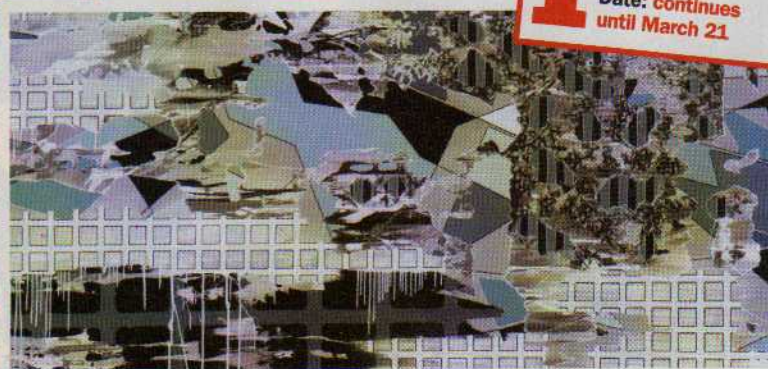


## Lehner's illusions

**i** **THE LOWDOWN**  
Artist: **Tobias Lehner**  
Gallery: **Carbon 12,**  
**Al Quoz**  
Date: **continues**  
**until March 21**



'When my children stand in front of my paintings, they always see figurative things such as people or horses,' explains artist Tobias Lehner. 'But I never paint these things. I only paint chaos.' His kids must be Magic Eye aficionados, although his works certainly possess a puzzling, layered quality – they are, as he says, chaotic, but they also have a kind of geometric uniformity.

Almost everyone provides a different interpretation. Some see techy album art, others see dystopic landscapes or, like Lehner's kids, figurative images. The works have a bold palette and they trick the eye – stare at them and they appear almost like a collage of prints on canvas – but they are formed from seemingly disconnected layers of acrylic, the top layer of which Lehner scratches onto the canvas using a tool similar to a palette knife.

Painting is a lengthy process for Lehner, one that can take from four weeks to six months per piece, although he seems to feel little control over how things evolve. 'I put geometrical elements on the canvas in layers, then I destroy these and make them new. I destroy them with a lot of colour, I scratch it all over the canvas. I then wait to see what's happened on the canvas, because at this point I don't know.'

His sense of abandon is similar to the attitude of one of his artistic idols, Jackson Pollock: his works have an air of Pollock about them, but are injected with 21st century digital fervour. He also cites graffiti-

inspired artist Cy Twombly and abstract expressionist Mark Rothko as inspirations, although he's wary of being too influenced by others. 'They are all very important painters to me, but I try not to copy them because it makes no sense. I try to understand what they are doing, then find a new form for abstract painting.'

One of his inspirations is satellite imaging service Google Earth, a technology that is so far removed from Pollock's countryside life of the 1940s that there's no doubt Lehner is doing something new. 'On Google Earth you can zoom in on or out from the earth step by step. This is very interesting for me, and I try to put something like this on the canvas.' But when we ask him to explain his work in layman's terms, his reply does nothing but baffle. 'I mix the microcosmos and macrocosmos in my work. This is the simplest I can say!'

**'I never paint figurative things. I only paint chaos'**

We interpret this as a suggestion that his work represents both the vast and the minute, which explains the title of his latest exhibition at Carbon 12 – the name, 'Pluton', references the planet Pluto and the element plutonium.

Complementary contradiction is rife in this artist's modus operandi: he explores the macro and micro, his work is contemporary but eternal, and its aesthetic would look just as comfortable on a cool poster as it would in a fine art gallery. Everyone seems to see something different in Lehner's works, but – just as with Magic Eye images – you could stare at them for hours.

*Pluton continues at Carbon 12 in Al Quoz until March 21*

German artist **Tobias Lehner's** works both trick and treat the eye. He tells *Nyree Barrett* about their creation

Remember Magic Eye books? At first glance they were just a jumbled, abstract mess, but they promised more. You could sit in front of them for hours, staring and waiting to see what the eye would make of the patterns. Some people claimed to

see dragons or tigers, although most never saw anything beyond a mass of blocky, migraine-inducing shapes. But, despite their elusive nature, the images did teach an entire generation about the disparity and malleability of perception.

