

# tema celeste

ryan steadman

O H+T Gallery  
Boston

In his new paintings, Ryan Steadman's concerns with everyday urban occurrences, conceived as metaphors for existential dilemmas, combine with a fruitful, formal mating of geometric abstraction and impulsive, expressive representation. Steadman, in fact, mixes a strong tension toward Mondrianesque purity of form with an urge toward spontaneous fleshy figuration. His faceless protagonists elicit the raw feel of juicy oil



Ryan Steadman *Jump* (detail / dettaglio), 2004, oil and enamel on panel / olio e smalto su tavola, 53,3 x 172,7 cm.

paint, while they play out their awkward dramas against a backdrop of meticulously rendered, enamel geometric configurations. There is sweet irony in *Jump* (2004), a long horizontal piece that features a single male figure in a white shirt and blue pants vaulting a multicolored fence of thin pickets set against a flat black enamel background. He seems to be in too much of a rush to escape into existential blackness to notice a large opening in the fence that he could have easily walked through.

In *Over the Wall (blue)*, (2004), three quarters of the composition is filled with a multi-colored brick wall; its grid-like bands have a harmonic sensibility, which Steadman carefully contrived by employing, in order to create the proportions, the mathematical purity of the Fibonacci Series—a sequence in which the next number in the series is the sum of the previous two numbers. The intense pulsating colors of the bricks, however, were randomly chosen. Atop the rainbow wall, thick exaggerated gestures of lush paint strokes become a brown-haired male in the process of hoisting up a blond-haired male.

Although one may imagine references to escaping over the Berlin Wall (and the artist relishes the open-endedness of his narratives), Steadman admits to having been inspired by Pink Floyd's 1979 album, *The Wall*, about how structures hold people back.

*Share a Square* (2005), poetically expresses human connectivity through the passing of a cigarette from a figure in a hotly painted red diagonally shingled building to a waiting hand sticking out from the side of an abutting blue building. The dark humor and the mixture of playfulness and youthful rebellious spirit of New Image Painting is reawakened in Steadman's sweet paintings.