

cityArts

new york's review of culture

Al Souza: [sic]

By [Mario Naves](#)

May 3, 2011

The best Gerhard Richter painting extant isn't by Gerhard Richter. It's not even a painting—or, rather, it's mostly not a painting. It's a collage by Al Souza, whose recent work is at Pavel Zoubok Gallery.

As with the majority of pieces on display, "Tip Tops Redux" is an abstraction cobbled together from store-bought puzzles, the kind of thing you put together while visiting Aunt Helen on a Sunday afternoon. Except this time around, Souza has superimposed whiplash slurs of glossy acrylic paint. Keying into the puzzle's color range, he achieves a tenuous detente between the two divergent media, between two modes of representation, really. "Tip Tops Redux" has the photomechanical sheen and slippery disconnected space of a vintage Richter, albeit without the theoretical backstory. That, and it's kind of silly. Souza is an affable artist.



"Big Crayons," by Al Souza

[sic] is the title of the exhibition, a literary conceit that should (or so it is suggested) reassure viewers who might wonder if Souza is capable of putting together a coherent puzzle version of Seurat's "La Grande Jatte." The stately couple that anchors that masterwork can be seen veering toward the upper left corner of Souza's "Last Impressions" in near vicinity of fleeting snippets from Renoir, the Mona Lisa and Hasbro knows what else.

Unlike Jess, the Bay Area artist who employed dye-cut puzzles to conjure dream-like panoramas, Souza is interested in sensation, not narrative. Puzzles are meticulously layered and reconfigured into expansive, all-over fields of pictorial incident. Images are discernible—crayons, bowls of cherries, macaws and candy canes figure in the work—but don't detract from the artist's Pop-wise brand of Colorfield painting. Pulsing, effusive rhythms and overripe colors, fireworks of saturated colors, define the work.

Accompanying the puzzle works are a suite of muted, cut-paper collages inspired by the musical strategies of John Cage and Edward Curtis' silver gelatin photographs of Native Americans. How much knowing the aforementioned information will bolster your appreciation of a near abstraction like "Clayoquot (Edward Curtis American Indians series)" is an open question. Still, there's no denying the rarified air of Dadaist caprice and intimations of historical gravitas.

While these pieces are less generous in temper than the puzzle abstractions, nor as involved in terms of construction, they are subtler, more haunting and, or so it seems, promising. It's Souza's newest body of work and a reason to look forward to his further elaborations on the art of collage.

Through May 21, [Pavel Zoubok Gallery](#), 533 W. 23rd St., 212-675-7490.