

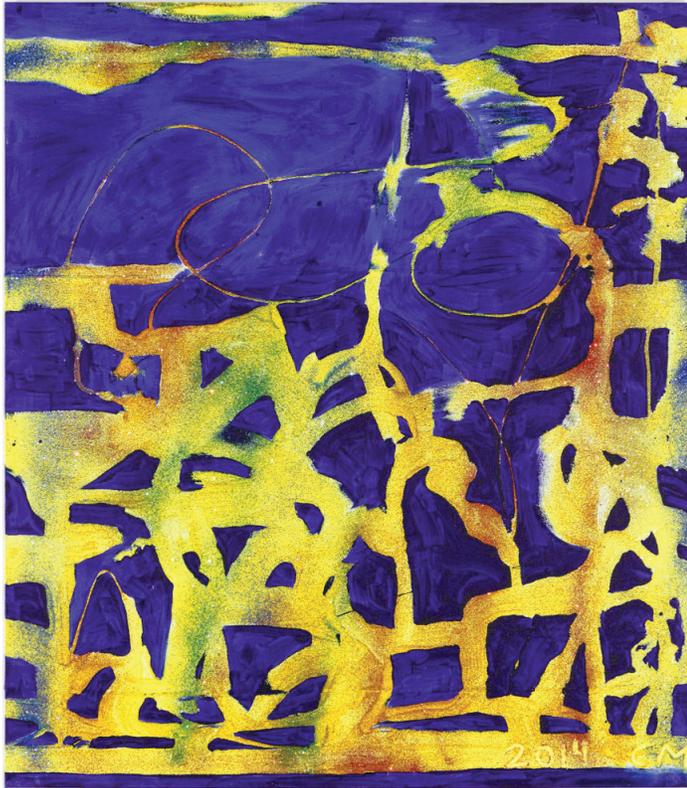
The New York Times

Chris Martin

NOV. 6, 2014

Art in Review

By MARTHA
SCHWENDENER



A spiritual tradition: an untitled work by Chris Martin.
Courtesy of the artist and Anton Kern Gallery, New York

Chris Martin's first solo show at Anton Kern feels like a breakthrough, although he's been painting for decades. Big, glittering and ethereal, the canvases were made upstate last summer, and they have the sun-drenched, baked-on look of the desert, a frequent touchstone in Mr. Martin's work. Many include a shimmery dusting of glitter, and not just any glitter: the holographic kind used by showgirls in Las Vegas, whose living depends on transfixing their audience.

Mr. Martin (who has a concurrent show at Half Gallery on the Upper East Side) traffics in a different kind of transfixion: the slower, seismic kind that painting affords. Among the works on view here are blatantly geometric paintings that hark back to modern precedents, as well as to vernacular practices like quilting. Virtually all of the paintings, even the ones with batik-looking skeins of paint swirling across their surfaces, have a geometric substructure that

anchors the composition. Others include sinuous shapes and forms that rise from the bottom of the picture plane, like plants or stalactites. Mr. Martin can go too far, though. "Space is the Place," in the back gallery, is excessive in its application: a glitter blackout that's like too much frosting on a cake.

Mr. Martin continues the abstract tradition of artists like Forrest Bess and Paul Feeley, but also the spiritualist-abstract one of Hilma af Klimt, Lee Mullican, Agnes Martin and Helmut Federle. He's not just painting, but searching for a way to "be" painting, to experience rather than understand the medium; to be a medium himself.

In a 2005 essay built around the conceit of a conversation between Buddhism and Painting, Mr. Martin admiringly described Richard Tuttle's work: "One does not imagine him actually making the paintings," he wrote. "Rather he steps aside and allows them to pass through to us." Clearly, this is the plane on which Mr. Martin is operating, and he wants us to join him there.