

Cheryl Goldsleger's studio is located above an office supply company in downtown Athens, Georgia, a block from the University of Georgia art department and the arches of the Old Campus. The large room is filled with tools she now employs for encaustic on canvas paintings that have evolved from graphite on paper drawings. There are strings pinned to the sheetrock walls, obviously used for a perspective system. There are the pigments used in the work, mostly shades of black, white, and gray, and there is an apparatus for melting wax. Canvases have been scored to create different depths of lines.

**MY WORK ISN'T**

**AS**

**PREDETERMINED**

**AS YOU MIGHT**

**THINK.**

# PASSING THROUGH SPACE

DIANE MEAD

Diane Mead: Where does your imagery come from? Has it moved forward consistently?

Cheryl Goldsleger: No, it hasn't. When I was in graduate school from 1973 to 1975, I was painting interiors, but not anything like these images. They were Diebenkorn's work from the '50s or impressionist interiors with figures in chairs, and using a kind of impressionist palette. I continued in that vein until 1977, when I moved here. Before that I was teaching at Western Carolina University.

When I moved here, I took some time to analyze what I was doing and felt it was good student work, but it really wasn't mine. I felt that I could go to any large art department around the country and find at least one person who painted like that. It was decent, but it wasn't exceptional or individual. I decided that I wanted to pursue something else, but I didn't know what that was. Since I was moving to a new place where no one knew me, I felt it was a good opportunity to just work and experiment. Since drawing has always been important to me, my plan was to draw anything that came into my head. I wouldn't decide that something was not a good idea until I saw it. I did that for a year, and the work that came out was wide-ranging. Toward the end of that period, the ideas that led to my current work began to develop.

In my current work, I really wind up doing two whole paintings in one piece. This painting that you're looking at now is not completed in terms of the first phase. (*She indicates a painting that, so far, is from a perspective looking down on curved walls.*) The initial stage of the paintings is developed up to this level before I begin to deal with the other view and the perspective system. At this point, I try to figure out how much of the composition I want to cover and what effect it will have on the image as a whole. And that is really an intuitive decision.

I try to locate a line and decide on a focal point, not necessarily at the center, but a vertical point from which the entire composition will radiate. That will determine what angle the two-point perspective takes—it could be more severely turned, or more frontal. A horizontal line is determined, and then a bisecting perpendicular line, and then two diagonal lines. Once these lines are established, they become the basis before I get to the two-point perspective. The strings on the studio wall are the vanishing points for the horizontals, and the point below the work becomes a location point for the verticals. So wherever I put this string, and wherever the string hits the horizontal line, I make a mark, and that's where a wall will be in the two-point perspective image. The two diagonal lines will tell me the height of a wall, a chair, etc. Similar to the angle of view, I can choose how tall to make any of the walls. It all depends on another vanishing point. Though it looks logical, I can change the entire look of the painting by changing these various points. I don't just take the first option. Often it will not look the way I want it to and I will change a wall or a diagonal—then I readjust the entire composition. It isn't as predetermined as you might think.

Mead: I've always thought of your work as having a strong intuitive, innate feel, although I've always thought of it as being laid out on a flat surface, and I've always thought of metal rulers.

Goldsleger: Well, I have several metal rulers, and when I do the initial grid on the last layer of the painting, I lay the canvas out flat on a table and use metal rulers to draw my grids out. After that point it is easier for me to work vertically. Once the grid is incised, I spread a buttery oil/wax mixture over the entire surface that stays wet for a very long time. As in this

particular painting, I use a mixture of half oil and half wax, and scrape all of that on; then I scrape white on top of that and at that point I've yet to make an image.

