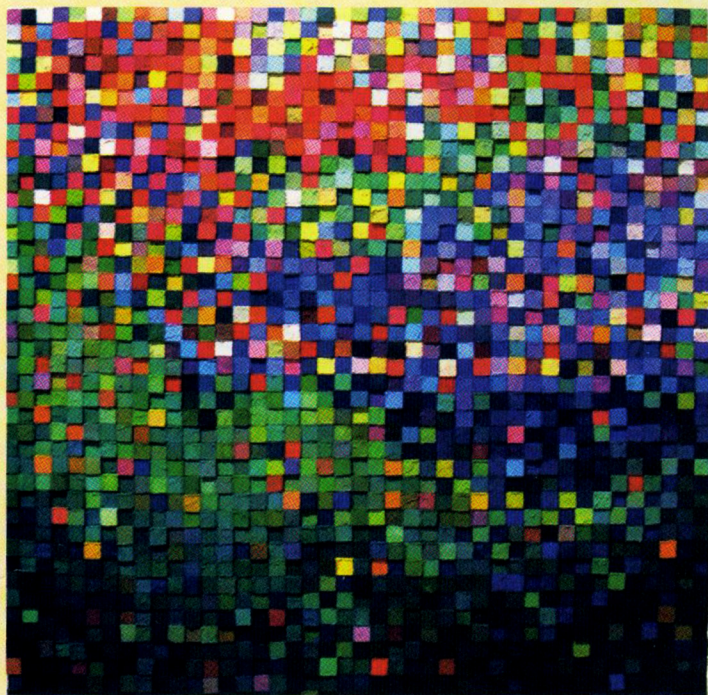


Critic's Picks: CHICAGO by James Yood



"MARCELA," 2012, **Carlos Estrada-Vega**
WAX, LIMESTONE DUST, OLEOPASTO, OIL, PIGMENT ON WOOD, 34" x 34"
PHOTO: COURTESY ROY BOYD GALLERY



"COMIC LANDSLIDE," 2012, **Judith Geichman**
ACRYLIC AND ENAMEL ON CANVAS, 60" x 60"
PHOTO: COURTESY CARRIE SECRIST GALLERY

erotics of smoking, how the cigarette is held, the smoke exuded, the oral fixation, the hand manipulation, the fire, the endless fussing with butts and ash, etc., and putting all that in the hands of children makes it deliciously eerie. If only the damned smokes didn't kill you!

New Mexico-based **Carlos Estrada-Vega** is showing new work at Roy Boyd Gallery through April 16, and continues his poetic pursuit of the relationship between the pixel and the grid. It wasn't that long ago that images downloaded slowly onto computers, appearing first as grids of pixels that only eventually took sharper visual focus, that in their interim states were curiously evocative and suggestive. That's Estrada-Vega's turf, he makes tiny wooden blocks, usually no more than one-inch square, and richly textures each one with a mixture of oil paint and limestone dust. He then composes huge geometric grids of them, putting each in order in rows, sometimes thousands of them, usually using magnets to secure the 'pixels' together. They end up often comprising dappling abstractions, but sometimes offering just the periphery of representation, of landscapes or skyscapes, if only—and they never do—the pixels would dissolve into focus. It's like Seurat meets Mondrian.

Judith Geichman is an abstract Chicago painter, which already makes her a bit of an anomaly in a city still dominated by figurative artists. And, as indicated by her show at Carrie Secrist Gallery, up through March 30, she steadfastly holds on to the dream of expressive gestural abstract painting: the struggle to make a mark, then make another mark, and then another until you've wreaked out some kind of hard-won resolution, until you've searched and experimented and scraped and abandoned and struggled to get paint—in this case acrylic and enamel—to come to a kind of stasis, a result where the painting achieved a state of fulfillment. It's never anarchy, though, far from it, and Geichman here sets up rules to circumscribe the journey. Each canvas is five-feet square, all made with same materials, and all realized in black, gray and white. It's about the process and the journey, of course, the unseen hours of Geichman's tussle to coax meaning out of stuff, and these paintings are both sober and engrossing.