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Art in Review

Leo Villareal

Gering & López Gallery
730 Fifth Avenue, at 57th Street
Through April 28

When you think about artificial intelligence, Mark Rothko isn't the first name that comes to mind. But "Field," the software-driven sculpture at the heart of Leo Villareal's third New York show, makes the leap. A computer code written by Mr. Villareal generates an autonomous system that illuminates thousands of colored LEDs, hidden behind a panel of opaque acrylic. Soft-edged shapes float on luminous grounds in sequences of pattern and palette that in theory never repeat.

The panel's elongated horizontality and monumental scale (it spans 24 feet) evokes Monet's "Waterlilies," igniting visions of a holodeck Giverny. (Also on view are a stainless-steel wall embedded with randomly flashing white lights and an erratic network of orange LEDs installed on the ceiling.)

On one visit, as "Field" cycled through break-of-dawn lilac, midday cerulean and the blood-orange of sunset, the piece seemed to compress the passage of an entire day into a few short minutes. This hypnotic meditation on the elasticity of time recalls Kandinsky's theories of painting as visual music; Mr. Villareal has orchestrated a soundtrack for eternity. "Field," unfortunately, is something of an also-ran: Jeremy Blake tackled digital animations of Color Field paintings in 2002.

In 2004 Mr. Villareal made a prequel of sorts to "Field" that used rows of Flavin-like tubes in lieu of a sheet of acrylic. That choice of materials felt like a bid for legitimization by an artist whose work could err on the side of high-ticket party decorations. But with this hypnotic update of systems-based art, Mr. Villareal comes into his own, pairing customized software with some of the most stunning hardware around.

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