

# BROADWAY

## Art in America

### EDIE FAKE

By *Kyle MacMillan*  December 1, 2018 11:01am



The dozen gouache and in compositions in Edie Fake's recent show (all 2018) were somewhat deceptive. Semiabstract images bearing electric colors, geometric patterns and push pull dynamics, they suggested art for art's sake. But they were layered with allusions to the transgender artist's explorations of sexuality and identity. Such combinations of eye-catching designs and personal and political concerns place Fake in the tradition of the 1970s and '80s Pattern and Decoration artists—a connection also claimed in "Surface/Depth: The Decorative after Miriam Schapiro," a group exhibition held earlier this year at New York's Museum of Arts and Design that delved into the influence of one of the movement's pioneers and included Fake's work.

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The Evanston, Illinois, native, who now lives in the California High Desert just outside of Joshua Tree, has something of a double career. He is probably best known as a force in the alternative comics scene, with *Gaylord Pheonix*, his 2011 book about a nonbinary humanoid on a journey of self-discovery, winning the Ignatz Award for outstanding graphic novel. At the same time, he is an up-and-comer in the art world whose work not only was included in "Surface/Depth" but also will be featured in the Des Moines Art Center's 2019 show "For Today I Am a Boy: Contemporary Queer Abstraction." During the peak of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 1980s and '90s, some artists confronting the ravages of the disease and examining other aspects of LGBTQ life camouflaged their messages via abstraction because of the controversial nature of the subject matter. Though one would hope our society has advanced enough that such disguising is no longer necessary, "queer abstraction" remains a potent means for investigating complicated issues.

Fake's latest body of work follows from his "Memory Palace" series of drawings, which reimagine the facades of Chicago-area gay and lesbian venues (bars, nightclubs, bookshops) as elaborate structures. While architectural references are often evident in the new work, they are less overt than in the previous series. In *Tangles*, a showy polka-dotted stairway is tucked into the center of a busy, fantastical space with an off-balance perspective. Boxes with gridded patterns on their ends jut forward, and curving brown stripes weave in and out of the foreground.

A gallery statement suggests that these works should be considered self-portraits of sorts, the images "referencing elements of the trans and non-binary body through pattern, color and architectural metaphor." While Fake does not seem interested in conveying definite meanings in them, he does explore particular themes and motifs, as titles *Center Part* or *Neutralities* might indicate. In *The T Room*, eight colorful, patterned squares form a central "T," which likely stands for "testosterone" or "transgender." Four of the squares contain the letters "F" and "T" interlocking in such a way that they produce an "M," evoking the notion of female-to-male (FTM). In a *Chicago Tribune* interview, Fake alluded to doing a painting about binding his chest and eventually undergoing what he called "masculinizing chest surgery." That work is clearly *The Bindery* one of the most explicit images in the show, with its convoluted interplay of floating red, white, and blue bandage-type strips unspooling from five rolls. Even in the less direct works, however, Fake's overall intent seems clear: to conjure a vibrant space where freedom of gender expression can reign.