

# HYPERALLERGIC

INTERVIEWS

## Unlocking the Secret Logic of Symbols Through Repetition



Samuel Jablon | September 30, 2016



Adam Henry, "Rubric" (2016), acrylic and synthetic polymers on linen, 67 x 51 inches (all images courtesy 247365 and the artist)

I first met Adam Henry about a year ago. I found his commitment to the creative process refreshing. As primarily a painter, he labors over his work, especially the surfaces of the canvases, which subtly shift in texture, gradation, and hue. He works in series, each painting a slight alteration of the previous one, creating a kind of endless structure.

The smart and colorful work in his new exhibition at 247365 in Manhattan's Lower East Side, [Handshakes and Networks](#), is an optical illusion; it's for sale, and in a few cases free. Three of the works will be given away, and will continue to be given away every six months, as they continuously change hands. The "hosts" of the paintings tell Henry where the paintings will be next, and are tracked on [a website](#).

"Repetition often reveals hidden and/or secret structures and it's the logic behind these structures that I'm primarily interested in," said Henry in one of the many conversations we had over the course of the summer on the nature of repetition in his work, reproduced in part below.



\* \* \*

Adam Henry, "A Plane in Three Dimensional Space Z" (2016), acrylic and synthetic polymers on linen, custom aluminum travel case, 16 x 14 inches

**Sam Jablon:** *Why is repetition important to your work?*

**Adam Henry:** Repetition is a great tool to show difference, structure thought, and question authenticity. It's a way for me to understand and study the logic behind things. I use repetition in my work to set up parameters of comparison and to slow down the viewing experience. I love repetitious music and I tend to read the same books and watch the same movies over and over again. For the last three years I have read and reread the same book on every trip I've taken. I think I'm up to nine reads. It's been an incredible experience to try to truly know this book and how the content changes depending on the place where I am reading it.

**SJ:** *What book have you read the most?*

**AH:** Without a doubt [\*The Invention of Morel\*](#) by Adolfo Bioy Casares.



Installation view of 'Adam Henry: Handshakes and Networks' at 247365

**SJ:** *Through repetition do you see things differently?*

**AH:** Yes, absolutely. Repetition often reveals hidden and/or secret structures and it's the logic behind these structures that I'm primarily interested in.

**SJ:** *Is that something you want your audience to experience through your paintings?*



Adam Henry, "A Shift in Personality Measured by Lumens" (2016), acrylic and synthetic polymers on linen, 47 x 59 inches

**AH:** To help shape, shift, or challenge someone's perception is the greatest power we have as artists. Asking questions about how we think and how we communicate these thoughts is the dialogue I hope an audience has with and around the work.

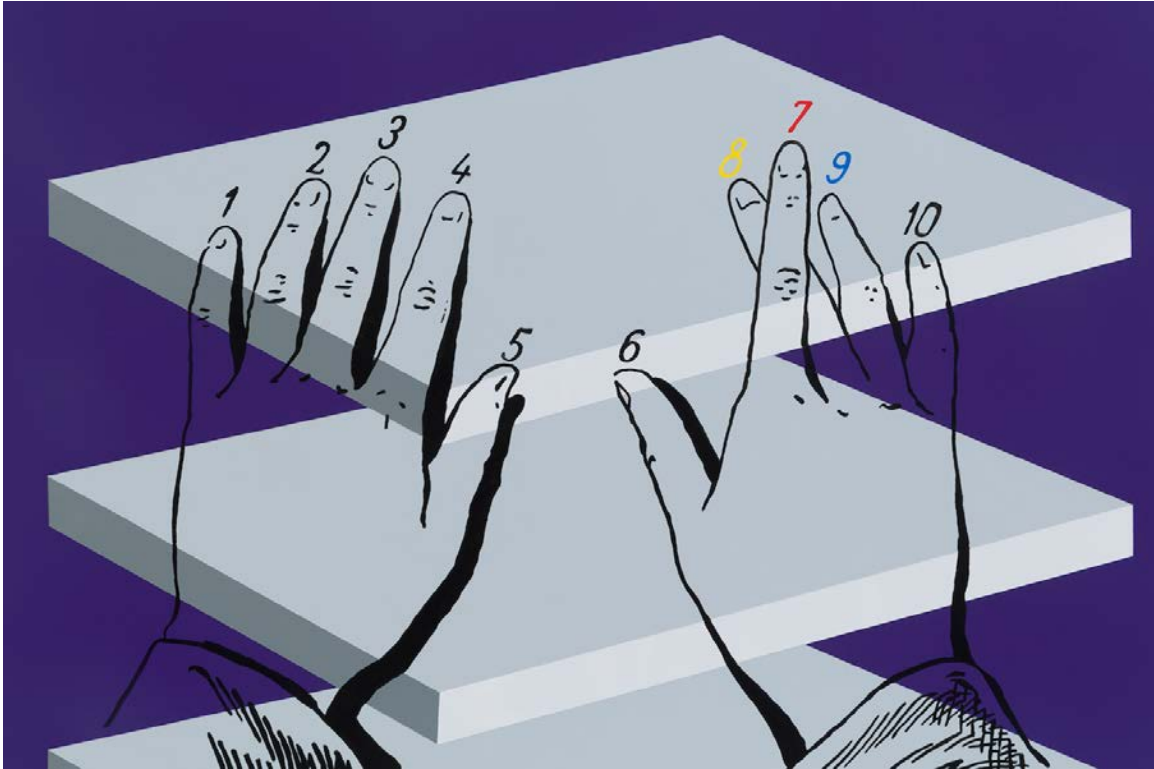
**SJ:** *Your paintings are often a series of subtle repetitions that are always slightly different. How are the works in your upcoming exhibition different from previous bodies of work?*

