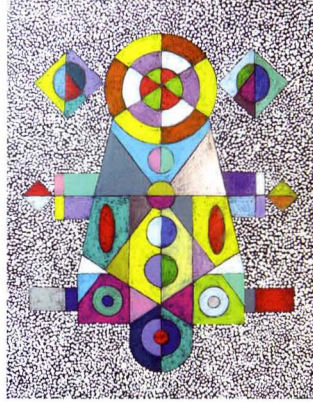
rhodes college
memphis, tennessee











The work in Michael Velliquette's *Cosmic Bodies* is striking, as in pull-you-by-your-eyes-from-down-the-hall striking. The individual pieces are radiant in their carefully considered palette, direct in their architectural design, and mesmerizing in their delicious detail. Seen as a whole, the show elegantly brings together the artist's varied approaches, which include drawing and painting as well as sculptural constructions. The artist's studio practice deftly navigates the liminal spaces found along the path of abstraction. Velliquette creates forms that seem to draw *from* or somehow tap *into* the pan-cultural tendency or human instinct to take mundane objects, and through the process of art-making, imbue them with a kind of spiritual power. This spiritual power doesn't have a name per se, but it is as if Velliquette is constructing a temple where we all might worship and reflect at the foot of color and form.

Resembling Native American totems, temple floor plans, African masks, and godheads all at once, the often symmetrical images trigger recognition sections of the viewer's brain on myriad levels. Additionally, the viewer's point of reference is constantly called into question. We wonder if we are seeing this object straight on, from above, or within. In *Sky Supreme 1* (2012) Velliquette presents a centralized form using the simplest of shapes: circles, ovals, triangles, and squares. Chalky, yet vibrant layers of gouache are layered on top of rugged strokes of graphite. The iconic, opaque shape feels rugged and immovable set in a vibrating field of black and white dots. The high contrast stipple sets off a static-buzz against the carefully orchestrated cacophony assembled by the patchwork of interior shapes.

Velliquette's shift to brightly colored, hand-painted sheets of drawing paper makes the sculptural pieces no less considered. In *Happy Tower* (2011) the artist is again employing simple shapes, but the colors are markedly brighter—the intensity almost confrontational. In this particular exquisite dance, we see color happy to take the lead. Using princess pinks, baby blues, acidic yellows, and emerald greens, Velliquette creates an unnerving hypnotic mix. The colors are layered in a way that maximizes the potential for jarring juxtapositions. The intensity of the colors recalls experiences of frenetic ecstasy described by holy men and ravers alike.

There is a common visual language at work in these pieces. The simple shapes and subtle tonalities of Velliquette's hues share an affinity with the Orphic Cubists from the early 1900s. We see the same intricacies in sand mandalas made by Buddhist monks as well as the slow and deliberate ornamentation found in the work of aboriginal people across all continents. The small shapes, repetitive mark making, and layered colors accumulate to do more than simply mark time. The final forms are not predetermined; rather, the artist's labor-oriented studio practice is a way for him to create a meditative space, a flow-mind, where one shape, mark, or color can lead to the next. This opens the process to intuitive or chance revelations that can only result after intense hours working in the studio. In this fertile ground, we find Velliquette building with small bits of information that add up to a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

These particular elements come together to foster the sense of functionality. Velliquette's contemplative pieces resonate in that part of our brains that recognizes objects that *do* something. The artist describes his recent forms as being like sigils, signs or shapes that can function as a stand-in for words or thoughts. While sigils have an ancient history of possessing mystical powers, the artist uses that as a framework, a starting point for these captivating objects. In the end these playful and foreboding, delightful and pragmatic objects function like totems that create a bridge between us and the sublime. Michael Velliquette carves out a much needed space for affection, celebration, and consideration, providing an all-important counter to the struggle and crisis of modern life.

Hamlett Dobbins
Director, Clough-Hanson Gallery

Cover: *Sky Supreme 1*, 2012, Mixed media on rubberized card stock, 12" x 9"
Inside Flap: *Sky Supremes 1-9*, 2012, Mixed media on rubberized card stock, 12" x 9" each
Inside Center: *New Monuments 1-24*, 2011, Gouache on cut out Bristol board, 16" x 5" each
Inside Left: *Sun Hug*, 2011, Paper, acrylic, foam, glue, 26" x 16" x 3"
Inside Right: *Happy Tower*, 2011, Paper, acrylic, foam, glue, 24" x 14" x 3"
All images courtesy the artist and DCKT Contemporary, New York.

