

Art in America

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Review of Exhibitions

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Cheryl Goldsleger at Bertha Urdang

The spatial intricacies of Cheryl Goldsleger's architectural paintings and drawings seem out of place in the current art world, for they are neither photographically based manipulations nor expressionistically urgent and agitated images. Meticulously executed, subtly transparent structures, laid out on an a priori grid, Goldsleger's works create a grandly complicated universal order—similar in spirit to the rationalist spatial order Renaissance perspective created, but more manneristically intricate.

In *Stations* and *Interior* the details of chairs and steps create a sense of intimacy—arouse almost inordinate curiosity as to the persons who would use these objects, inhabit the deserted yet object-crowded space. But the space itself, in surrounding these objects, spreads in all directions away from them. They hardly anchor it, and in the space's vastness these ordinary, architecture-oriented and echoing objects seem talismanic. The rationalism of the spatial construction tells us that we should not read the objects in any Kafkaesque way, but Kafka's world was also rigorously rational—a bureaucratic construction, full of mazes that promised a way out but boxed one in instead. A similar paranoia confronts us in Goldsleger's works, which are given, perhaps inadvertently, a subliminal narrative dimension by the

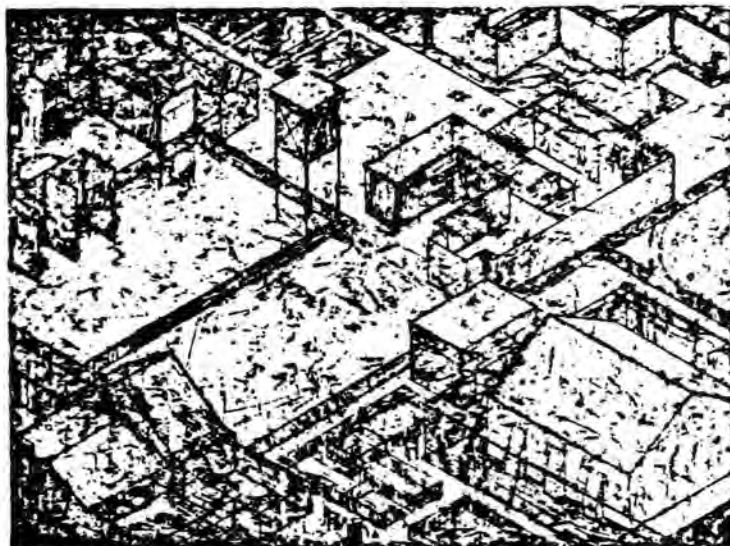
presence of the objects.

In any case, the scenic elements of the pictures disguise their Minimalist basis, that is, their use of elementary spatial gestalts to generate a supposedly universal visual language—the climax of this century's rationalist non-objective art. Minimalism also intended to engage, perhaps ironically, the viewer in his or her movement through space—to force attention toward bodiliness and other fundamentals of being. Goldsleger's everyday objects seem tropes for such fundamentalist engagement; she acknowledges that she obliquely refers to "human presence and absence," and expects the viewer to "visually walk around" her architecture to "comprehend" it totally.

Minimalism is, I think, an art of bureaucratic rationalization of space—"organizational" art to match organizational man. Goldsleger has given Minimalism a new, imagistic twist, replacing its manufactured look with a personal, highly crafted touch.

Goldsleger offers us a very elegant art at a time of renewed interest in a variety of primitivisms, reminding us that "expressivity" can be brought into being as much through rationalistic means as through impulsive painterliness. Both approaches are equally fictional, self-aware, and self-questioning these days. It may be that we finally prefer painterly to perspectival complication because we feel the latter is no longer pregnant with symbolic meaning. Is Goldsleger saying that we should resist rationalization, in a last modernist fling at space-making that unconsciously seeks to undo all the controls by which the space is made rational in the first place? It is this ambivalence that I think I detect in Goldsleger that converts her constructions into serious images, and makes them emotionally engaging.

—Donald B. Kuspit



Cheryl Goldsleger: *Boundaries*, 1984, oil, wax and graphite on linen, 38 by 50 inches; at Bertha Urdang.