

Your Move: How Mariah Dekkenga Turns a Board Game Into a Meditation on Influence

Kate Andersen, Sept 6 2022



“Non-Zero Sum” at Installation in New York, NY

It’s an October evening in New York, the city thrumming with its usual restlessness. But inside Chelsea’s SITUATIONS gallery, air is calm, weightless— disrupted only by the low murmur of the AC. At the center of the room: a wooden table, a pair of dice, and a scatter of small, jewel-toned cubes.

This is *Non-Zero Sum*, artist Mariah Dekkenga’s current show, an interactive environment that draws visitors into the heart of her practice. While many know Dekkenga for her thick impasto paintings, few realize that they begin with a computer. Using programs like Photoshop and Illustrator, she first designs her compositions digitally— carefully balancing color, form, and structure— before translating them, by hand, into paint.

The resulting artwork is a deliberate balance: computer-generated precision made tactile and imperfect through the human hand. But for Dekkenga, the work is less about her process and more about the

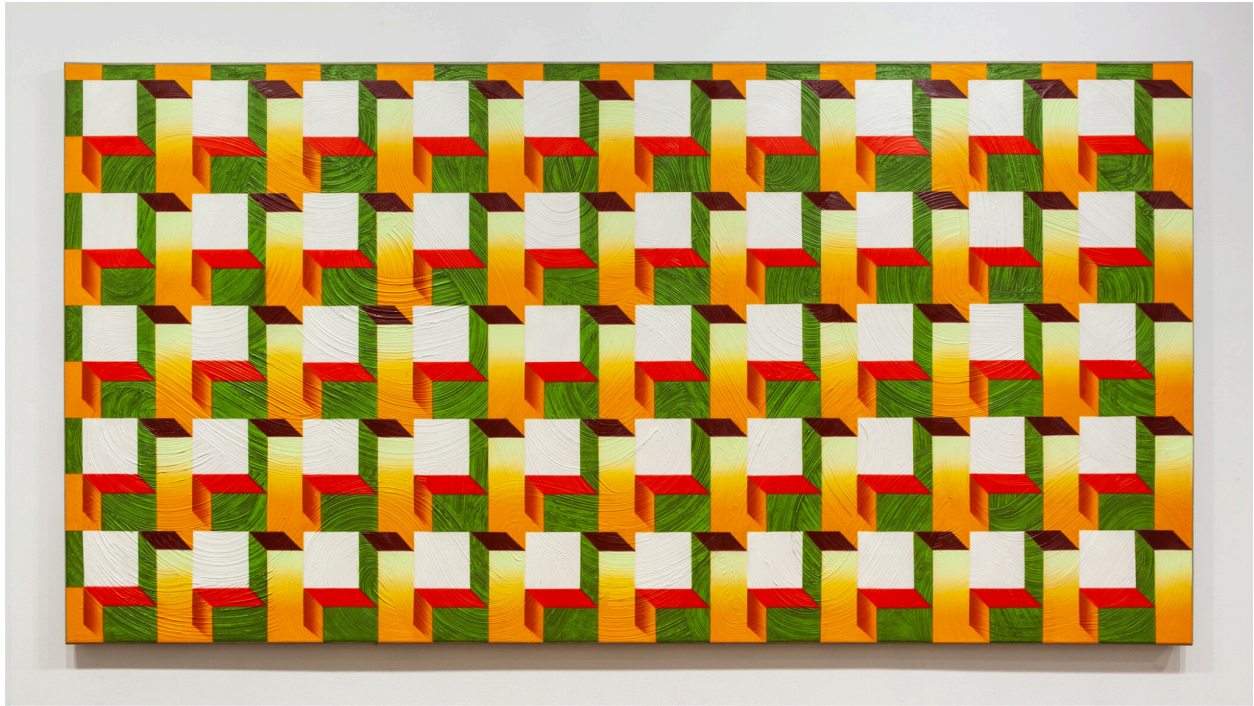
presence of her audience. “I want people to really spend time looking,” she says, voicing a desire to create pieces that hold attention and invite careful reflection.

In *Non-Zero Sum*, the show’s titular work, players roll dice and place colored blocks on a grid, following rules that generate random towers of color, with no winner or loser. As the game unfolds, participants find themselves unconsciously echoing the gestures and logic behind the surrounding paintings: stacking, spacing, considering, stepping back.



It’s a subtle but effective tool. Play becomes meditation, inviting reflections like, “*how do the choices I make affect others?*” and “*what larger patterns am I contributing to?*”

By inviting visitors into the act of making, Dekkenga builds a space where abstraction is no longer distant or opaque and instead something lived, felt, and understood. Gallery visitors will step back out into the bustle of New York with a greater sense of their own influence, and powerful questions that are likely to linger.



Cameron, Robin. "Your Move: Artist Mariah Dekkenga Uses a Board Game to Rethink Abstract Painting." ARTNews, November 25, 2019. <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/reviews/mariah-dekkenga-situations-review-1202669253/>