

# KALEIDOSCOPE

## MEET Chicago-based artist Paul Cowan

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There's something Midwest-feeling about the work of Chicago-based artist Paul Cowan (b. 1985, Kansas City, MO), with its signage, its tucked-away industrialism, its thinking on and about margins. Cowan's recent exhibition at Clifton Benevento in New York took its title from Melville's *Marginalia*, a virtual archive of the marginal notes made by the American author in his own books. The exhibition, focussing on partitions, marginalia, and the periphery, included the painting *Untitled* (2011); for this piece, Cowan hired two sign painters, also based in Chicago, who hardly spoke Spanish to create a sparse painting in primary colors—a yellow squiggle, a blue curve and a red right-angle. The result looks like a Power Point animation, vibrant yet empty, with some of Laurence Weiner's diagram-like lines of motion. The emphasis on artistic process - the problem of translation between the artist and two Spanish-speaking outsourcees - leads to a deceptive clash between final object and procedure. In other works from 2012, the discreet minimal gesture of painting a gallery room references the fact that when one paints a room, the sense of smell declines as the color's lasting power takes hold; and a fishing lure on a canvas seems like a formal diagram of flat futility. Cowan's solo exhibition at the MCA Chicago opened last November and is on through early March.

- Pablo Larios