



REVIEW / UTAH

## Review: *Jorge Rojas: Material Witness* at Granary Arts

SEPTEMBER 7, 2022



Jorge Rojas's retrospective *Material Witness* at Granary Arts in Ephraim, Utah, showcases a quiet yet still tenacious side of the Salt Lake City-based artist.



Jorge Rojas: *Material Witness*, installation view, 2022, Granary Arts. Courtesy Granary Arts.

## Jorge Rojas: Material Witness

May 25–September 23, 2022

Granary Arts, Ephraim, Utah

The inherent peace at Granary Arts, housed inside a rehabbed granary building constructed in 1876 by a women’s religious group, is softly amplified in the exhibition Material Witness by Jorge Rojas. The Salt Lake City-based artist, often known for his multidisciplinary approach to performance art, illustrates other aspects of his studio practice via minimalist and post-minimalist pieces, color-field paintings, and sound-centric works from 2003 to the present.

*Material Witness* professes to accentuate purity of form. It certainly does, especially in a pair of color grid paintings—*Color Grid #2* (2006) is reminiscent of a Rubik’s Cube in its geometry and color choices. The two grid works also emanate tension. The oil paint, positioned via the impasto technique (the show features little if any brushwork), murmurs off the canvas in a subdued three-dimensional presentation that’s just shy of imitating a dried and cracked riverbed, which is on-brand in Utah’s climate-changed present.

Rojas, born in Cuautla, Morelos, Mexico, existentially infuses his works with his roots as well as Mesoamerican materials and a connection to the beyond. His “beginning-a-piece-with-a-feeling” approach is empathic in *Encaustic Painting (Green)* (2014) and *Encaustic Painting (Red)* (2014); in each, the artist arranges beeswax in a method that cocoons the abstracted shapes into a net of safety and mystery.

While Rojas’s brooding color-field works—some reminiscent in construction (but not color palette or size) to Mark Rothko—aren’t deep feeling grabbing, two sound pieces activate the space with more amity.



Jorge Rojas: *Material Witness*, installation view of *Color Grid #2* (2006) and *Color Grid #1* (2006), 2022, Granary Arts, oil and graphite on canvas, 24 x 24 in. each. Courtesy Granary Arts.



*Sonic Sculpture #2* (2006), a flower-like wax imprint inside of a found pine-wood box, cloaks a speaker playing excerpts from *Music for Spaces*, a 1997 album by sound artist Peter van Riper. The nonfigurative sounds coax quiet contemplation and uncannily blend with another nearby piece by Rojas that diffuses Tibetan Buddhist monk chants. A similar yet unexpected feeling exudes from two simple, stirring grid-style presentations of dollar-store sink strainers, which ensnare miniature handmade balls of wax.

*Material Witness*—festooned with quiet colors and hypnotic materials—successfully distills the big-picture and often clichéd intuitive art-making approach. The show's salve is particularly potent in its rhythmic structure. But instead of playing half-notes or triplets to make his point, Rojas's visual score illustrates an idea gleaned from music theory, which doubles as an underrated life concept: rest.



Jorge Rojas: *Material Witness*, installation view of *Encaustic Painting (Green)* (2014) and *Encaustic Painting (Red)* (2014), 2022, Granary Arts, oil and wax on panel, 16 x 20 in. each. Courtesy Granary Arts.



Jorge Rojas, *Sonic Sculpture #2*, 2006, wax, found wood box, MP3 player, audio selections from *Music for Spaces* by Peter van Riper, 6.75 x 9.25 x 5 in. Courtesy the artist.





Jorge Rojas, *Study for Mural #1*, 2007, sink strainers and wax on panel, 24 x 24 x 3 in. Courtesy the artist.



