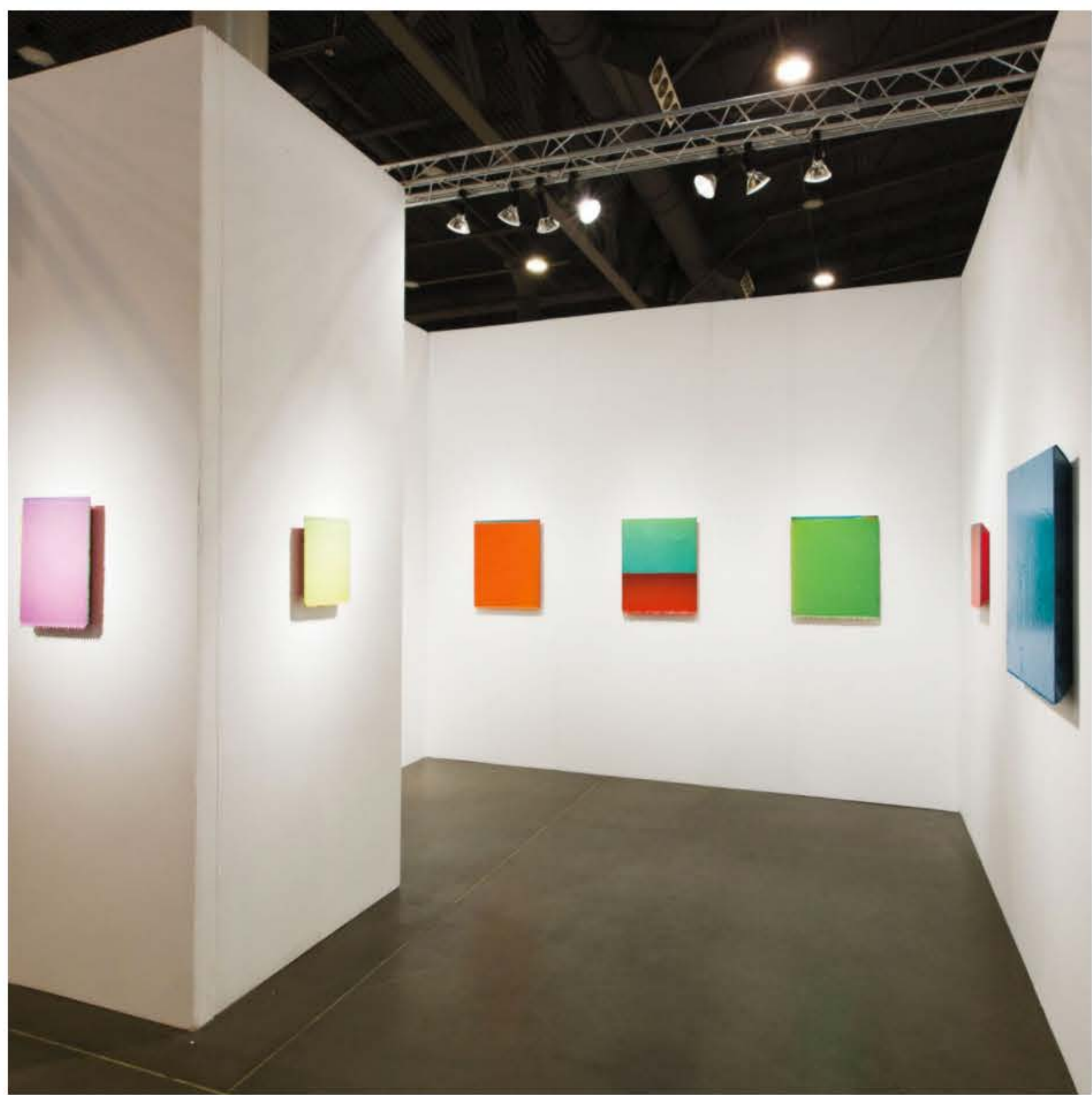




The Sculptural Painter: Joseph Cohen



Artist Joseph Cohen is a master of "subtlety in small shifts." Propositions, his three-dimensional sculptural paintings of stacked shades of a single hue, brush the eye with the touch of the artist's hand. "They're a historical topography," he says. "They build up layer by layer and provide a record of my craft." Cohen's Houston studio is located in a windowless midtown warehouse, illuminated solely by halogen and full-spectrum fluorescent lights. "There's no natural light because I need consistency when I work," explains the artist, who mixes his own paint (raw pigment with varnish) and makes his own brushes. Each work of undulating angles contains about 30 different shades and up to 150 painted layers. "As you move," he says, "your perception of the work changes from light to dark and from warm to cool, so the paintings become metaphors for life." Cohen uses a new brush for each layer to maintain the bristles' "direct strength," which results in tactile works that create the intimate connection he's after: "I like people to feel the work when they look at it."



An installation of Cohen's work at the Avis Frank Gallery booth at the Houston Fine Art Fair.

LX: Why pigment and varnish?

JC: Varnish serves as a transparent binder. It suspends the color—a mixture of ground and interference pigments, diamond dust, platinum, silver, bronze and gold—and lets me "stack" planes of color in a manner that doesn't obfuscate previous layers.

LX: Design icon:

JC: I've recently become familiar with David Rasmussen's furniture. It's sleek, functional and I adore the form. I enjoy fluidity in architecture and design.

LX: New artist whose work you admire:

JC: He's not new on the Houston art scene, but Aaron Parazette's name comes to mind. I think it's because his work looks so fresh. He's always outdoing himself, pushing the envelope and creating something anew.



The ReMix chair by David Rasmussen. The form and function of his work resonates with Cohen.

Images courtesy of F. Carter Smith (portrait), Alex Barber (installation photo) and David Clifford (silhouette)

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