

Review

THE CRITICAL STATE OF VISUAL ART IN NEW YORK

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Cheryl Goldsleger

New Work

Rosenberg + Kaufman Fine Art
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TO KNOW THE WORLD, WE duplicate the objects of the world, make miniatures of every item in the inventory of our known reality and deposit them within the mind. The image is an homunculus. Our overviews of our environments, our knowledge of our places in reality and the realities in which we hold a place, condense into a vast and inner panorama, an expansion of the mind to hold a world, a dilation of awareness to contain a universe.

Awareness is a dislocation, a detaching of the world from the world, a seeding of the inner life with living images of the world - for as the mind is a living presence, as it renews itself and changes in its views and dispositions, its attitudes and angles of approach to the objects of its consideration, it grants a living aspect to its images. The images of knowledge are alive within the mind, and among those living images are the images of ourselves. As *creatures self-aware*, we are among the occupants of our own minds. We reside within the schematicized vistas we create of the world we know, and there we are alert and we consider the world, creating further images within which we again reside, only to create further images. Consciousness is a funneling in, an expansion of enormous spaciousness holding worlds within worlds, plunging

to a center that lies at inconceivable depths. Conception is, itself and at its core, inconceivable.

It is beyond conception at its core, but knowledge is as extensive as the mind's eye can see, for knowing is visual. Examine the dictionary - the preponderance of nouns, the majority of the objects of fact and of thought, are visual distillations. Their definitions comprise observable attributes. What is the sound of a chair? Could we devise the comprehensive ideas of a table or a tree on the basis of an aroma? Do we largely recognize an instance of a beaker or a bird by fully feeling out its shape? We see to know, and in knowing, we see.

To know is visual - a significant fact for visual artists - and the forms of knowing possess their own visualities. We are many-minded, and to be aware, and to be aware that we are aware, we grant each quality of awareness its own quality of spaciousness, its own logic and detailing of extension. Rationality is a labyrinth, an intricacy of patterning that ravel itself out from a mathematical formula, a geometric extrapolation of proliferating precisions. Emotionality is a density texture, a pillowing recession of enveloping thickness upon yielding richness, enfolding masses in endless succession. Sensuality is a divisional field of voluptuous edges, the stroking sides of softly winding corridors. And intuition, the direct access to the inner world, is barely of vision and barely of consciousness, but all the other attributes feed into it, and it may well be the portal onto the center of

the recession, the core of the depths beyond conception.

We are aware in frames of consciousness of differing and irreconcilable qualifications, in plunging deeps of inner space, hallucinatory and uncanny, suspending worlds upon worlds, and we conceive in planes set at mental focal lengths. They overlay and bleed together, emotions seeping into ideations, sensations blending with piquancies of intimate feeling. We shift our attention among the distances of mental focus, shuffle and reshuffle, again and again, the deck of focal planes to which we lock the mind's eye. And one is always dominant at a time. In any moment, we think, or sense, or feel primarily, unless the personality achieves an integration, a coherence, a profound development - a maturity. It is an achievement of extraordinary acquisition, to do all that the mind may do, simultaneously, as a single gesture, in an intricate balance - consciousness as a ballet of subjectivity, as a grace of awareness.

We are aware in a mental layering - to see the overlays of inner vision is to know the truth of our knowing, and to integrate the layered projections of knowledge is to begin toward a wisdom of self-awareness. The paintings of Cheryl Goldsleger presently on exhibition at Rosenberg + Kaufman are initiating steps into the realm of interior knowledge. Compounded images of an integrating awareness, they are

mappings of the inner life, superimposed schematizations of the realm of subjectivity, the inner structures of the spaces in which we live our most intimate existence. They possess the structural principles of insight, the laws of the vision directed within.

Goldsleger's nine works in wax and oil on linen and paper, all created this year and last, portray complex geometric constructions - arrangements of circles, ovals, and rectangles set in concentric, radiating patterns. Circles within circles, boxes inside boxes, the component forms have breaks in their edges such that the spaces between connect and make an intricate maze of pathways. Each structure is, in fact, a labyrinth, a true labyrinth, for each construction resolves - there is always a route that leads from the center of the maze to a break in the outer edge, to an escape, and from the outer skin back to the inner core.

Mazes hover over mazes in Goldsleger's images. Rendered in a palette limited to tones of black and white and to the intrinsic golden hue of the wax, the images remove the emphasis of the eye from color and shift it to the texture and lush density of waxen surface. And the density establishes a set of focal planes. The foremost labyrinth is scored into the wax in black lines. Behind it, at the surface of the support, is another labyrinth, set at a distance that is not so much optical but tangible, set beneath the felt thickness of the translucent medium, the wax which seems to well up and almost brim over the edges of the frontal maze. And beneath the second maze is another geometry - a regular grid of lines imprinted onto the linen or paper and partially obscured by brushwork. A labyrinth hovering above a labyrinth hovering above a grid, an intelligence before an intelligence before the simplest form of intelligence - a reticulation of regular horizontal and vertical lines - all

simultaneously in focus, each as immediate as the one beneath it or before it.