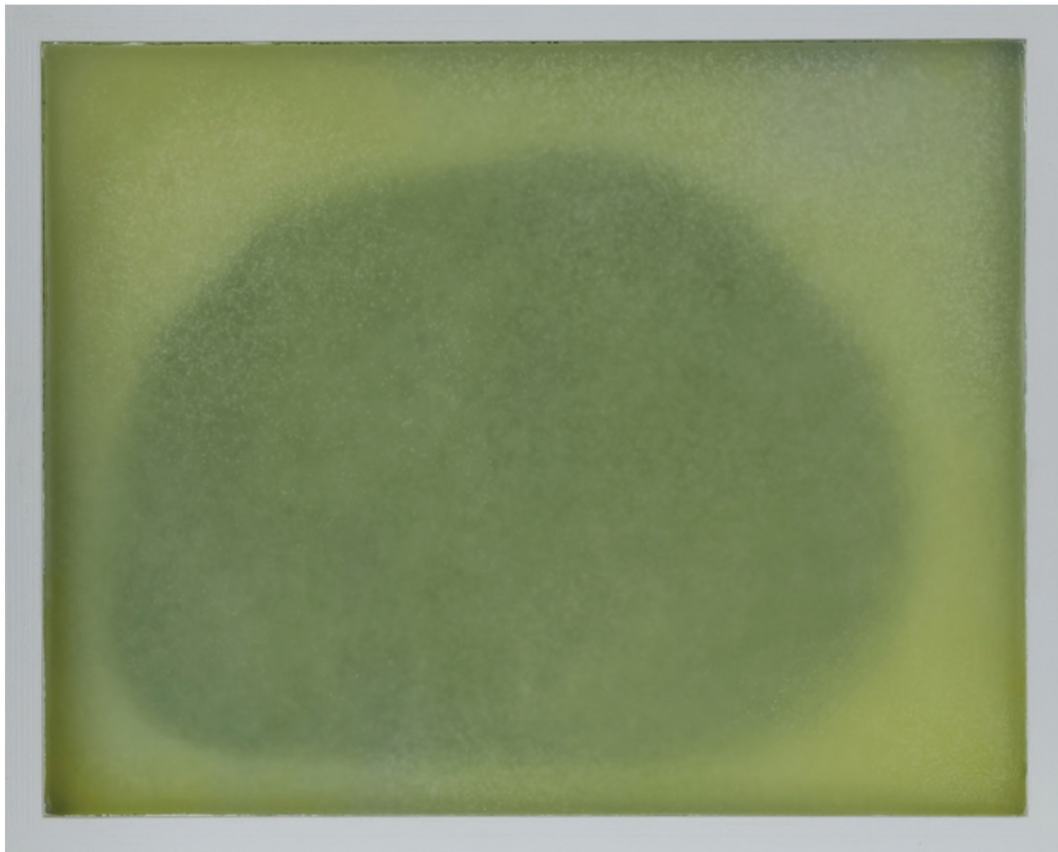


Jorge Rojas, *Study for Mural #2*, 2007, sink strainers and wax on panel, 14 x 11 x 2.25 in. Courtesy the artist.

