By Cate McQuaid
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A good kind of paper cuts
Matt Rich's cut-paper paintings grow ever more ambitious, and at the same time ever more humble, as his show at Samson attests. As always, they rely on paper's delicacy and utility. Rich's pieces are torn, creased, and crumpled, marked with footprints and spattered paint. Every mark has its purpose. In all but one work here, he veers toward straight lines and hard angles. The forms are reminiscent of Frank Stella's 1960s paintings, but the material, scuffed and torn, is nowhere near as crisp or heroically imposing.

"Stacks," for instance, features a V formation. It's not perfectly symmetrical. It's not perfectly anything. Flaps in blue and black at the bottom are misset up. Then, a small rectangle in the center is vaporous violet, and at the top, Rich paints another one in brushy, green-black strokes at angles that skew against the rest of the piece.

Rich gets downright painterly in some works, including "Three Stars," a 100-inch-tall goofball of a star sporting patchy triangles and polygons, each painted differently. Toward the top, a puddle of blue brushed with purple suggests depth. The upward points are dark and glossy, but wrinkled, as if Rich fished them out of the trash can. Another section is flat, weedy green.

The tension between surface and depth, intention and accident, gesture and geometry adds up to relentlessly engaging work. Looking at Rich's art is an inherently intimate experience. It's not big, and the smallest marks pull you in. In this show, however, he strives toward something harder, bigger, and more monumental, and if he can continue on that path and hold onto the works' humility, he's really going somewhere.

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