

Painting and sculpture in one

■ Artist uses geometry and subtle color for special effect

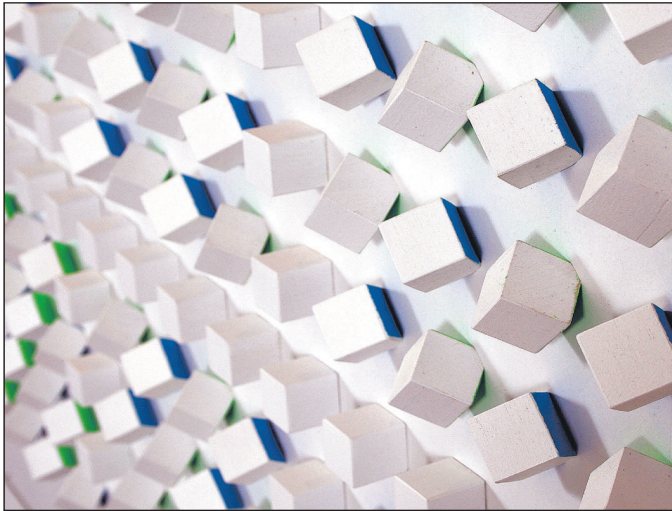
By **DOUGLAS BRITT**
ARTS WRITER

Because Luis Tomasello's painted wood reliefs at Sicardi Gallery lie somewhere between painting and sculpture, they make you want to approach them in ways appropriate for both media.

Viewing them head-on, you want to walk toward them, then back away, then move closer again, as if they were paintings. You want to maneuver your way around them as much as possible, as though they were sculptures.

The longer you indulge both desires, the more seductively they work their quiet magic on you.

A 93-year-old Argentine who has lived and worked in Paris since 1957, Tomasello, like Venezuelan artist Carlos Cruz-Diez, makes work that relies on viewers' movements to complete its optical effects.



SICARDI GALLERY

PERSPECTIVE: Visitors will want to approach *Atmosphere Chromoplastique 863*'s cubes from many vantage points.

But Tomasello's work is far less steeped in color than Cruz-Diez's. To the extent the former uses saturated color, it's usually on the back or an angled side of one of the cubes, rectangular boxlike shapes or polyhedra he attaches to a relief's flat support — thus infusing the shadows they cast with subtle chromatic effects.

You don't realize why parts of a white work look

off-white until you get close and view them from an angle, seeing where Tomasello has painted a side green, blue or red.

Tomasello's use of geometry is at least as important as his use of reflected color to achieve his kinetic effects. An otherwise infinite field of cubes that are attached to the support at one of their corners might be interrupted by several rows and columns of cubes

LUIS TOMASELLO: RECENT WORK

■ **When:** Through Aug. 1

■ **Where:** Sicardi Gallery, 2246 Richmond

■ **Information:** 713-529-1313 or www.sicardi.com

that lie flat, thus creating perpendicular stripes.

In other works, a flat surface might sprout grid formations of hundreds or thousands of tiny, cylindrical peglike forms whose tops appear to have been sliced off at a diagonal. The direction of the slice — and the presence or lack thereof of holes bored into the surface — further intensify their optical effects.

More so than Cruz-Diez, Tomasello seems to draw inspiration from Piet Mondrian's grids and Kazimir Malevich's *White on White* paintings of 1917-18.

The latter seem especially relevant to Tomasello's work for the way they achieved an austerity without becoming impersonal.

You could see evidence of Malevich's hand in their texture, and they were geometric yet not precise.

"Where (Venezuelan artist Jesús-Rafael) Soto would use wire and Plexiglas and Cruz-Diez would employ strips of aluminum, Tomasello takes it upon himself to create geometry out of natural materials," Kelly Klaasmeyer wrote in the Houston Press about Tomasello's first Sicardi exhibit in 2005. "There's something appealing and down-to-earth about taking a humble, imprecise natural material and trying to create geometric precision out of it."

Part of the mystery in these works is that what Klaasmeyer described as their sometimes "awkward or clunky" quality tends to be more apparent at first glance than after a period of prolonged study.

Or perhaps contemplation is a better word since that's the mood Tomasello's meditative works inspire, even as they invite motion on the part of the viewer.

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LOOKING BACK

■ In 1847, Mormon leader Brigham Young and his followers arrived in the Great Salt Lake Valley in present-day Utah.

■ In 1969, the Apollo 11 astronauts — two of whom had been the first men to set foot on the moon — splashed down safely in the Pacific.

BIRTHDAYS

Movie director **Peter Yates** is 80. Political cartoonist **Pat Oliphant** is 74. Former Republican National Chairman **Marc Racicot** is 61. Movie director **Gus**



CHENOWETH

Van Sant is 57. Country singer **Pam Tillis** is 52. Actress-singer **Kristin Chenoweth** is 41.

Former NBA player-turned-actor **Rick Fox** is 40. Actress **Anna Paquin** is 27.

JOKES ON US

If you are what you eat, I'm dead meat.

— **BILL KERLEY**, Houston