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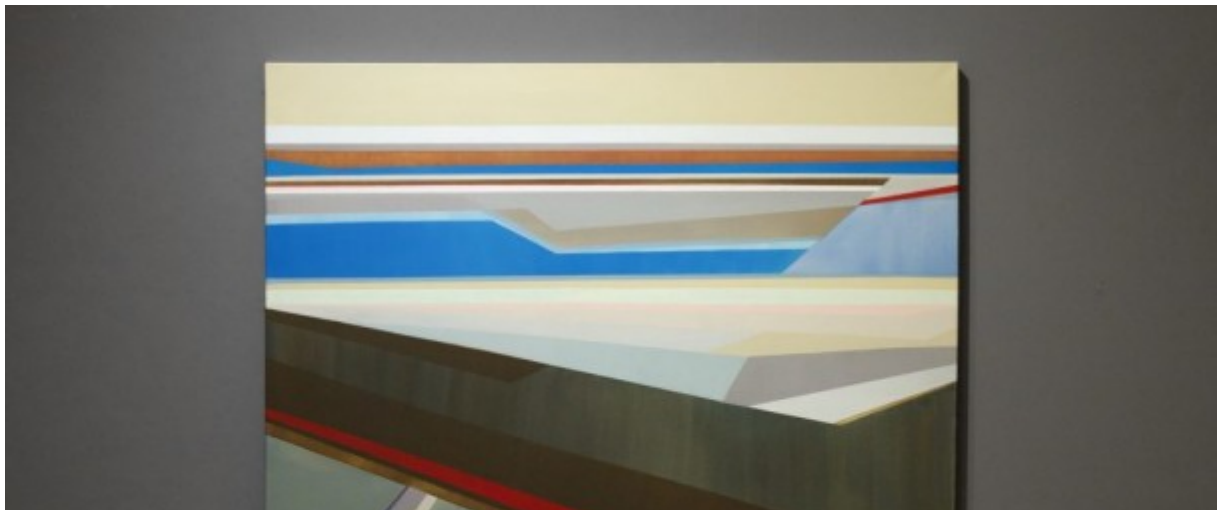
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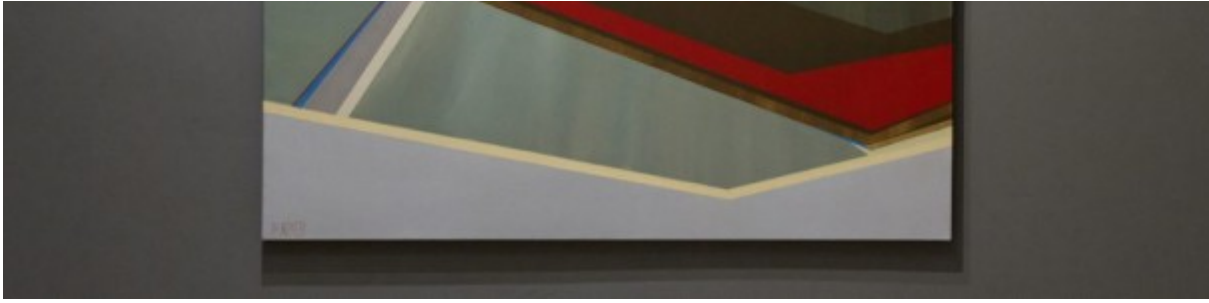
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The Shape of Things





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In painting after painting in Shilo Ratner's soon-ending solo exhibition at DaSilva Gallery, big blocks of color meet contrasting angles and lines and bands. Together, they suggest a grand experiment in which the artist seems to be working out a pattern, using shapes and colors to reach a deeper sense of order.

There's repetition in the obtuse angles, knife-edged lines and flat fields. But each time, the treatment is a little bit different, like multiple attempts at a tangram puzzle in which you try first one solution, then another. Does the large block belong at the top of the canvas, compressing the thinner lines below? Does it belong at the bottom, with an accumulation of thinner lines above? Or should it, perhaps, float in the center or even higher?

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In *Looking Up at the Open Sky*, a "horizon" line tips ever so slightly, to vertiginous effect. Other lines compensate by tipping in the opposite direction, but it's hard to find the level. With a large, pale blue block of color dominating the top of the canvas, the experience of looking up at the sky and losing touch with the ground is uncannily recreated.

Shifting Waters shifts the experiment with a dominating dark wall that slices diagonally through the canvas in shades of brown and green striped with red. Like the horizon in *Open Sky*, this partition is unsettling; each of its bands of color locates the wall's corner in a different place. A segmented gray shape follows it like a sidewalk. In the background, cheerful blues peek through.

Only two of the show's 16 paintings break the pattern to include a portion of a circle, partially obscured by horizontal lines, which calls to mind a rising or setting sun. Seeing these pieces last

might make the circles an element of surprise, but one is displayed in the front window and the other just inside the door. Their placement seems to instruct us to think of the more squared geometric images that follow as doing the same: overlapping and obscuring one another, just as the circle is obscured by the lines that hide its completion.

Sure enough, on closer examination, Ratner's paintings are more layered and subtle than they first appear. Return for a second look and then a third; even more layers emerge. It's as if the closer you step to these works, the farther in they draw you. For example, once you notice them, subtle banded and triangular ghosts behind an ivory block of color in *Temple of the Moon* give the unexpected effect of sunlight casting a quiet shadow.

Ratner sees her artwork as a form of meditation. Her painting process begins each day with Japa meditation, which uses sound repetition in the form of mantras that put her in a positive frame of mind to approach the canvas intuitively. "I just start with a shape," she says. She draws on her formal art education—a knowledge of color and brush technique, for example—but mostly, she says, the paintings "sort of just evolve on their own. They have their own voice, and I try to just bring it out on the canvas."

The colors she chooses—tiger orange, sapphire blue, sunny yellow—excite the eye, and yet the way her shapes hug tight and her lines stretch straight conveys a sense of stability. Even when she's tipping us off balance, the tilt feels more playful than precarious.

The net positive effect is intentional, Ratner says. She names some of the things that are tilting our global society today—climate change, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia. "I try to bring beauty into the world," she says. "[I'm] not saying that I'm not aware of everything that's happening, but I'm trying to put something out there that doesn't have that angst, so I when I'm creating the work, I want to create these calm visions, kind of this optimistic view of the world I see in the chaotic times we're living in."

Paintings by Shilo Ratner

DaSilva Gallery – 897-899 Whalley Ave, New Haven ([map](#))
Tues-Thurs 10am-5:30pm, Fri-Sat 10am-5pm through Feb. 1
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