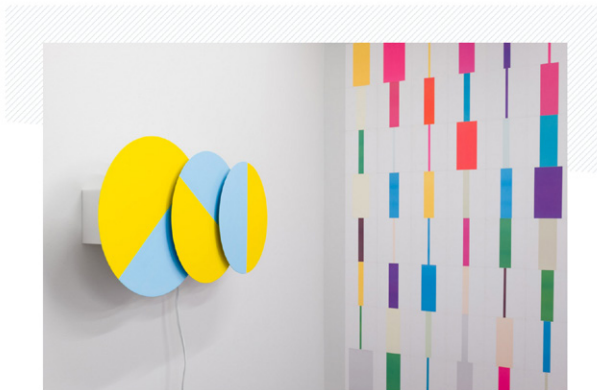


What Happens When An Iconic Print Designer Experiments In 3D

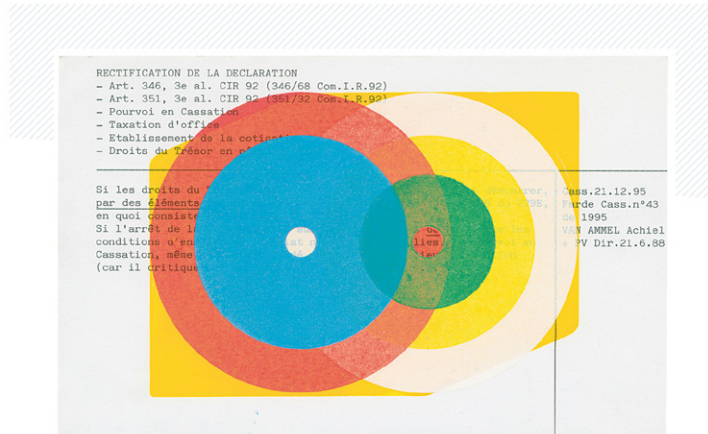
At a new show at P! gallery in New York, the Dutch modernist Karel Martens explores systems and abstractions across media.

"Ultimately the thing that carries through all of Karel's work is a deep and profound interest in abstraction, but abstraction that can actually still have meaning," says Prem Krishnamurthy, one of the founding partners of NYC-based design firm [Project Projects](#) and director of [P! gallery](#) in downtown Manhattan. "For Karel, abstraction, like in music, constructs some kind of new world."



Krishnamurthy is talking about [Karel Martens](#), the modernist Dutch designer best known for his typographic posters, book covers, and letterpress monoprints that layer colorful abstract shapes over found cards. In 1996, Martens published the celebrated book *Printed Matter*, which collected many of these works that he had been making since the 1960s. But Martens wasn't just a print designer, as a new exhibition on his work at P! shows—he also applied his penchant for abstractions and modernist systems across video and installation work as well.

For *Karel Martens: Recent Work*, which opened last weekend, Martens worked with Krishnamurthy for nearly a year to design original pieces for the show. One of the pieces, *Three Times (in Blue and Yellow)*, a kinetic clock, picks back up with the kinetic sculptures he started working on in 1968. The clock consists of three circles that, half sky blue and half bright yellow, rotate at three different speeds: one for the second hand, one for the minute, and another for the hour. As the circles spin, the colors converge and overlap, forming new shapes and showing the passage of time in more of an experiential way.



As Krishnamurthy points out, that durational quality is present in the other works in the show as well, even the static monoprints. Martens creates the prints by printing one shape, then letting it dry fully before printing another on top of it—meaning that they sometimes take days, weeks, or even months to complete. Over time, his monographs have also taken on new forms: his new series is made with bright fluorescent colors that form mostly circular shapes.

The most surprising piece in the show by the renowned print designer is an interactive video piece. In the piece, an icon system made out of Martens's signature abstract shapes are rendered on a screen and respond to the movement of the viewer. Elsewhere in the gallery, he created a more analog interactive piece: a wall covered in offset printed analog pixels creates a sort of DIY wallpaper that end-users can arrange themselves.

Even though they were created with different mediums, all of the works in the show are grounded in tradition. "He comes out of the Modernist movement," says Krishnamurthy. "So since the 1960s he's been thinking about systems of representations and systems of typography, but basically systems of making meaning. It works on different levels: in the monoprints he's creating an image for use, but for the other works he's creating the means by which other people might create an image."