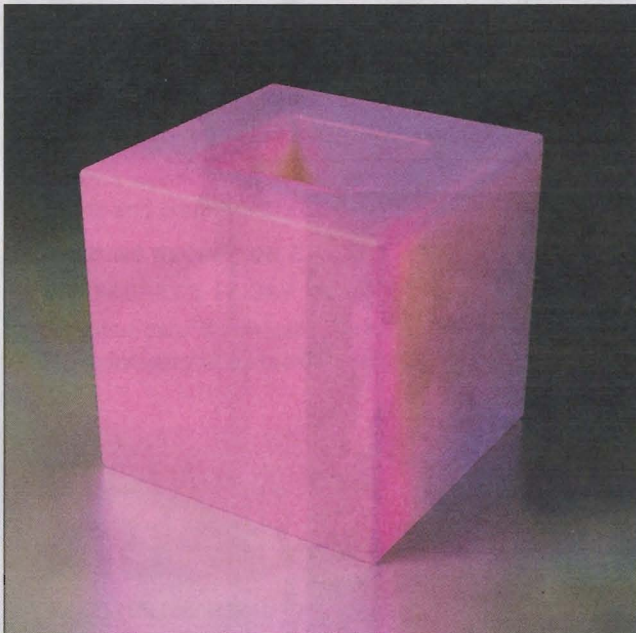


GRAND ILLUSIONISM



Ronald Davis'
pixel-dust renderings



THE two-dimensional surfaces Taos artist Ronald Davis uses for his recent body of work on view at Charlotte Jackson Fine Art are in seeming contrast to the images on them that convey the illusion of depth. The images, each one printed on an aluminum substrate, are as flat as the surfaces. Davis, whose exhibition is called *Pixel Dust Renderings 2012*, begins with computer generated forms. Since the 1980s he has been exploring digital programs as mediums for producing art. The works in the show were created using state-of-the-art hardware and software.

Davis models his pieces in Maxon Cinema 4D and then renders them in VRAYforC4D; both programs are used for 3-D animation. The resulting geometric designs — cubes and dodecagons, for example — look like real objects. “Sometimes viewers think they’re looking at photographs of sculptures,” Davis told *Pasatiempo*. “A superficial viewing of these renderings could lead one to perceive them as photorealism; however, given the artificiality of the images, they really could be considered as photo-surrealism. Think de Chirico or Duchamp and the *Chocolate Grinder*. One of my rendered images could hypothetically exist as a cellophane cube, for instance, but it’s unlikely.”

Often, the geometric forms in Davis’ 3-D renderings appear to be made out of physical materials. His *Glass Box III* looks like a rectangular construct composed of tinted glass, and his *Holed Cube* seems like it was molded out of pink plastic.

These illusions are not merely tricks of the eye as in photo-realistic painting or trompe l’oeil. The possibility that viewers will see his work as photographs is not the point. Rather, images in *Pixel Dust Renderings* are a consideration of color, form, and space. *Front Cube*, which resembles a box of tinted-green glass, is typical of Davis’ aluminum prints; it contains a single object, angled to show perspective, with minimal background. There is just enough detail in the piece to suggest that the cube is resting on a table or other flat surface.

Davis uses a dye-sublimation process to heat-fuse the images onto the aluminum surfaces. “In some early digital printing processes,” he said, “I wanted the images to be printed on PVC plastic to achieve a more substantial product, i.e. ‘painting as object’; paper is so fragile. But the process was not very good and the laminate bubbled up and delaminated. I had done dye-sub prints in the late ’80s. So I was pleased in 2004 to find a printer who did dye-sub on aluminum. Also, it’s a pretty good archival process: 125 years. Better than paper.”

“Pixel dust,” Davis’ own term for the medium, is the light energy (photons) the image is composed of when in virtual form, converted into pigment during printing. It is also the term Davis uses for an image viewed on a screen, whether it’s a smartphone, laptop, tablet, or other digital device. The sculptural illusion is enhanced by Davis’ inclusion of subtle shadows or reflections, but the images rarely have real-world counterparts as would an object in a still-life painting.



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Left to right, Ronald Davis:

Holed Cube, 2012,
pixel dust on aluminum.
24 x 24 inches

Glass Box III, 2012,
pixel dust on aluminum,
42 x 42 inches

Upright Dodecagon VIII, 2012,
pixel dust on aluminum,
36 x 36 inches

They are somewhere in between representation and abstraction. Some exceptions, not in the show but visible on Davis' website, www.ironDavis.com, are hard-edged, geometric renditions of coffee cups. "Actually I am doing fruits and veggies lately, literal objects like tomatoes, similar to the coffee cups. For the purposes of these renderings, I consider common reference objects like cups and tomatoes to be virtual, flat, and therefore abstract objects. Question: Is a slab less abstract than a square?"

His query underscores the tendency to read a computer rendering as representational because of its 3-D qualities. Certainly, Davis plays with the sense of object-hood in the renderings by adding three-point perspective — a characteristic, along with shading and reflection, of Abstract Illusionism, the movement with which Davis is associated. "Much of abstract painting for the last 50 years has made extensive use of the 2-D grid. Conceptually, I evolved the 3-D grid: the x-y axis plus the z axis, whereby I reintroduced Renaissance perspective back into modernist painting. At the same time I kept in the back of my mind the canons of modernist Greenbergian picture-making." (Clement Greenberg was a critic and art historian who championed the work of the Abstract Expressionists.) Davis' work, while reductive and containing recognizable shapes, is still abstract. As with Op art, the eye registers properties in a work by Davis that aren't really there, but there is a greater distinction. "I use strong color contrasts in my

illusions," Davis said. "Abstract Illusionism can have qualities of optical art. Most optical art as I view it is characterized by strong color contrasts like orange and blue after-imaging, et cetera. Optical art, also, is usually more two dimensional or 'flat.' Bridget Riley, Larry Poons' dot paintings — these are relatively two dimensional."

For Davis, a pixel-dust rendering is no less a work of art before printing, when it exists only in the virtual world, than after printing. The artwork in virtual space is the original and the printed image a mere representation. The paradox is that the mind reads the printed image as representing something tangible. But the models for the aluminum renderings have no definable parameters by traditional means of measurement, and no real thickness. Such considerations can distract from appreciating computer-generated artwork purely on aesthetic terms. "I would be pleased," Davis said, "if, when people view my work, they keep their wits about them." ◀

details

- ▼ *Ronald Davis: Pixel Dust Renderings 2012*
- ▼ Opening reception 5 p.m. Friday, Jan. 25; through Feb. 25
- ▼ Charlotte Jackson Fine Art, 554 S. Guadalupe St., 989-8688