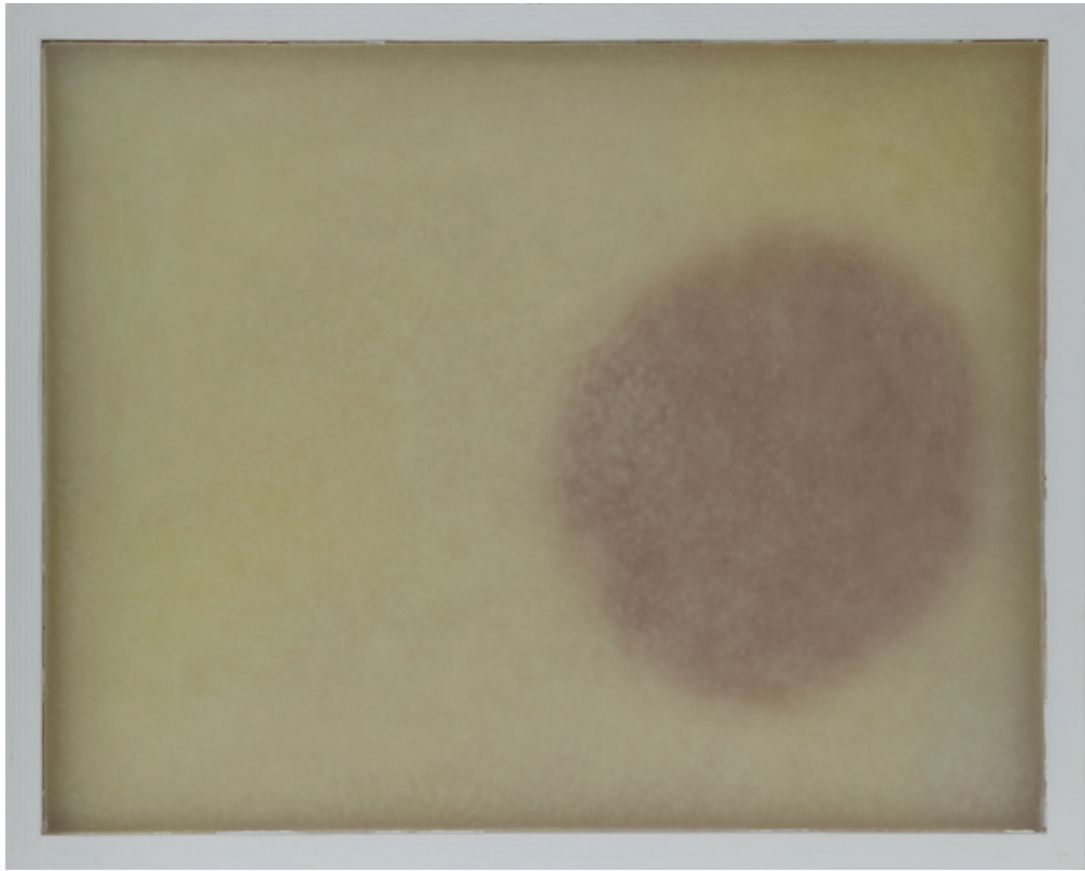




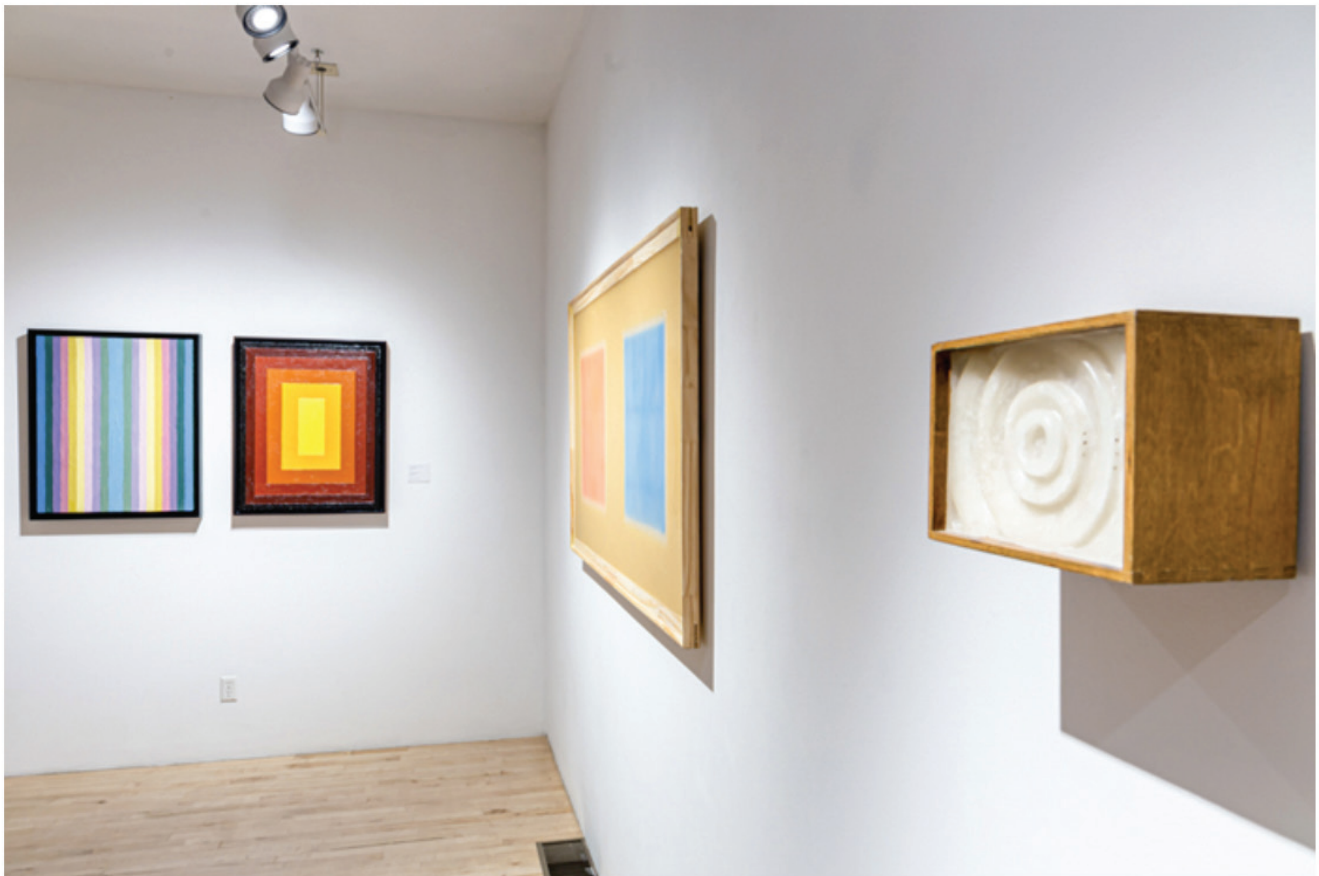
Jorge Rojas: *Material Witness*, installation view of *Quantum Grid* (2021) and *White Grid* (2007), 2022, Granary Arts, media, dimensions variable. Courtesy Granary Arts.



Jorge Rojas, *Encaustic Painting (Green)*, 2014, oil and wax on panel, 16 x 20 in. Courtesy the artist.

