



CHERYL GOLDSLEGER

Cheryl Goldsleger's drawings and paintings of buildings, courtyards, and corridors laid out on grids initially seem matter-of-factly architectural. Her use of isometric perspective, which is based on a 30° angle, normally permits architects to render structures and their relationships clearly and three-dimensionally. However, it soon becomes apparent that for Goldsleger the tilted vantage point allows for a complex and ambiguous interaction of flat surfaces and receding spaces. This dichotomy is particularly emphasized in the paintings which are rich with surface incident: incised networks of overlapping and obscured lines, drifting areas of mottled color, and rough layerings of built-up and scraped pigment. Furthermore, since Goldsleger's compositions are not hierarchical, the need to scan the total image reiterates their surfaceness in contrast to the perspective system. The result is a spatial quality that is almost oriental, like what might be found in a Chinese scroll painting. But these works, based on a graphic method to convey struc-

tural information which has been subverted to explore formal properties of line, surface and space, have another, entirely different dimension as well.

Goldsleger's pictures evoke diverse but curiously similar associations: industrial parks, concentration camps, corporate offices after the work force has gone home. The drawings delineate interior spaces; the paintings are primarily concerned with exterior views. Populated only by empty chairs (fewer in number in the paintings) which serve to accentuate the absence of humanity but acknowledge past or future occupancy, the barren spaces reverberate with silence. These architectural labyrinths speak of spiritual or physical entrapment, and in their way are reminiscent of Piranesi's *Carceri*, but instead of melancholically sublime structures there is only the desolation of contemporary fabrication. The irrationality of these apparently ordinary spaces with their implied presences recalls nothing so much as the disturbing vision of Franz Kafka.

Since Goldsleger appears to be

Cheryl Goldsleger, *Boundaries*, 1984.
Oil, wax, and graphite on linen, 18 x 50".
Courtesy Bertha Urdang Gallery.

dealing with a pervasive aspect of modern experience, other 20th-century artists who have explored similar territory come to mind, although her images look nothing like theirs. In fact, the artists one thinks of used the human figure in one form or another. It would not be stretching comparison to mention de Chirico's architectural dreamscapes or even the work of the American painter George Tooker, with his repetitive figures in dehumanized environments, but it is Alberto Giacometti whom in spirit Goldsleger most resembles. His sense of overwhelming isolation and the distances between people have been rediscovered in her work. It is a credit to Goldsleger's powers of metaphor that her chairs set in architectural spaces have something of the emotional resonance carried by Giacometti's solitary figures. Stylistically, her use of overlapping lines, many partially eradicated or obscured, recall the gestural markings in Giacometti's paintings and his feeling for successive moments in time.

On a more obvious level, the

drawings and paintings suggest architectural plans of earlier civilizations. For example, the reconstruction drawings of the palace at Knossos in Crete or the schematic plan for a 9th-century monastery at St. Gall, Switzerland display the meandering, maze-like complexity of Goldsleger's images. As an academically trained artist, Goldsleger is familiar with the basic survey texts and freely acknowledges her interest in architectural history. She counts among her influences the architecture of the ancient, medieval, and pre-Columbian periods as well as the modern. The indifferent, diagrammatic renderings in books have been structurally and subjectively transformed into spatial containers of meaning.

The paintings are done in wax, oil paint, and either graphite or powdered pigment. First, a thin layer of hot wax is applied to linen. In the black and white paintings, graphite is mixed with the melted wax; in paintings containing color, powdered pigment is used. When the wax cools and hardens, the linear elements are incised into the surface. Then, in those paintings with color, more color is applied with oil paint in a cold wax medium. Lastly, a layer of white oil paint mixed in a cold wax medium is applied to all the paintings, resulting in a surface that stays wet for weeks. This allows Goldsleger to work and rework the paintings, scraping, repainting, and incising on them to achieve a fusion of tactile and linear qualities, clarity and ambiguity.

The preference for hard-edged geometry, grids, and monochromism in the '60s and '70s provided the backdrop for Goldsleger's education as an artist. These influences and a somewhat wistful romanticism, which would not have been out of place several generations ago, combine in the production of her personal imagery. Too often, what passes for expressiveness these days is no more than raw material untempered by the niceties of aesthetic and psychological insight. Then again, a lot of work tries to get by on shallow facility. It is heartening to see art which is technically accomplished, formally sophisticated, and emotionally, if discreetly, compelling. (Bertha Urdang, *October* 2-27)

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