

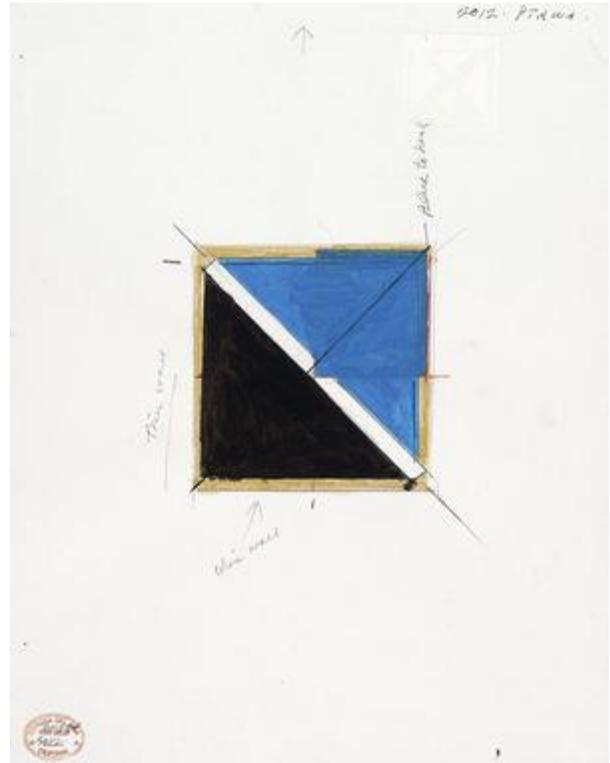
# Art world all-rounder: Stalwart Tony DeLap defies categorization

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By the time Minimalism reached its apogee in the late 1960s, there emerged a working definition of the art form. Minimalist art often incorporated reductive geometric forms, and colors were used sparingly. These works were also often industrially produced — leading to the development of Finish Fetish works that used high-tech materials such as plastics, resins, coated glass, and auto-motive paints and finishes — and were associated with artists like Larry Bell, Craig Kauffman, and Billy Al Bengston. California-based artist Tony DeLap has also been counted along with the Minimalists and Finish Fetishists and, over the decades, among various subgenre artists, including hard-edge painters. But DeLap keeps such labels, particularly Minimalism, at arm's length. In *Tony DeLap: A Unique Perspective*, a new documentary about the artist from filmmaker Dale Schierholt (the first in a planned series of films showcasing the legacies of postwar West Coast artists), DeLap stated that his aim is not to minimize his art but to complicate it. "I never cared for the word 'minimalism,'" he told *Pasatiempo*. "It always sounded like something that's simpler than it should be."

There is, however, a simple grace to the works of DeLap, whose *Selected Works From Fifty Years of Making Art* opens Friday, Oct. 17, at Charlotte Jackson Fine Art, but there is nothing simple in their construction or effect. The San Franciscan likens his interest in minimal forms to viewing of the Golden Gate Bridge when the fog rolls in and only the towers can be seen. In other words, perhaps some works of Minimalist art can be regarded as possessing the details of a larger construct while remaining validly complete compositions that don't refer to anything other than themselves. *Tony DeLap: A Unique Perspective* premiered recently at the Laguna Art Museum in Laguna Beach, California. It screens in Santa Fe at the Jean Cocteau Cinema on Monday, Oct. 20, where DeLap is on hand to sign copies of his new monograph, published this year by Radius Books. The tome, *Tony DeLap: Painting, Sculpture & Works on Paper, 1962-2013*, includes a foreword by Douglas Dreishpoon, chief curator at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York, and an essay, "Now You See It, Now You Don't," by art historian and critic Barbara Rose.

Early in his career DeLap focused on painting; then, in the early 1960s, an experiment in two-dimensional work led to the development of pieces that lie somewhere between painting and



Pictured above: *Simply Complex*, 2013, collage on paper (John Vokoun Fire Dragon Color)

sculpture. “I was doing some paintings that I took off the wall and did a painting on the back side. So I had a painting on both sides, but it was in real space, like a piece of sculpture. You could walk around it. With modifications and so on, that painting, in a sense, was a new avenue of approach for me. It was certainly more sculptural, but the nature of my work through the years has aspects of both.”

DeLap’s three-dimensional pieces are often made with much consideration of the space surrounding them so that, depending on a viewer’s perspective, a work can change dramatically. One untitled wall piece from 1993, for instance, is a twisting sliver of wood extending out from the wall. From one position, all that can be seen is this wood form. But from another viewpoint, flat, painted circles appear. “Looking at my work straight-on, a bit of it is hidden,” the artist said. “The edges of paintings, for example, will be cut back against the wall so that, at an angle, you’ll see a different form. Moving to the other side, you no longer can see what you first saw.” This illusory aspect of DeLap’s sculpture is one of the reasons he’s also associated with the Op Art movement that arose, like Finish Fetishism, from the Minimalist vanguard in California.

Op Art relies on optical illusions to create an effect. Although it took off on the West Coast, beginning in the 1960s, it has antecedents in movements like Cubism, Dadaism, and Constructivism (the last, with its focus on minimal, interpenetrating geometric forms, was an obvious influence for DeLap). But, unlike the work of many of his East Coast 1960s-era contemporaries, there’s also something truly hands-on about DeLap’s pieces. “The work I was doing was aligned with so-called new art, which somewhat quickly took on a lot of names. It took on the names Op Art, Finish Fetish, and, of course, Minimalism, which was new and flourishing in New York. It seems that, here on the West Coast, we had our own take on Minimalism, as compared with what was being done there. A good number of the New York Minimalists, like Donald Judd, were having their work made on the outside. They would indicate, by plan, what they wanted and would go to a fabricator and have the work made. Out here, we were more prone to develop our work on our own. Speaking for myself, there would be more handcrafted work and much less outside fabrication. I pretty much made all of my own work. There was a period when there were a few things I simply could not do technically, such as anodizing a color on metal and things of that sort. But I pretty much always stayed working with shaping wood, working with canvas and paint, and crafting my own thoughts and ideas.”

Though only a few of DeLap’s more sculptural pieces are included in the exhibit, several of his lesser-known drawings are on display, helping to illuminate his considerable output as a whole. The drawings show DeLap’s interest in experimenting with form and line and with interruptions to geometric shapes — a circle truncated by an angular wedge, for instance — concerns that lend such compositions a tension between their elements and the white space surrounding them. “I’ve done an immense amount of drawing. It’s almost disgusting to see all this work that’s been accumulating over all that time, particularly the drawings,” DeLap said. “I find that drawing is a way for me to find out about things I wanted to pursue in a different medium, whether it be painting on a larger scale or sculpture. There’s an excitement about working things out on paper, and it would sometimes surprise me. The surprise always hooks you, because you’re always hoping it will come around again.”