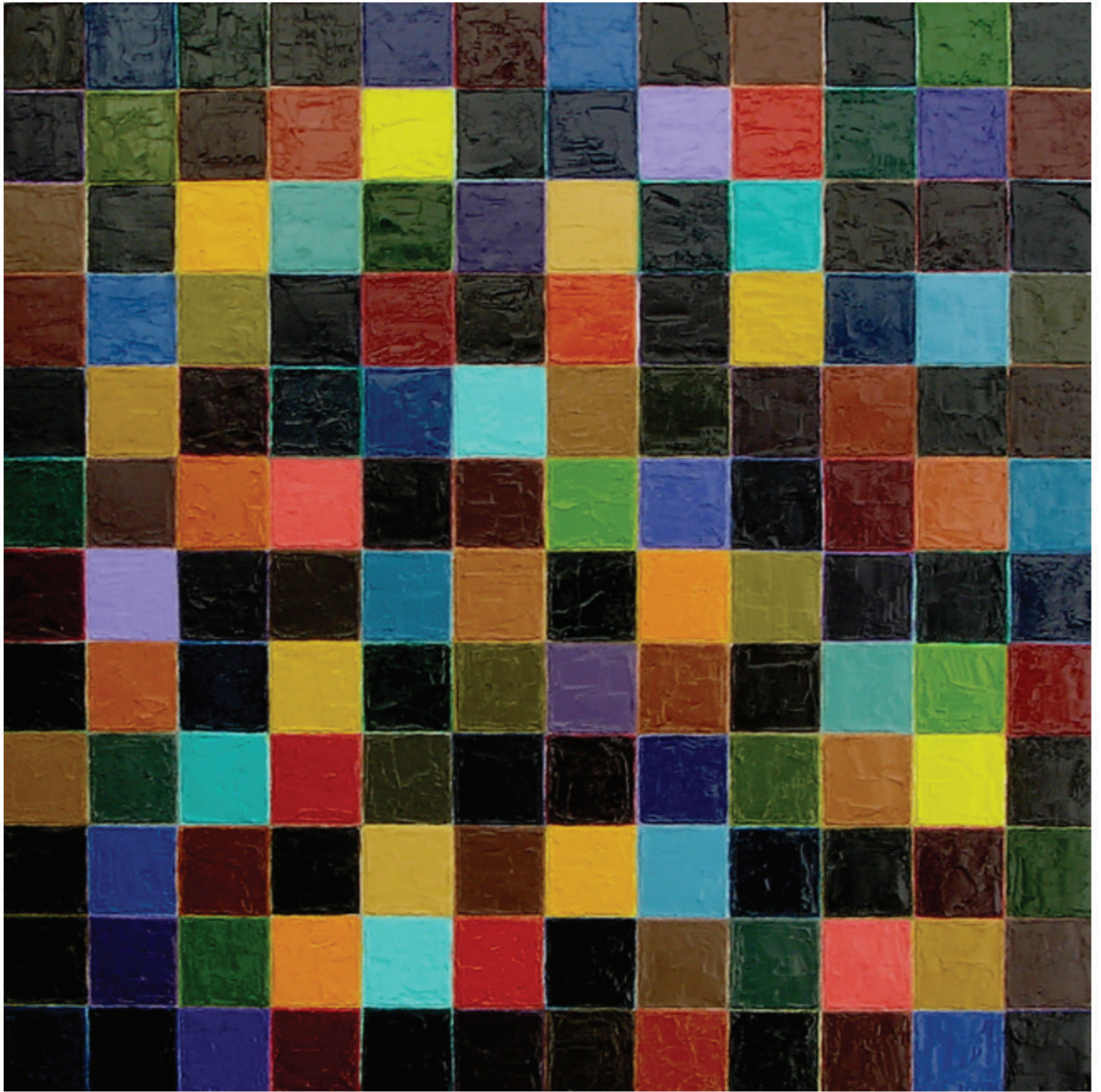


Jorge Rojas, *Encaustic Painting (Red)*, 2014, oil and wax on panel, 16 x 20 in. Courtesy the artist.



