

Op art: A rehash from the past

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University Galleries at Illinois State University in Normal, is no ground-breaker. But it's not a total bust, either. A handful of artists — including Karin Davie and Peter Halley of New York, Jim Isermann of Los Angeles, Yayoi Kusama of Japan and Susie Rosmarin of Houston — put a slightly different twist on things.

And much about the show is entertaining, despite claims that the work "tests blurry boundaries between sensory titillation and the transforming experience of ecstasy." Whatever that means.

Simply put, op art is hard on the eyes but easy on the mind, meaning you don't have to know much about the subject to feel its impact. There are only so many ways to create these kinds of retinal sensations — wavy patterns, optical mixing of colors that seem to vibrate when placed in close proximity, repetitive parallel lines that vary slightly in their distance from one another.

Mr. Halley, a leader of the neo-geo or new geometric movement that surfaced in the 1980s, surrounds garish Day-glo blocks of color with heavy black lines to form bold geometric networks he calls

cells and conduits. Ms. Davie takes sweeping abstract expressionist brush strokes and bends them out of shape in fun-house-mirror manner.

Mr. Isermann makes doughnut-shaped targets with holes where the bull's-eye should be. Ms. Rosmarin creates a vibrating sensation through her meticulous rendering of an infinitesimal number of tiny squares so evenly placed that they almost look mass-produced.

There's something obsessive about other artists' works as well. Mark Dagley's *Concentric Sequence* consists of countless red, yellow and blue dots that diminish in size as they approach the center of the picture. A sensuous painting by Fred Tomaselli was made by stacking hundreds of aspirin tablets in columns, then embedding them in resin. And Ms. Kusama's *Crowd*, a bevy of painted dots that intermesh like multiple strands of beads, reflects compulsive behavior on the part of an artist who describes painting dots as "painting boredom," linking the activity to time she spent in a psychiatric hospital.

One thing that distinguishes recent optical experiments from those

of the 1960s is the unabashed referencing of prior sources. Mr. Halley's hard-edge configurations can be read as flow charts, road systems or tightly compartmentalized rooms. Mr. Isermann's target, with its radiating spokes creating the effect of a glaring spotlight, not only plays off signature images by Jasper Johns and Kenneth Noland but also incorporates the blinding colors and eye-popping patterns of supergraphics.

There's a kitsch element at work as well. Sarah Morris bases a skewed aerial view of diamond patterns on the garish floor of a Las Vegas casino bathroom. And David Clarkson's *Iris Seventh Avenue Style*, with its red light bulbs and spray-painted dots forming a kind of decomposing happy face, makes sly reference to the worlds of advertising and fashion.

Computer graphics feed into several artists' works. Tad Griffin's rhythmical horizontal motifs, created by dragging squeegees across the canvas, have the digitally produced look of electrocardiograms. Aaron Parazette bases the amorphous "pours" in his paintings on clip-art drips that he scans into his computer. David Szaf-ranski's shimmers result from a form