

# Goldsleger exhibit a study of cultural fragments

By Catherine Fox

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Cheryl Goldsleger's handsome exhibition at the High Museum of Art may be titled "Architectural Drawings and Paintings," but it is as much about architecture as Van Gogh's "Starry Night" is about astronomy.

The complex spaces and structures she creates, inhabited only by randomly placed chairs, project all sorts of social and cultural ideas. In terms of imagery, for example, the relationships of the chairs to each other and the interior spaces evoke the same sort of loneliness as the isolated buildings in Edward Hopper's paintings. Meaning is also embedded in form: The decentered compositions, with their multiple and overlapping viewpoints, suggest both the density and fragmentation of modern culture.

Ms. Goldsleger's work is quite different from that of the three artists who preceded her as featured regional talent in the museum's "Southern Expressions" series. Curator Peter Morrin selected Atlantans Don Cooper, Tom Ferguson and Amy Landesberg for the series' debut last Spring, grouping these colorists together as artists whose imagery bears a relationship to the South.

This Athens-based artist emphasizes structure rather than color, and her work is resolutely universal. "Southern" is applicable neither to the mathematical precision and logic of the perspectival systems that order her compositions nor to the generic structures she creates.

Until 1981, Ms. Goldsleger, now 34, made only graphite drawings. Even when she began painting, she limited her palette to black and white. Only this year has she introduced color into her paintings, and they are muted, muddied greens and blue-grays.

"Levels of an Exterior Space (1984)," a black and white painting, is representative of her approach. She builds forms in space using isometric perspective, a system in which the horizontal edges of the structures are drawn at a 30-degree angle. This gives the viewer the impression that he is looking down on the scene from an oblique angle and enables him not only to survey a broad field of objects without any overlap, but also to see into all the buildings.

This perspective also discourages a central focal point. There is no single way into the picture and no way to take it in at once. The eye meanders through a terraced man-made landscape of buildings, courtyards, colonades and steps dotted with an occasional chair. Some of the structures have pitched roofs, others are just enclosures.

As the eye moves into space,

through buildings and up stairs, it is constantly called back to the painting's surface. Goldsleger achieves this tension in several ways. One is the surface material itself, a sensuously thick combination of oil and wax. Then there is the painted grid, intersected by the diagonal lines that define the objects, that overlays the whole scene like a scrim. Some of the lines are incised into the thick encaustic rather than drawn, and some are obscured by paint — gestures that insist upon the reality of the surface as opposed to the illusory depth of the scene.

Ms. Goldsleger has recently added new twists to the format typified by "Levels." The drawing "Projection: Expansion" reveals the addition of two-point perspective. Here, the two systems are separate, with isometric perspective used in the top portion and two-point on the bottom. The exhibition shows how she has progressed, first letting them overlap and, finally, superimposing one system on the other.

Likewise, the scribbly lines and marks belonging to neither system make first a shy appearance and then come on quite boldly. Further muddying the water is the introduc-

tion of color in the most recent paintings. The intermingling of green or blue-gray and white produces a marbelized effect. The plane of the painted surface seems to simultaneously lie on top of and behind the constructed space. To add to the confusion, the artist frequently obliterates segments of lines by painting over them.

The architecture changes, too: It becomes more partition than enclosure, obliterating the boundary between inside and outside. The recent paintings rev up the tension between many other polar opposites — order/disorder, surface/depth, clarity/obscurity, to name a few. It seems as if Ms. Goldsleger is bent on destroying the elaborate system she has painstakingly set up.

These formal changes and complications intensify the paintings' potential as cultural metaphors. Ms. Goldsleger sees each painting as a "fragment of a vast urban/civilized plateau." The layering accentuates the multiplicity and ensuing confusion of modern life, which threatens the order associated with civilization. The commingling of perspectival systems is particularly apt, considering that one of the purpose of

perspective is to fix the relationships of objects to the world.

The superimpositions also transform the works into archeological sections, with layers of culture imprinted one upon the other, in a way curiously akin to Peter Eisenman's recent architecture.

This exhibition is not the only recognition Ms. Goldsleger has received of late. Her recent New York exhibition was reviewed in major art periodicals. She was awarded a SECCA/RJR Fellowship for 1986, and is one of two Georgians selected for inclusion in the New Orleans Triennial, considered the most prestigious regional show.

Ms. Goldsleger's resonant vision and the intensity with which she develops it merits the attention she has received. ■

■ Cheryl Goldsleger: Architectural Drawings and Paintings. High Museum of Art, 1280 Peachtree St. N.E. Through February 9, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday; until 9 p.m. Wednesday; noon-5 p.m. Sunday. Admission: \$2, \$1 students and senior citizens; free to children under 12 and Thursday, 1-5 p.m. 892-4444.