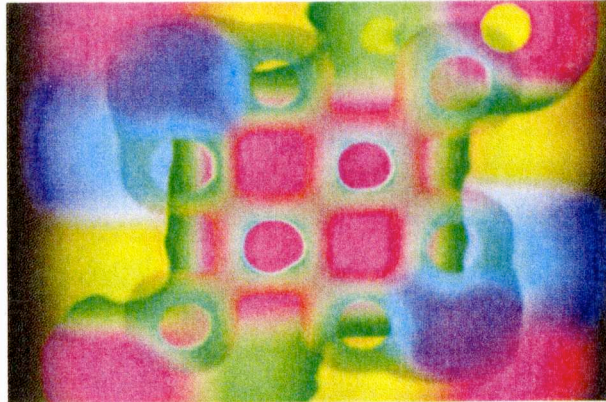


Art in America

INTERNATIONAL ● REVIEW



Scott Wolniak: *Musical Notes in Harmony with the Attuned Healing Colors*, 2008, digital video, 29 1/2 minutes; at the Chicago Cultural Center.

CHICAGO
SCOTT WOLNIAK
CHICAGO CULTURAL CENTER

ON VIEW THROUGH APR. 5

Scott Wolniak explored the impact of color and light on the human psyche in his recent exhibition "Ungray: Color, Light and Other Balms," which could well have been titled "Concerning the Therapeutic in Art." Working in several mediums, including video, sculpture and drawing (all works 2008), the 37-year-old Chicago artist looked to the legacy of transcendental art—whether that of Kandinsky, Rothko or Turrell—and to New Age practices to offer viewers potential deliverance from their mental burdens.

The hypnotic video *Musical Notes in Harmony with the Attuned Healing Colors* looks like a journey through the history of modernist abstraction. Multihued cells and checkerboard grids oscillate, morph and meld into expressionistic fields of yellow, blue, lavender or red, only to resume distinct forms. In actuality, the vibrant procession of geometric patterns came from a commercially available light-therapy box that Wolniak altered and then synched to the pulsating rhythms of composer Jim Dorling's ambient score.

Wolniak takes an ironical stance toward the subject of spiritual consciousness, which he seems to neither wholly embrace nor wholly reject. In some works, New Age cosmology is reduced to a series of sentimental images and gestures, as in *Untitled (08/08/08)*, a small photograph of a rainbow arced against a gray sky, whose numeric title may intimate some hidden mysticism

or simply record the date. Similarly, the powerful solar flares suggested in the digital video *Untitled (Cute Sunflare)* are upstaged by a central black orb that can't retain its circular shape.

The artist is at his best in those works that reveal the process of their making and continue previous well-known themes. *Improvised Grass*, for example, offers a strip of "grass" fastidiously crafted from colorful studio debris that seems to have sprouted from the floor. Related to the earlier *Weeds Project*, this piece gains from an intuitive, playful approach tied to Wolniak's observation of natural sources. A strong sense of materiality inhabits five drawings from his "Simulated Sunprints" series, experimental studies in color and perception. Using bleach (rather than sunlight) to remove pigment from paper, Wolniak produces Rorschach-like images that allude to various organic phenomena yet retain their affinities to abstraction. Modest in scale and intention, they eschew any real power to transform or heal, instead drawing viewers into a reflective experience that is pleurably visual.

—Susan Snodgrass