

Warren Isensee at Miles McEnery Gallery

23 January 2026 | By Riad Miah

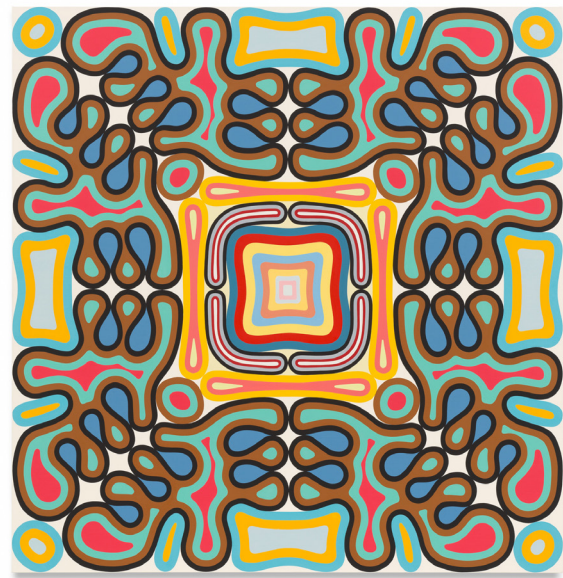
If I could imagine what a cross-section of an altered perception might look like, it might resemble and carry many attributes of Warren Isensee's recent paintings, now on view at Miles McEnery Gallery's West 22nd St in Chelsea. The exhibition is open until February 14th. The new body of work continues Isensee's focused exploration of geometry, perception, and painterly systems, while subtly incorporating moments of disruption that feel both timely and deliberate.

At first glance, the paintings seem to follow a highly controlled visual logic. Isensee's signature compositional structure is consistent: a shape is drawn, mirrored, inverted, and mirrored again, creating a recursive image that spreads outward like a fractal. This approach suggests a procedural precision similar to algorithmic thinking, yet the results avoid any sense of cold calculation. The geometry is hard-edged, with lines crisply enclosing shapes and color fields—yet it never feels rigid or dogmatic. Instead, the paintings have an amphiphilic quality, fluctuating between organic fluidity and structural clarity. They appear to be influenced equally by biological processes and digital imaging, as if the language of systems is being filtered through embodied perception.

This tension is particularly clear in large-scale works like *All Day Sucker*, where the composition suggests the visual texture of MRI scans or neurological imagery. The similarity is not literal but associative: the paintings feel like maps of cognition rather than literal representations. They evoke the feeling that one is looking not at an image of the brain, but through a perceptual system shaped by repetition, symmetry, and variation. In this way, Isensee's work aligns less with strict geometric abstraction and more with a broader exploration of how form shapes experience.



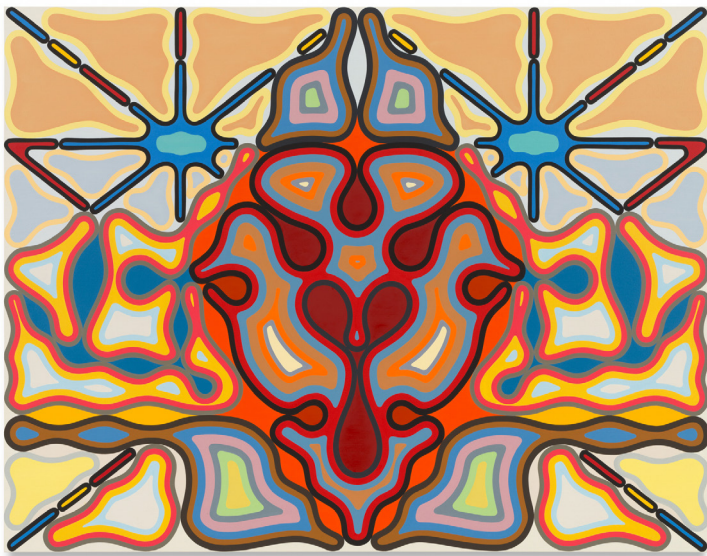
New York, NY: Miles McEnery Gallery, "Warren Isensee,"
8 January - 14 February 2026.



All Day Sucker, 2025, Oil on canvas, 60 x 60 inches.
All images courtesy the artist and Miles McEnery Gallery.

Color plays a crucial role in maintaining this perceptual energy. Isensee's palette sets his work apart from more worn-out types of geometric abstraction that depend on merely formal connections or historical references. Here, color functions in a tonal range that feels both tactile and deliberate, working in harmony with the compositional systems instead of sitting on top of them. Raspberry pinks, aqua blues, golden browns, and acidic greens pulse across the surfaces, energizing the paintings without overpowering their structure. These colors do not simply solve formal problems; they seem to reference internal states—affective, cognitive, even physiological. Their relationships suggest a logic rooted less in art-historical tradition than in lived, albeit elusive, experience.

Despite the clear process behind the compositions, the paintings resist flattening into diagrams. Their surfaces are pristine and flawless, giving an initial impression of mechanical precision. From a distance, the works can look almost machine-made, with symmetry and perfection suggesting an impeccable, automated process. However, closer inspection reveals subtle variations—tiny shifts in line, edge, and surface—that reaffirm the presence of the artist's hand. This tension between mechanical appearance and human execution becomes one of the exhibition's central tensions. The paintings exist in a liminal space between control and intuition, system and touch.



Head Charge, 2025, Oil on canvas, 45 x 60 inches.



New Normal, 2025, Oil on canvas, 45 x 60 inches.

This tension becomes even more complex due to several works that intentionally disrupt Isensee's established compositional logic. In paintings like *Head Charge* and *New Normal*, the artist moves away from his usual mirroring techniques. *New Normal*, in particular, shows a clear deviation: the bottom half of the composition neither mirrors the top nor shares its palette, breaking from a key structural principle in Isensee's work. The change is subtle—easy to overlook at first glance—but once noticed, it unsettles the overall coherence of the image.

This breach in symmetry feels more like a recalibration than an anomaly. The break in logic doesn't abandon the system but instead reveals its contingency. By disrupting the expected order, Isensee highlights the constructed nature of his visual language, reminding viewers that even the most stable systems can be revised. The title *New Normal* emphasizes this shift, implying a redefinition of balance rather than its collapse. What emerges is not chaos, but a recalibrated order—one that embraces asymmetry, intuition, and deviation.

Within the broader scope of contemporary abstraction, Isensee's work finds a compelling middle ground. It neither falls back into the self-referential purity of formalism nor fully adopts the expressive

excess often linked with gestural abstraction. Instead, the paintings introduce a model of abstraction that is both systematic and sensory, analytical and embodied. They invite viewers to engage not only with what they see but also with how seeing itself is structured—through repetition, expectation, and subtle disruption.

The exhibition ultimately explores perception under pressure: how visual systems endure, strain, and sometimes break. Isensee's recent paintings suggest that altered perception isn't a rupture but a state of heightened awareness, where structure becomes visible just as it starts to weaken. In this way, the work feels especially relevant, reflecting a modern condition where established patterns—visual, cognitive, social—are constantly tested and reshaped.



Crepuscule Plot, 2025, Oil on linen, 75 x 100 inches.