**AH:** The repetition is contained within each painting. My 2015 exhibition at Meessen de Clercq spread the ideas of repetition over three gallery floors. This allowed a viewer to experience my ideas about repetition slowly through the installation. In the exhibition *Handshakes and Networks* I enclosed each idea about repetition within the objects themselves. The space often dictates the candor. At the gallery 247365 I have an opportunity to allow the exhibition a certain gestalt. Everything is seen at once and then slowly scrutinized.

**SJ:** *Could you talk about the ideas of commerce in your upcoming exhibition?*

**AH:** I'm always thinking of how to make painting less static. I want to put a painting into motion and not just hang it on the wall. For a few years now I have been working on an idea to give away three paintings and track them. As the idea developed I realized that the network of participants was as important as the

object itself. So I developed a system where the network could evolve naturally on its own. I made three paintings of a rotating color theory diagram. These paintings are placed in custom-made aluminum cases and are given away at the end of the exhibition. The first three participants accept the painting under the contingency that they will give the painting away to another participant after six months and so on. The exchange will go on forever. Each painting's history and various hosts will be logged on a website devoted to the project. I wanted this work to bypass the market and the idea of the object as a commodity. Its focus is the network or community of participants and the value is in the experience.



Adam Henry, "Powers of 9" (2016), acrylic and synthetic polymers on linen, 31 x 24 inches

**SJ:** *Do you know who the first three people will be?*

**AH:** The first few participants or hosts will be within my own personal network. They will be people whom I have had some personal interaction with — for example, people I've had a studio visit with, a conversation, or a professional connection. They will be announced at the end of the exhibition and will be three distinct contributors to the art world: a curator/writer, an artist, and a dealer/collector. I think it's important that it starts from me and grows outward. I imagine that in a few years the paintings will be far outside my community and this, of course, is a good thing. They will take on a life of their own as all objects naturally do. Their story will, however, be public.

**SJ:** *What are your thoughts on uniqueness or authenticity?*

**AH:** The creative endeavor is not real estate!

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**SJ:** *Do you think the market influences the creativity of artists?*

**AH:** I think the market itself is creative. It has to be.



**SJ:** *To me, the painting covered in ampersands speaks to endless possibilities. What is the relationship between the repetition of an ampersand (&) and the optical illusions created by color and spacing in the painting?*



Adam Henry, "And Per Se And" (2016), acrylic and synthetic polymers on linen, 55 x 79 inches

**AH:** When reciting their alphabet, school children in the 1800s would end with "and per se and," and this would eventually become our word for this symbol. It is very interesting to me how this shorthand has become such a well-used and understood symbol in our language. For me the symbol implies multiplicity. Because we are so inundated with information, daily life does feel as if there are endless options being added to every decision we make. You're absolutely right in that the painting with the ampersands is a type of endless feedback loop. The symbols are caught between describing themselves and the negative space. I read that synesthesia could be something that is learned and I painted a diagram to evoke that experience in a painting. The color is very specific and carefully chosen to make the space optically challenging. That is part of the experiment: to create a painting where a viewer is constantly reorienting themselves to the painting's optical, linguistic, and spatial logic.

**SJ:** *What has been the biggest challenge for you working on this show?*

**AH:** Probably working on the extraordinarily intricate and delicate parts of the paintings while wedding receptions were happening on the floor above my studio.

[Adam Henry: Handshakes and Networks](#) continues at 247365 (57 Stanton St., Lower East Side, Manhattan) through October 10.