

Galleries

New angles on geometry



Ilana Manolson's oil on paper, "Order on the Rebound I," at the Randall Beck Gallery.

ILANA MANOLSON

*Randall Beck Gallery, 225 Newbury St.
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By Nancy Stapen
SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE

From skyscrapers to the ubiquitous black box, geometric units are such an intrinsic part of our experience, we hardly give them a moment's thought. But these primary organizers of space — in both the natural and manmade worlds — are the traditional building blocks of artists. The minimalism of the '60s, which venerated reduced geometric form at the expense of all embellishment, represented something of an apotheosis of this tendency; it remains a touchstone for many artists today.

In Ilana Manolson's oil paintings, geometric units, which usually symbolize stability, are erupted and imploded. Order, or the lack of it, is the subject here; the word crops up repeatedly in titles such as "Order on the Rebound I," "Out of Order," etc. Spheres pop out of cubes like crazed jack-in-the-boxes; brushy swirls of paint rushing in and around these forms suggest wind, fire and floods. The palette is a combative mix of fiery yellows and reds and acid greens, underscoring the hyperactive ambience. This is clearly a world where the center no longer holds.

A second series dealing with entropy presents geometric forms at rest. Painted in black and white, they suggest little middle ground between freneticism and utter inactivity.

Manolson upends our notion of geometry as a soothing, harmonious means of structuring experience. Instead, she offers a formal equivalent for a society veering out of control, where geometric icons of classicism are merely a finger in the dam of cataclysmic chaos and fragmentation.