






Petzel

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The Shapes Project: Collection of One Hundred and Eight Perfect Couples, 2005/2014. All images courtesy of Petzel Gallery

To artist Allan McCollum, more is more. His latest exhibition, *The Shapes Project: Perfect Couples*, opened last week at Petzel Gallery in New York, bringing his affinity for quantity to the gallery with dozens of new colorful works. Fusing his interest in population growth with art making, McCollum devised *The Shapes Project* in 2005, which is a system for producing unique shapes. Utilizing this plan, the artist is able to create a two-dimensional representation for each person on the planet, without ever repeating the same shape twice. As with many of his past projects, which borrow from the language of modern production, he tricks our eye with absurdly similar, but unique hand-made objects. In a twist on the theme, *Perfect Couples* eschews individual portraits, pairing his shapes into "couples" that very simply represent the idea of human relationships.

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Installation view, *The Shapes Project: Perfect Couples*.

The Shapes Project is an exploration of art, identity, mathematics and actual population data, devised in a system that has been organized to produce over 31,000,000,000 different shapes. The shapes represent not only individuals in the current population, but also the projected population. It is designed to keep track of every individual iteration, ensuring that no two are alike. Each shape exists as an Adobe Illustrator vector graphic, enabling it to exist two-dimensionally, three-dimensionally, or simply digitally. They can be made in any medium, size, color or texture, by hand with pencil and paper and other art materials or handcraft tools, or using outputting devices like desktop printers, CNC machines, water jet cutters, or 3D printers, but each remains uniquely itself in form, regardless of material or size. Yet, despite the fact that the system for each shape has been completed and designed, the task of producing each piece would take longer than McCollum's lifetime. Instead, the project, if it is to be completed, must be passed on as a legacy with McCollum enlisting the help of others.

McCollum has intended for each shape to be used for various purposes: a piece of art or sculpture, a logo, an emblem, a gift, a piece in a game, an award. The pieces in *The Shapes Project* are meant to have limitless possibilities, while retaining the possibility of representing a specifically unique individual.

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Perfect Couples is an evolution of *The Shapes Project*. For *Perfect Couples*, McCollum has brought each shape to life in three-dimensional form, made using methods of quantity production and handmade craft, hand-cut from New England maple wood and painted by hand with acrylic paint. Unlike his past pieces, which have been either black, white or the natural color of the material being used, these appear in brilliant candy colors, painted with flat acrylic paint.

In this series at Petzel, McCollum has produced over 1800 shapes in varying sizes ranging from around three inches to nine inches. Also straying from past manifestations of the project is how these pieces are arranged. For *Perfect Couples*, McCollum has suggested an almost anthropomorphic assignment for each piece. Alone, the singular shapes are intended to represent one unique individual, but are mostly still identified with the object they embody. For *Perfect Couples*, McCollum has paired the shapes, arranging them in twos on a ten-by-ten inch gray panel. These panels are then arranged in several tight grids along the gallery walls.

On each panel, the paired shapes, which never share the same color, suggest a human relationship. Some face inward, with one curve following the opposite curve of its partner piece, while others seem to be facing away from each other. Others simply coexist, side-by-side, seemingly unaware that they share the same plane with another. By insinuating his shapes capable of interacting with each other, McCollum goes beyond the form, allowing for each to be read as a character with their own personality.

This suggested relationship is amplified by McCollum's arrangement of the panels themselves. The constructed grids placed around the gallery vary, some only two panels high, while others stretch to nine. With the chosen gray hue for the panels, the grids have the feeling of apartment buildings in an urban setting. Each colorful pairing enlivens the grid as if looking through an illuminated window with curtains drawn allowing a peek inside the relationship between the two.

As with the over 1800 unique shapes executed in *Perfect Couples*, McCollum can create a whopping 15-billion different pairings without repeating one. The exhibition is at once a display of interacting color and form, and a representation of the endless possibility of human relationships.

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