

Scott, Andrea K.  
“Imaging Systems”  
The New Yorker.  
May 20th, 2013

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AUGUSTINE

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK  
IMAGING SYSTEMS

Remember beauty? For a refresher course, visit Philip Taaffe's new show—a dozen kaleidoscopic big paintings and a wall of sixteen black prints—his first at the Luhring Augustine gallery, to which he decamped from the international supermarket chain that is Gagosian. Taaffe, fifty-eight, has spent years honing his unique approach, applying sourced imagery to canvas with stencils, rollers, and stamps. The results are pictorial confluences of organism and ornament that suggest the botanical studies of Karl Blossfeldt tiled at the Alhambra or Ernst Haeckel's "Art Forms in Nature" inlaid at the Taj Mahal. Not every new canvas here thrills, but taking in the wheeling symmetries of "Illuminated Constellation" feels like chanting ecstatically with your eyeballs. Taaffe's paintings are analogue all the way, but his fascination with layers, his nonhierarchical spirit—he's as influenced by the biomorphic patterns of sea kelp as he is by Mark Rothko's Surrealism—and his restless circulation of images should make him a hero to the digitally minded young artists of the twenty-first century.

—Andrea K. Scott