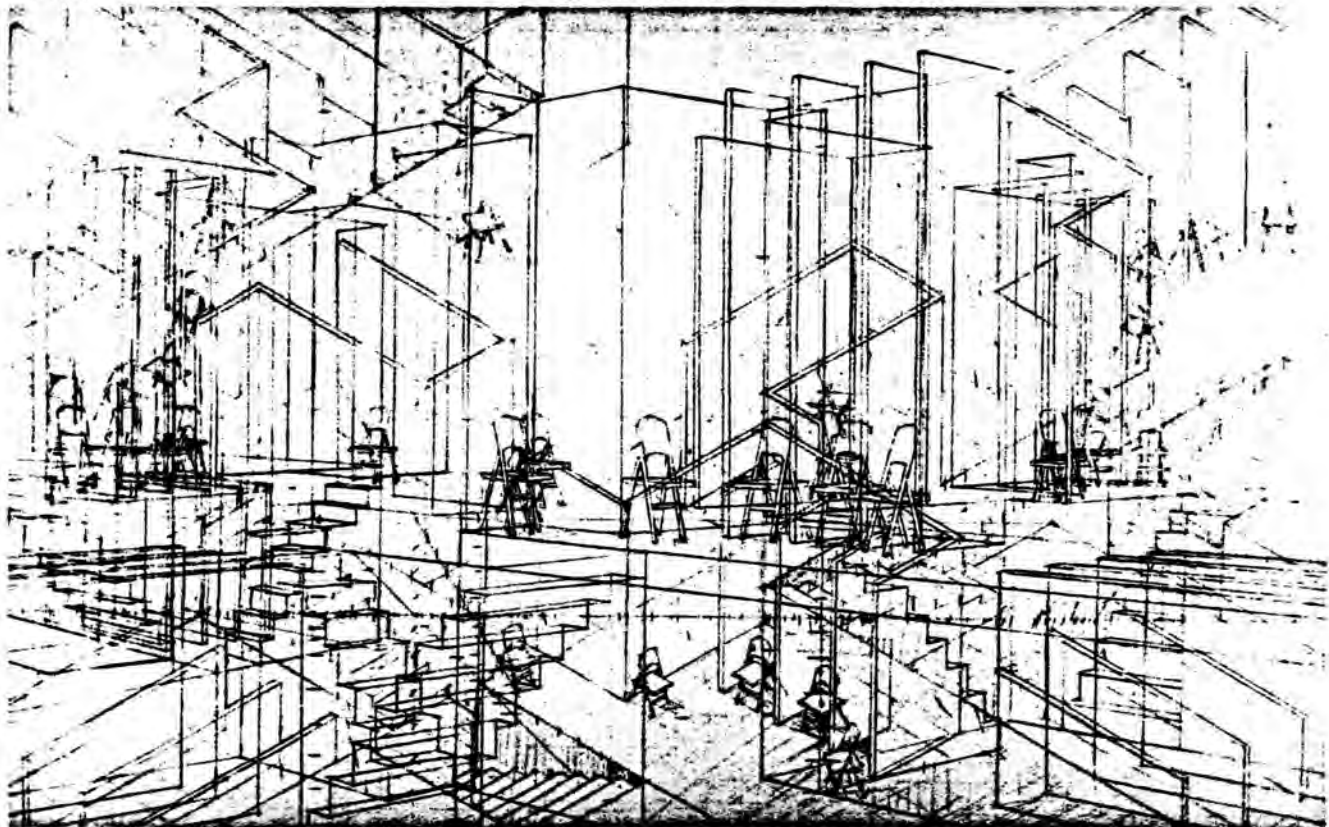
At that stage I start to make the composition, and the spaces that are constructed are based on intuitive decisions. I start drawing through the layers of paint and wax, adding white or scraping it away to get to the darker layers and establish the value range.

**Mead:** Did you come about this because you wanted some kind of duplicate of the graphite on paper method?

sources they would refer to a whole other realm. So I like the lack of color. Even though they do deal with representational imagery, they have nothing to do with reality.

**Mead:** I would think that the encaustic would be more satisfying for you because it is tactile. You can touch these surfaces and see the levels. I would think that would be more satisfying than black and white painting.

**Goldsleger:** Yet with the black and white painting it was much the same process. It was dark ground with white over and no color in



Cheryl Goldsleger, *Stations: Sectioning*, graphite, 26" x 42", 1988. (photo courtesy of the artist.)

**Goldsleger:** I think that I've always felt very comfortable with drawing. For four years I worked only in drawing. They were finished pieces; and, at that time, the idea of works on paper came into its own. In 1982-83 I did some very dark drawings that led me back to painting. If I hadn't done those dark drawings I don't necessarily think I would have gone back to painting. I thought that the drawings were statements in themselves. They were not sketches for anything, they were finished works. When I started back to paint for the first year and a half to two years, the paintings were black and white.

**Mead:** Did you find the black and white paintings as satisfying as the drawings?

**Goldsleger:** Yes. I liked the intellectual aspect of not using color. And even these color paintings are monochrome. I don't want them to be identified with realism. They aren't real spaces. If they were polychrome and had light

between, so again it was to build up the white or scrape down the white. At the time I found some books on a show in Houston on the history of grisaille painting, and that encouraged me to think that there was some tradition of not dealing with color.

