

## Pointlessness Is the Point: Tony Tasset and His Arrow at Kavi Gupta

Alison Reilly

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Art Slant



*I was on acid and I looked at the trees and I realized that they all came to points, and the little branches came to points, and the houses came to points. I thought, 'Oh! Everything has a point, and if it doesn't, then there's a point to it.' —Harry Nilsson*

At Kavi Gupta's Elizabeth Street location, Tony Tasset has wall-papered the large warehouse space with 66 arrow paintings. The paintings, which feature pairs of arrows (one pointing up, the other pointing down), create a multicolored mosaic of seemingly endless permutations, each complicating the expanded illusion of flatness and depth.

Accompanying the kaleidoscope of flat geometric shapes are two arrow sculptures—shiny, pristine objects, meant to be admired. One sculpture at the entrance to the gallery reaches just below the knee, offering an endearing preview of what's around the corner. The other, peeking out from a room beyond the main

gallery, stands five feet tall. Matching the paintings, the sculptures are similar in shape to one another; Tasset simply scaled them up and down and added different colors (lime green, pale pink, sky blue) to each plane.

But what is an arrow without its context? Is Tasset referring to the trending arrow from sites like Facebook and BuzzFeed? Are we meant to interpret the pairs as a critique of our attention to the fluctuations of the Dow Jones? Is he evoking direction in any sense? The exhibition offers up every possible interpretation of the arrow, but renders them meaningless in the process. Without a context, Tasset's arrow is self-referential, constantly pointing to the act of pointing.

The exhibition's cute title, *Me And My Arrow*, is an ode to pop singer-songwriter Harry Nilsson's 1971 song of the same name. Nilsson composed the tune as part of his musical fable, *The Point!*, which tells the strange story of a boy with a rounded head struggling to survive in a world of pointed heads. The use of Nilsson's song reveals Tasset's own interest in the ability of language play and paradox to construct meaning. For both artists, pointlessness is part of the point.

Like any good Pop artist, Tasset invokes the tropes of mass production while maintaining the idiosyncrasies of the handmade. His oil-on-aluminum paintings, for example, have a glossy sheen that reflects the viewer's image. Tasset's ordered brushstrokes are apparent in each geometric section of the painting with imperfections in the paint pointing back to the artist's hand.



The repetition of a banal subject calls to mind Andy Warhol's *Shadows* series, in which Warhol took a seemingly insignificant photograph of a shadow in his studio, enlarged it, and then silkscreened the image onto 102 canvases. However, the *Shadows* paintings are exhibited as a single work, while Tasset's arrow paintings are discrete objects, sold individually. Tasset is less interested in exploding one instant across an entire gallery than he is in creating an impressive set of modular paintings. Each of the 66 paintings has a unique color scheme, suggesting that they could continue to be produced ad infinitum.

Both the paintings and the sculptures are sleek, desirable objects. The smooth arrow sculptures suggest the same devotion to surface that one finds in the work of the Los Angeles Finish Fetish artists from 1960s and 70s. With this aesthetic in mind, Tasset's arrows coolly flirt with their status as corporate art intended to line the walls of executive boardrooms and the lobbies of Fortune-500 companies. They simultaneously demonstrate their position as unique objects and their conformity to the larger art market. Tasset playfully imitates the marketing practices of today by making a calculated effort to stay on trend while offering up an array of options for purchase. The arrow has a referent after all: it's pointing to the buyer.

Alison Reilly is a Chicago-based writer and curator. She is currently the Managing Editor of Chicago Gallery News.

(All images (unless otherwise noted): Tony Tasset, Installation view of *Me and My Arrow* at Kavi Gupta, Elizabeth Street, Chicago, 2016. Courtesy of Kavi Gupta and the artist. Photos: Tim Johnson)