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Gallery Chronicle

Urban plazas, public and private buildings, and other architectural structures underlie the current work of Cheryl Goldsleger, shown at Rosenberg + Kaufman Fine Art. For some years, Goldsleger (who is a generation or so younger than Mitchell) has been taking as her point of departure the work of women architects, using their plans (and sometimes elevations) as starting points for nuanced, richly worked improvisations executed with excruciatingly delicate lines and dense layers in encaustic and resin. Some paintings from early in the series, which use elevations and isometric views of proposed buildings, can verge on the literal; in the best of Goldsleger's work, the specific source is less than evident, even though it's clear that the unpredictable geometry, the repeated, sometimes offset grids, and the complex orchestration of marks that animate the pictures have deep resonance with the built environment. It's equally clear, especially if you are familiar with architectural plans, that there is nothing straightforward about the way Goldsleger uses her generating images. For all her fidelity to the lucid geometry of traditional building plans, she treats her motifs simply as "subjects" to be transformed by will and invention. A recent series of drawings on Mylar, for example, submerges once-legible plans under pools and blots of varying densities; the results read as lush abstractions, palimpsest walls, or aerial views of ancient ruins—among other things—without any loss of structural rigor.

Goldsleger's most recent works at Rosenberg + Kaufman were among her strongest to date. In her new paintings, she seems to take more liberties with her generating images, building up different levels in one picture and opening up carefully shaped slots in another, so that the structure of her luscious planes of encaustic seems to fulfill (in non-literal ways) the implications of the plan that is her starting point. But to make the dialogue between real and conceptualized construction even more provocative, the architectural basis of these works is more obscured and abstracted than usual. Goldsleger's combination of sensuous encaustic and austere color—a severely restricted palette of earth tones and ochres, from cream to deep brown, with lines rendered in near-black—creates an enlivening contradiction. A number of mysterious "sculptures" completed the exhibition: blocks of translucent golden resin with three-dimensional drawings of architectural elements—the ribs of a Renaissance groin vault or a staircase moving upward in a squared-off spiral—within them; the images change according to the angle at which they are viewed. Apparently made with the last word in advanced computer technology developed for making architectural models, the blocks of resin are what you imagine Brunelleschi or Palladio would have done to entertain themselves, had they had the equipment. Part of the appeal, admittedly, is sheer bafflement at how the image was created, rather like the ship-in-a-bottle phenomenon, but more arcane. Yet Goldsleger's cubes are not mere curios; I suspect that they would continue to reward attention, for their sheer beauty, as much as for their ability to astonish.