

# The New York Times

ART IN REVIEW

## RICCI ALBENDA

By Ken Johnson

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*Andrew Kreps Gallery*

*525 West 22nd Street*

*Chelsea*

*Through Oct. 23*

Ricci Albenda investigates perception in strangely futuristic sculptural environments and carefully calibrated word paintings. This transporting exhibition's Pop-Minimalist canvases consist of flat fields of sky blue emblazoned by letters in a font of his own design resembling that of headlines in The New York Times. In more or less muted hues the letters spell words, phrases and song titles.

In some, like "Aglow," the letters are emphasized by halos of brush strokes. "Breathe," in which the nearly invisible characters seem to emerge from some transcendental blue yonder, is like a collaboration between Ad Reinhardt and Ed Ruscha. Hung closely around the room, Mr. Albenda's picture-window-size canvases create an airy, celestial ambience.

He employs a system whereby letters of the alphabet are keyed to sections of a color wheel. (In theory you could use it to encrypt the Bible in colored dots.) A casual viewer might not detect the underlying code in Mr. Albenda's paintings, but a patient one possessed of analytic ingenuity and exceptional sensitivity to nuances of color could figure it out. This makes for an absorbing experience of looking and thinking and being conscious of your own consciousness in the here and now. The painting bearing the word for "here" in French — "ici" — could be a clue: Eye see I, or I see I. The philosophical viewer might unpack larger implications about thought, language, images, space and color. Others will be satisfied by Mr. Albenda's poetic wit and eccentric perfectionism and the dry, but sensuous fabric of his work.

**KEN JOHNSON**

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