Some of the mazes seem patterns of plane geometry - geometric structures built on a plane, a flat surface, careful drawings that are purely two-dimensional. Others appear to be visualizations of rhythms, emanating vibrations that spread across the surface, optical equivalents of what can be only heard and felt. *TRISECT*, 1999, in particular, is nearly impossible to see as a labyrinth without sustained concentration. The work shows an overlapping of three circular mazes, and with focused attention, the eye can find and follow out the path of escape from the center of each to its outer edge. But when the gaze relaxes, all one sees is rippling - like the waves that arise from stones dropped into a pool of water.

However, the majority of the paintings seem inescapably like architectural drawings, plans for intended building projects, drawn in overview. Although there are in the works no indications of volume, of the added third dimension that would transform these patterns into enclosing spaces, and there are no suggestions of an intended increase in scale, the eye cannot help but take these constructions as environments, as floor plans for structures we could one day inhabit. The sense of it is ineluctable, and is acknowledged in several of the titles - *OVERVIEW*, 1998 and *CHAMBERS*, 1999. The geometric patterns explode before the eye, within the mind. They dilate and erect themselves around the viewer. They become the imaginative space that eclipses the gallery from awareness. Or rather, the viewer reduces in scale and walks the labyrinthine corridors of the paintings, a miniature presence before its own eye, within its own mind. Or rather, and better still, the expansion and the miniaturization are indistinguishable, are the same experience, are the same moment, are overlaid. All by virtue of

simple geometry. The homunculus and the mind it lives within are the same.

Geometry inescapably becomes environment for a reason that is equally inescapable: Geometry is inherently environmental. We are creatures of space - the volumes of our own bodies and the volumes through which our bodies roam - and that space is mathematical. It is not a subject of math in its analysis, but is inherently numeric, a *matter of math* in its essence. That is the reason the complicated methods for rendering perspective, established during the Renaissance, matched the nature of appearance so well - the methodology of perspective aligned with the truth of the situation, with the truth of situation itself. Perspective was not an imposition but a discovery, an unearthing of an implicit fact.

Geometry is space, for math is not a mental invention but a fact of nature, and all space is inevitably and always the space of the mind. Space, even as we wander through it, even as we are built of it, is an expansion of mind, a layering of overview upon overview, an extrapolation of awareness into a vast inner universe, which is indistinguishable from the universe around us, even as galaxies are stood within the mind. And that universe is geometry, it is a thought we have even as we are objects within that thought. Worlds within worlds, and each is within the other. There is a mystery in it, and the blunt facts of existence are nothing blunt at all, but something mystical.

Goldsleger's paintings have a deceptive simplicity that masks their access to the miraculous power of geometric regularity to become a living reality, to be the essence of living reality. And yet, their simplicity is not deceptive at all, for her works are positioned at the crux of a great

simplicity, at the very point at which mind and reality touch, at which mathematics is a conception and an inherence, at which simple lines expand into the enormity of a cosmos. Her layering of mazes establishes gaps between, spaces in which the viewer resides, suspended between labyrinth and labyrinth, between images of pure intellect, for the labyrinth is the natural symbol of rationality. But in Goldsleger's hands, coming from her hands, it is more. The thickness of the wax is its own volumetric, its own encompassing space, another extension in which the viewer is captured. It gives a sensuous intimacy to the vision, to the inner vision along with the outer, to the mind's eye and to the fingertip of the mind, and it too is mathematical, rhythmic and regular. The truth of Goldsleger's work is that nothing in the mind, nothing of its dry calculations and precise conceptions, departs the skin, leaves behind the flesh, relinquishes the ensconcing pleasure, or torment, of the touch.

The images Goldsleger creates are, in their symmetry and balance, as much mandalas as architectures, and they are as much appeals to and invocations of tenderness as they are of thought. The numeric regularity of her constructions vibrates to the rhythms of a great secrecy, for numbers are the root of the spirit, are images of fundamental and barely detectable understandings, are the essence of all the forms of awareness. Numbers are themselves archetypal, and the geometry Goldsleger has rendered is a sacred geometry, bringing principles of harmony that balance the mind, that integrate it with itself. Her strict geometry is no different in import from the artificial regularities of abstraction in Byzantine iconography, seemingly unnatural regularities of human form that are in no real sense artificial, in no real sense unnatural, but are intrinsic to an inner image, to some portion of our understanding of

ourselves. The absence of the human image in her works is of no import, for the human image is a literalization the icon does not require. Geometry alone is also a human image.

Goldsleger's geometries, her mathematically regularized abstractions of form, are icons in the fullest sense - they interiorize the awareness, turn it upon itself and focus it on its deepest recesses. Her labyrinths turn the attention of awareness on the structural principles of awareness, and with that, it turns on the structural principles of reality, for at the farthest levels of introspection, the two are indistinguishable. The labyrinth, as an inherited image, holds in its heart a mystery. Here, the center of the labyrinth is simultaneous with the core of the soul, and we wend our way, as living images in Goldsleger's paintings, not to the outer edge, but to the heart of the maze.