**Mead:** You've been very successful in getting gallery representation. Who is representing you now?

**Goldsleger:** Bertha Urdang Gallery in New York, Heath in Atlanta, Arden Gallery in Boston, Ann Jaffe in Miami, Jessica Berwind in Philadelphia, and Brenda Kroos in Cleveland. All of these people have been supportive and it has been good, and educational. When you live in a small town like Athens—even though I'm originally from Philadelphia—it's hard to realize what goes on in art. David Heath and Bertha have been so completely supportive of my work for the last nine years now—that's hard to find. I've been with Arden for three

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years. Ann Jaffe, Jessica Berwind, and Brenda Kroos happened more recently. There are galleries that won't deal with you if you're not local or well recognized; that's especially true for New York. It has been a good situation for me. Finding the right gallery isn't the easiest process in the world.

**Mead:** How did you find Urdang?

**Goldsleger:** Just the way you hear—a friend of mine had lived in New York, and went away for a month or two and said that we could stay at her place. This was a way to stay in New York for an extended period of time and not feel as though we were imposing or paying astronomical hotel bills. We went up there for a few weeks in September 1980, and galleries were just opening. I wanted to take my work around. Some galleries have a day when you go and stand in line and they look at your work, and others tell you to just leave your slides in a stamped self-addressed envelope. Before then, it never occurred to me that a gallery would show just a certain style of work, so I never concluded, "Of course they wouldn't be interested in my work." It was eye-opening that galleries in fact do perceive things in this way, rather than accepting work that they think is good regardless of stylistic bent.

Not all galleries are like that, of course. But, for instance, some galleries specialize in landscape work—or you can think of galleries that have a figurative bent. So I took my work around and talked to a couple of dealers and left slides at a couple of places. Bertha had a space on 57th Street in one of those huge buildings that had lots of galleries back then, and I went in there and saw a show that I just loved. It was a drawing show by an artist named Kupferman. He does incredibly intense drawings—labored, non-objective drawings. I loved the show. And so I asked Bertha, "Would you look at my work?" She was having an opening that night, and she said, "Well I will, tomorrow at eleven." She liked the slides that she saw and told me to send two drawings, unframed. I felt uncomfortable about that, because I felt that framed they would have less of a tendency to be tucked away in a drawer. But she said she would frame them there. In the case of Heath, I had sent a catalogue from a show I was having at a university. Later, at the gallery, Ann Brown told us that David liked the work, so we scheduled an appointment to bring in some pieces for him to see.

**Mead:** It seems as though through Bertha's exhibits your work gets reviewed regularly.

**Goldsleger:** Not every show has been reviewed, but I've been lucky with some of the shows. Bertha has been supportive, and as my work has changed, she has been critical. I did some very dark drawings at one point in time. Bertha liked them at first, and then she changed her mind. Of course, it was her right, and it's hard to know if you should let that affect you. I asked her to show them to a museum director who was coming to look at work, someone whose opinion I respected, as did Bertha. He liked them and bought one for the museum. She called me up and said that she was wrong

about them. She has yet to really like the drawings. But it has been a good experience to work with Bertha; good things have happened in terms of reviews, museums, and such.

**Mead:** Donald Kuspit said that your work seemed out of place in the current art world. I think he meant that you are willing to oppose trends because you aren't interested in them.

**Goldsleger:** Yes. I liked what he wrote. The connection he drew to minimalism was very much on target, although I am not interested in pursuing a strict minimalist path. Toward the end of the review he says that my work is a modernist attempt at space making that goes against all the rational systems developed to illustrate space in the past. And this is an idea I am working with because I really feel that every time period has a very particular attitude or approach to space and architecture, and I am trying to get at a late 20th century feeling for space. For instance, compare the architecture of antiquity to that of the middle ages to our present architecture in the United States. They are extremely different. Our current attitude about space is very tied into our concept of time and therefore we understand space differently from previous generations.

**Mead:** I had a problem in that he mentioned Kafka.

**Goldsleger:** Carla Shultz-Hoffmann, who also wrote about my work, mentioned Kafka, too. I think the potential to read that into the work is there, but there also has to be something in the viewer to want to see that. I will say that I don't consciously think of my work in those terms; but I can see that on another level those kind of feelings would surface in my work.

**Mead:** Tell me about your "Southern Expressions" exhibition at the High Museum.

**Goldsleger:** It was sponsored by Kidder Peabody; they decided to sponsor four artists from Georgia. The first show Peter Morrin put together had three artists in it, and it turned out that I was the fourth. It was a very good experience for me, and a very wonderful thing that the High Museum and Kidder Peabody are continuing to do for artists. One of the nicest things was to sit down and talk to Peter Morrin. That interview was printed in the exhibition folder. He asked some interesting questions; he was one of these people who thought of the drawings as corporate spaces—places people would feel oppressed in and want to leave immediately. He felt that the chairs were all in disarray because there had just been a meeting. I don't see the spaces that way.