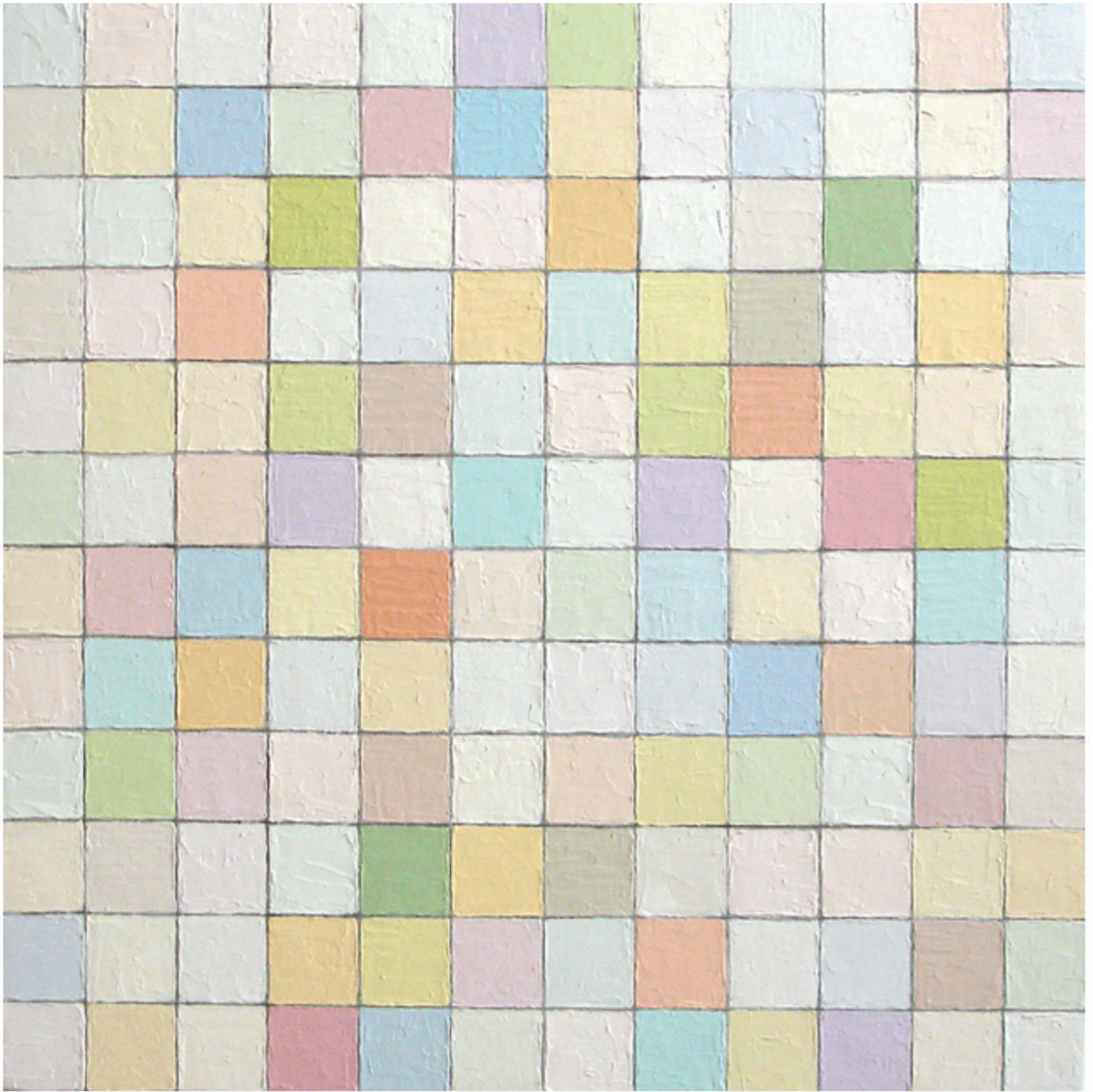
Jorge Rojas: *Material Witness*, installation view, 2022, Granary Arts. Courtesy Granary Arts.





Jorge Rojas, *Color Grid #2*, 2006, oil and graphite on canvas, 24 x 24 in. Courtesy the artist.





Jorge Rojas, *Color Grid #1*, 2006, oil and graphite on canvas, 24 x 24 in. Courtesy the artist.





Jorge Rojas: *Material Witness*, installation view, 2022, Granary Arts. Courtesy Granary Arts.

## STEVE JANSEN

Steve Jansen is the news editor at *Southwest Contemporary*. An Albuquerque-based investigative news reporter and arts writer, he has won and been nominated for various state, regional, and national awards. In 2013, his investigation into two crumbling Houston dams attained first place for Best Print News/Feature Story in the Texas statewide Lone Star Awards. A former staff writer for *Phoenix New Times* and *Houston Press*, he's written for *Hyperallergic* and contributed news reporting to *The New York Times*.

### WORDS

STEVE JANSEN

### EVENT

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