

ARTCRITICAL PICK: Chip Hughes at Kerry Schuss

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Chip Hughes's *Drinks* (2012) is the standout piece in an anyway exceptional debut show. The young recent graduate of the Maryland Institute (he was born in 1986) has his solo spot at Kerry Schuss in the former Tribeca dealer's Lower East Side space. As Mr. Schuss has a reputation for showcasing Outsider Art that phenomenon inevitably provides a point of departure for reading his labor intensive obsessive-compulsive all-over join-the-dots abstraction in works that bring to mind folk art and fabric. But in fact the "termite" aesthetic (Manny Ferber's term, quoted by Mr. Schuss approvingly) at play here has language at its origin, making the algorithmic abstraction of James Siena or the psychedelic spins on found texts of Bruce Pearson more pertinent references. With a background in artist comics, Hughes embeds words – flipped, drooped and otherwise subjected to layout abuse – within his compositions, making fully resolved graphite studies (whether separately, on paper, or under the paint) before embarking on the paintings themselves, keeping alive a "pencil" versus "ink" division of skills familiar from the graphic milieu. *Drinks* is at once his most ambitious canvas in terms of structure and his freest in terms of touch with its pulsating patches of color and jittery, zigzagging networks of line. Despite its primitive allure, this is Paul Klee for the cyber age, with circuit boards taken for a walk. DAVID COHEN