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Michel Alexis

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Delicate thin black whisps curl around yellow and white rectangles, orange and brown spheres—dreamy, organic forms—connecting the disparate elements of the canvas. Michel Alexis' abstract oil-and-mixed-medium paintings evoke Miró's playful geometric compositions; the diaphanous golden ground in which Alexis anchors his compositions recalls the decadence of Gustav Klimt's backdrops as much as the austerity of Byzantine icons. Despite his involvement with various aspects of art history, Alexis creates a lexicon for geometric abstraction that is as much contemporary as it is his own.



Michael Alexis, Epigram # 12, 2003. Oil, mixed media on wood, 24 x 24 in.

With a keen sense of the physical and conceptual gravity of his materials, Alexis contrasts fabric, transparent paper and heavy acrylic paste in his compositions. While his organic forms maintain their independence, Alexis has them enter into a dialogue with one another by means of tenuous, sweeping lines. The thin dark paths cross one another before falling on dead ends, their vague itineraries serving to highlight the isolation of the painting's

discrete zones while physically connecting them. It is no coincidence that Alexis is an avid reader of Gertrude Stein, the Modernist high priestess of linguistic disjunctions and unforeseeable juxtapositions. Deploying geometric forms instead of words, Alexis explores the intermittent domination of unity, alienation, organization, and entropy in his own pictorial idiom.

Alexis is also interested in the art of early civilizations—most particularly the concept of the glyph, which can serve as an eminently readable signifier for the initiated, or, conversely, as an ominous, inscrutable logo in the eyes of the outsider. In building up his canvases, Alexis succeeds in staking out the restless no-man's-land between the antagonistic poles of transparency and opacity in communication. Both the title and the visual experience of his painting, Epigram #12, remind us what great volumes may lie behind the pithiest gestures, and what sterile wastes may be hidden by the most grandiose dreams.