



DECEMBER 2022
"THE BEST ART IN THE WORLD"

Mokha Laget: Hot Axis at David Richard Gallery



*Mokha Laget, Hot Axis, 2022. Vinyl emulsion on shaped canvas, 60 x 91.5 in.
Courtesy of the artist and David Richard Gallery. Photograph by Yao Zu Lu.*

Mokha Laget: Hot Axis

David Richard Gallery

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By **CORI HUTCHINSON**, December 2022

Mokha Laget's shaped canvases transmogrify the very walls on which they hang in her fourth solo exhibition at David Richard Gallery. Laget, a former studio assistant to Washington Color School painter Gene Davis, studied in the perceptible art historical tradition of geometric abstraction of the Corcoran. From this school, she has absorbed a formidable sense of color and directionality. The exhibition title, *Hot Axis*, is both indebted to and defiant of Davis's 1964 acrylic work *Hot Beat*. The vertical pulse of *Hot Beat* unifies an active composition of color itself through sheer repetition, whereas Laget's body of work diverges in an exploration of language, symbol, and subjective perception. Ultimately, Laget earns her stripes through her own means.

The titular *Hot Axis* (2022) blends a variety of diagonals and verticals. Pairs of gray and blues are bisected by solo notes of orange, red, purple, and gold. Curator Kristen Hileman suggests an earlier work by Laget (*Wedge #6*) may be interpreted by art historian Libby Lumpkin's theory of diagonal lines as indicators of prohibition; the combination may come to mean a signature slash of disobedience upon the parallel bars of the Washington Color School. At the same time, an addition of slant forms does fortify the foundation, interlocking forever a frozen formalism within a unique structure of active investigation. The artwork *Cross Breeze* (2022) also notably establishes this tension with its strike-through, challenging the rectangular.



*Mokha Laget, Cross Breeze, 2022. Vinyl emulsion on shaped canvas, 33 x 36 in.
Courtesy of the artist and David Richard Gallery. Photograph by Yao Zu Lu.*

The orange diagonal of *Hot Axis*, ending midway through a blue vertical, imposes a sense of two-dimensionality upon a seemingly multi-dimensional rendering. A leftward, elbowed arm of deep red mirrors this warm vein on an otherwise cool-toned planar composition. The artist's smart color adjacency, as well as her use of strictly non-reflective media (vinyl emulsion), maintains vibrancy and illusion among individual components operating harmoniously. The lack of glare upon the matte work draws one in with the light, appearing almost like a textile at initial impression. Also upon first glance, the right edge of the canvas appears folded behind like possible origami, but the color discontinuity defies that form

logic. Spatial relationships are suggested, collapsed, and reimagined nearly simultaneously. As viewers, we are called to understand the geometric balance established with not only our real eyes, but with our personal calculation of contradiction.



Mokha Laget, Pagoda Opus, 2022. Vinyl emulsion on shaped canvas, 69 x 78 in. Courtesy of the artist and David Richard Gallery. Photograph by Yao Zu Lu.

In “**The Death of the Plane**,” Brazilian artist Lygia Clark (1920-1988) writes, “To demolish the plane as a support of expression is to be conscious of unity as a whole, alive organism.” Laget, in her own work, combines the fractal, unstable, yet whole nature of Clark’s *Bichos* (“critter”) sculptures with the muted, anti-patterns of the *Planes in Modulated Surface* paintings. Laget’s “*Tide Stint*” (2022), a stack of blues atop red, suggests sculptural hinges with shadow edges skirting the top and bottom quadrilaterals. It is possible to pin the tidal pull in any direction,

between any of the forms as well as the surrounding space, yielding thrilling ambiguity and multiple, unfixed views. The significant, physical depth of the canvas creates additional shadow-tides upon the walls.

The illusions of Laget's work move beyond Op art, resisting a mechanical effect despite their sharp edges, but share a technical interest in spatial relationships and architecture. Most literally, *Pagoda Opus* (2022) invokes both architectural and musical reference by title alone. While the ridges of the painting's upper-limit suggest a mountainous landscape, a periwinkle leg juts out like an improbable kickstand. A rarity in this showing, two tones of red are seemingly seamlessly blended within the fore-form. Along with *Alibi Desire*, this work resembles overlapping glyphs, reminding of the artist's deep knowledge of language from her work as an interpreter and translator.



Mokha Laget, Tide Stint, 2022. Vinyl emulsion on shaped canvas, 73 x 64 in. Courtesy of the artist and David Richard Gallery. Photograph by Yao Zu Lu.

Despite one's feelings for Clement Greenberg, he significantly attributes, in part, the high quality of work of Washington Color School artists Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland to their distance from the New York art scene. He writes in *Art International*, "When they return to Washington to paint it is to challenge the fashions and successes of New York, and also its world machinery" (May 1960). Laget, living and working off-grid in New Mexico, achieves a similar perspective and goes further, integrating more worldly influence, experience, and social agency into her work. The architectural features and palettes of her

childhood in Northern Africa and current residence in New Mexico are well-represented in the artworks on view.

Mokha Laget's latest exhibition impresses, demonstrating an ongoing conversation with the future in and of her work. Despite the solid quality of color in these works, a particular veiling or transparency is established through perspective, color, and form. Kite-like, floating yet fastened, each piece attracts repetition of attention and perspectival sensitivity; every experiment circles the truth.

CORI HUTCHINSON

Cori Hutchinson is a poet, watercolorist, and library assistant living in Brooklyn.