

REVIEWS

CHERYL GOLDSLEGER

BERTHA URDANG GALLERY

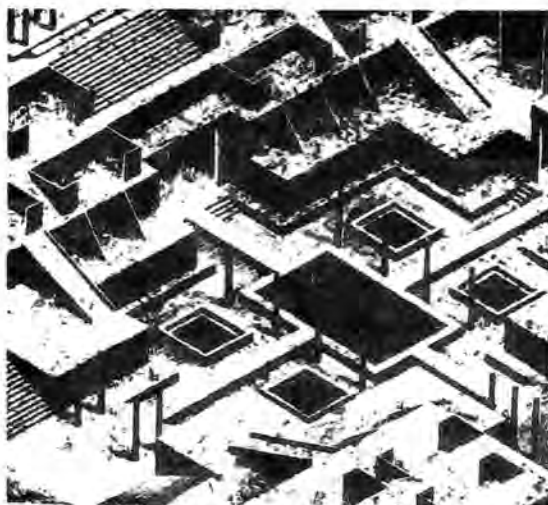
That Cheryl Goldsleger's deserted architecture is a kind of grand world theater is certainly suggested by the amphitheater in *Vortex*, 1993, and by its equally grandiose, engulfing form in the other charcoal drawings presented in this show. In a world theater, the actors are all tokens of fate, just as the scenery is cosmic and stark, seemingly inevitable. Though full of the signs of human presence—chairs scattered as though people had just got up and left the scene—the actors are never present, rather, the architecture itself becomes the actor. This architecture is dramatic in itself, not only because of its bizarre structure—an eccentric composite of columns without capitals, walls that do not form rooms but are aligned with each other like monumental Minimalist sculptures, opaque exits and entrances—but also because of Goldsleger's brilliant chiaroscuro, sometimes stark, sometimes more graded, always exquisitely played. Because of this tonal morbidity, and because of what can only be called the violence of absence in her images, their monumentality seems aborted, the architecture never complete.

Virtually every work—and these are the largest, most overwhelming works Goldsleger has made—images the vortex, which is sometimes elliptical but more often rectilinear in character. Even though there is clearly a center to the vortex, however displaced, there is also the sense that it is a false center—that we are in an infinitely extending labyrinth. Indeed, all the spaces are essentially the same, whatever their architectural differentiation: we are in a grid, skewed but still intact, feeling at once claustrophobic and agoraphobic—Goldsleger's ultimate expressive obsessions.

Can these startling, irrational images of geometrically rational architecture or quasi-Minimalist elements be taken as allegories of the artist's solitude and melancholy, and more broadly, female solitude and melancholy? They are not only about the aloneness necessary to the creative act, but about the loneliness—the longing for the presence of the other—implicit in it. The feeling of absence is ultimately a mourning for the loss of the object, which is what the artistic act tries to restore, albeit never successfully. At bottom, art remains mourning.

These works are about woman's sense of solitude—of self-loss, of the absence of self—even as she is full of new relational, worldly possibilities. Indeed, Goldsleger pictures a whole cosmos in which she has no place, except that she imagined it. She has imaged empty interior space, no doubt universal but woman's in particular at this time of her transition to universality, that is, at the time when she seems about to become the new "essence" of being. But that will mean she will be an ideal she herself cannot live up to, which is another reason Goldsleger's images are so full of far from subliminal despair.

—Donald Kuspit



Cheryl Goldsleger, *Stratification*, 1993, charcoal on paper, 60 x 65". (detail)