

ART

Abstractions that Capture the Light and Shadow of an Artist's Studio

In Juan Iribarren's paintings, objects are subject to changing climates, seasons, and hours in a day, and the work is a poetic transcription of such atmospheric shifts.

Patrick Neal September 17, 2018



Juan Iribarren, "Untitled (Square Nocturne)" (2017), oil on linen, 48 x 48 inches (all images courtesy Cecilia De Torres Gallery)

At the Broad Museum in Los Angeles there are a few large [Sam Francis paintings](#) that, upon approach, envelope you in an atmospheric, silvery fog. Simply titled "Grey" or "White #4," these works depict bobbing, crystallized forms, as if caught in resin, and have a wonderfully hushed rhythm. Reading the wall labels, one learns Francis was looking at [Pierre Bonnard's](#) dappled outdoor tabletops and wind-tossed leaves as source material for these oversize abstractions.

At Cecilia De Torres Gallery's summer show in Soho, one came face-to-face with [Juan Iribarren's](#) "Untitled (Square Nocturne)" (2017), a painting with an iridescent, shimmering surface like burnished aluminum.

The painting, part of a solo show of Iribarren's recent work, elicits a feeling of déjà vu, maybe as an heir to Francis's Color Field stains, while similarly partaking in a cycle of artists drawing from other artists.

Iribarren's works look like sensual, lyrical abstraction; however, the artist uses the tropes of this style to do a more conceptual type of painting. For the works in *Walls, Windows and Nocturnes*, he observed the shadows and lighting that play across the architecture of his studio in relation to the windows, paintings, and stretcher bars that straddle the wall.

These objects are subject to changing climates, seasons, and hours in a day, and the work is a poetic transcription of such atmospheric shifts. Moreover, the catalogue of marks and processes Iribarren employs exist as a toolbox of freestanding geometries and gestures to disassemble at will.



Juan Iribarren, "Split Format Diptych" (2017), oil on linen, left: 72 x 60 inches, right: 72 x 48 inches

The oil paintings run in a predominant palette of Naples yellow to deep turquoise. Channeling [Diebenkorn](#) via [Matisse](#), Iribarren works with shifting orthogonal bands that contain diaphanous washes of color. The paintings in the show were accompanied by drawings and a suite of photos, all with a scruffy, black-and-white elegance that served as studies for the paintings. The photos record the fall of light across paintings over time, and the paintings appear to embed the photographs' shadowy documentation. It can be dizzying to tell what is derived from what, as each medium contemplates the other.



Juan Iribarren, "Untitled (White)" (2017), oil on linen, 51 x 35 inches

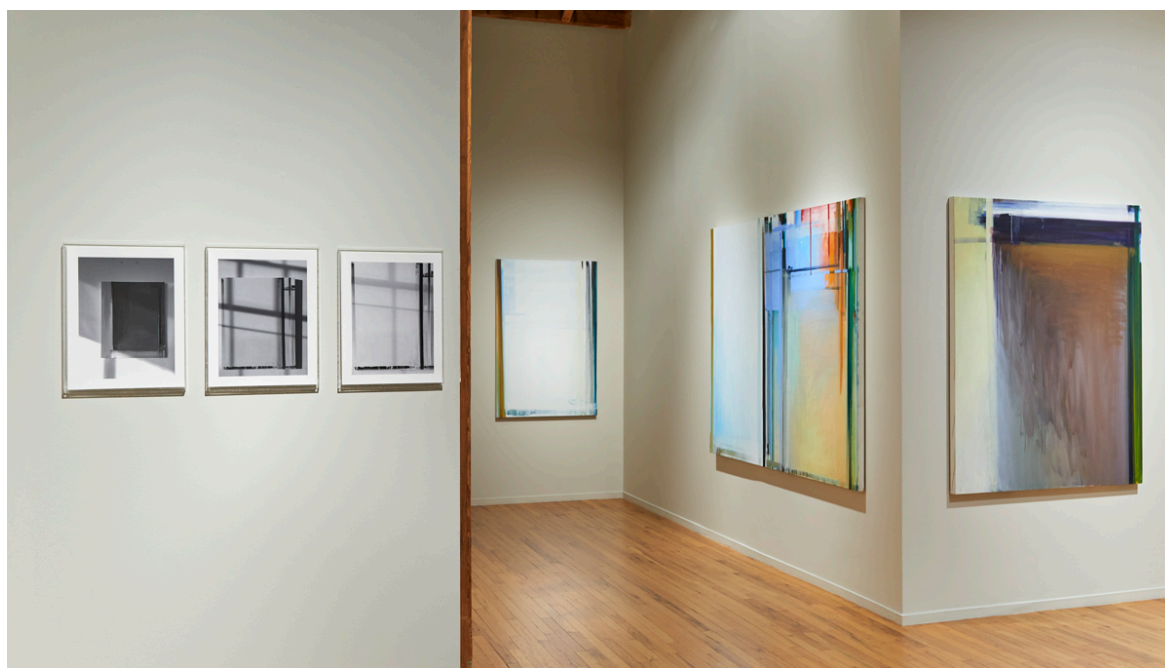
Several of the paintings have minimal, blindingly white, or sky-blue surfaces abutted by windshield green, mustard, or gray borders. With raw, dodged, and burned edges that accentuate the framing device, these austere canvases resemble celluloid strips. "Untitled (Nocturne)" (2016) has the beautiful, murky surface of a streaked window pane rendered in chocolate, feathery strokes. The split format and diptych paintings, lodged with traces of underpainting and obscuring veils, consist of floating planes in high-key twilight and sunset hues. The diptychs, with mismatched outer dimensions and square-within-square compositions, may be derived from actual window banks or lifted from sections of other paintings.



Iribarren's project is not unlike that of painters [Mark Grotjahn](#) or [Matt Connors](#), who also work within pockets of modern abstraction, plucking from a range of idioms (Orphism, Primitivism, Constructivism), and reanimating them to create new forms. Call it what you will — [“atemporal,”](#) [“metamodern,”](#) etc. — this type of painting is reality-based, process-driven, and alive to a trove of art history.

Juan Iribarren, “Untitled (Nocturne)” (2016), oil on linen, 58 x 48 inches

Juan Iribarren: Walls, Windows, and Nocturnes was on view in the 2018 Spring–Summer show at Cecilia De Torres LTD (134–140 Greene Street, Soho, Manhattan).



Juan Iribarren, *Walls, Windows and Nocturnes*, installation of the exhibition at Cecilia De Torres Gallery