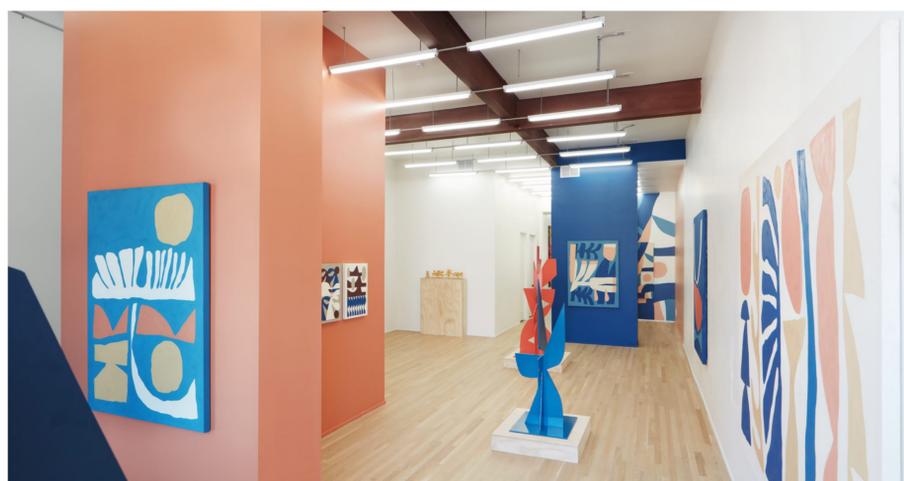


Temporary Relief: A Review of Cody Hudson at Andrew Rafacz

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Cody Hudson, "I Have No One But You," installation view/Courtesy of the artist and Andrew Rafacz/Photo: Ian Vecchiotti

RECOMMENDED

Where were you when everything started to fall apart? For me, it was Thursday, March 12 at the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts. In town for a symposium on the late-twentieth-century painter David Park, I met his youngest daughter Natalie, now in her eighties. Courteously and with a youthful smile, she extended her right hand to shake mine. In that moment, with Soviet-style empty shelves and lack of chlorine wipes fresh in my mind, I remember thinking, "This is a bad idea," but I shook it anyway. I was starstruck.

Over the next few hours I got word that the exhibition's curator would not be attending the symposium. Later, I heard that SFMOMA was desperately trying to find ways to strike the exhibition and ship it back to San Francisco without having to fly their preparators to O'Hare. Everyone was suddenly scared, me included. I did not stay for the symposium—ominously scheduled for Friday the 13th—and instead drove straight home.

One-hundred-twenty days later, listless and weary from three months of viewing online exhibitions and pretending to like outdoor sculpture, I stepped into Cody Hudson's radiant new show "I Have No One But You" at Andrew Rafacz. Bright and cheerful, brimming with deep Mediterranean blues and sunbaked, terra cotta oranges, the superficial appearance of the show couldn't be more at odds with the zeitgeist. And yet, the works' hard-edged shapes and nature-evoking contours are the pitch-perfect antidote to the all-consuming physical and social malady we endure.



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Those familiar with Hudson's playful, Matisse-inspired designs will find much to love. Paintings, such as the large-scale acrylic on canvas, "Regular Social Connection can be a Lifeline (A Love Like That Won't Last)" are packed in tight with flatly brushed shapes that bounce laterally across the surface, like life-affirming notes on a musical score. But as the title of this work and numerous others allude, Hudson has the deleterious effects of social isolation and a global pandemic on his mind.

Even contours that are most sensibly read as floral can assume sinister overtones. In "They Are Looking for Something More Than This World Can Offer (Can You Drown in an Isolation Tank?)," a warm, tropical sun hovering over a cream-colored palm may just as easily be interpreted as viral proteins and cellular structures. That doesn't mean they should be, however. Most of the pieces in the show predate the slow-motion catastrophe of the last four months.



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Although I resolutely reject its forced instrumentalization, we are in the midst of sad days and art has the power to acknowledge our suffering and to transform it. Which is why works such as Hudson's, which plainly have nothing to do with social justice or a global pandemic, are vital in times like these. We don't need the paintings and sculptures in "I Have No One But You" to show us a world spun out of control, inflamed by hatred and disease. We're living in it. Instead, Cody Hudson's work invites us to contemplate a world as we might like it to be: filled with radiant light, warmth and joy; and inspiring us to make that a reality. (Alan Pocaro)

"I Have No One But You" at Andrew Rafacz, 1749 West Chicago, through August 29.