I think of it as no specific space, except as a space that I would pass through. I try not to envision the activity. I sometimes think of the logic. Sometimes I think that the logic is not right, or at least, not logical—the way it goes from being interior to exterior and chairs are outside of interior spaces and in illogical places, which makes the whole more of an interior. I like that feeling. The exteriors and interiors have common ground. When I'm doing

sketches, I don't think of progression or physical movement through the space, although I do think of how the viewer has to visually move through the space.

**Mead:** Is time an element?

**Goldsleger:** It wasn't important early on in the work, but as the image has gotten more complex, it is. Someone once asked me if I believed that these drawings had anything to do with the fourth dimension. Artists in the teens and twenties were trying to reference time, which influenced the Futurists and Picasso and Cubism. I thought about the fourth dimension

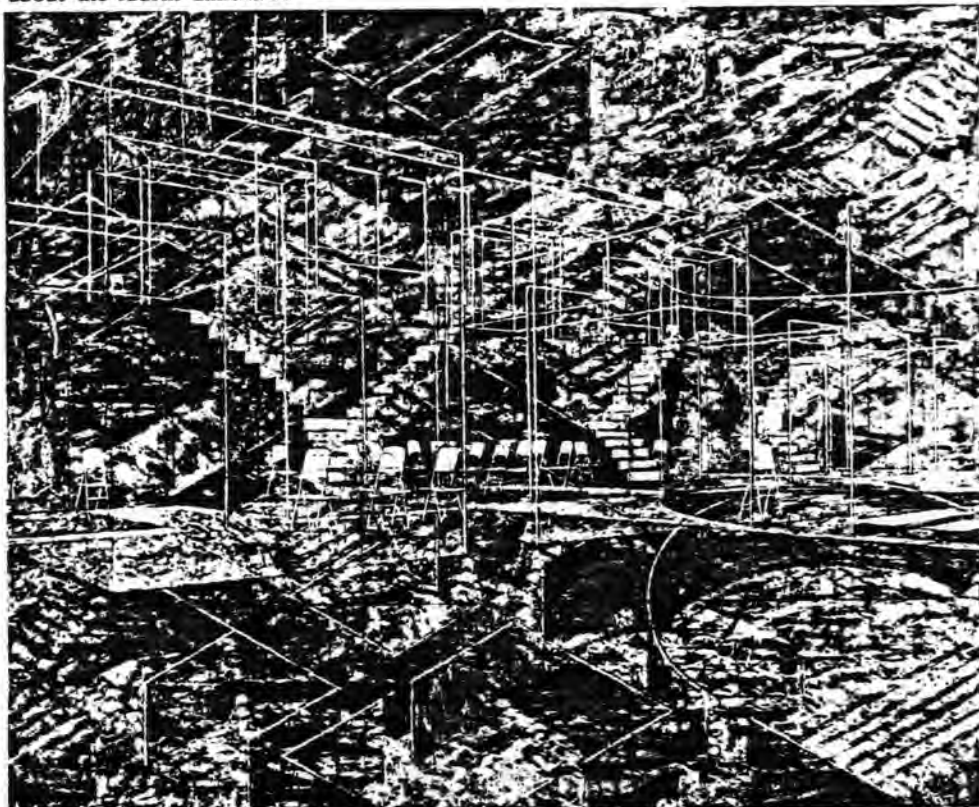
relative to the work, and I understood the comment. I liked the relationship. Some of the newest pieces relate to Cubist space, I think. I don't think I work like a Cubist; the Cubists come to their image from intuitive approaches; and I come to this image through systematic methods. Vanishing points and strings on the wall—but the overall feeling of the work is of a very fractured space. The logic of it is obvious—obvious to me, and so again there is a gap between what people see and what I see in the work.

**Mead:** This seems like it's positive.

**Goldsleger:** Yes, I like an open interpretation. It seems as though I should have a concrete answer when people ask me how I view the spaces—I guess in part I see the formal elements rather than subject matter. I think of what the space will look like, but I also think of more pragmatic things, such as how the composition is divided, and what happens if there is a curve here and what I need to do to balance the curve. I think I am mostly a formalist. Maybe that's why I have to leave the content so open-ended. I try to leave it open-ended, but then they say I'm Kafka-esque.

*Diane Mead is an arts writer in Macon, Georgia.*

## OUR CURRENT ATTITUDE ABOUT SPACE IS VERY TIED INTO OUR CONCEPT OF TIME



Cheryl Goldsleger, *Scale: Structuring*, oil, wax, pigment on linen, 48" x 58", 1988 (photo courtesy of the artist).

## AND THEREFORE WE UNDERSTAND SPACE DIFFERENTLY FROM PREVIOUS GENERATIONS.