

# Light and Space Pieces.—Coming From New York?

# Los Angeles Times Calendar

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## Art Review

By CHRISTOPHER KNIGHT  
TIMES ART CRITIC

The 21 recent works by eight New York-based artists in the newly opened exhibition "Transparent Facade" share certain traits. Plastics rule, whether in the use of materials such as Mylar or plexiglass or in the choice of acrylic as paint. Everything is abstract, with an emphasis on geometry. In art that crosses the wall-bound properties of painting with the material tangibility of sculpture, hybridism is a watchword. Light is everywhere a dominant motif, which also means there's an emphasis on color.

If these particular traits sound collectively familiar, tracing their ancestry to Light and Space and Finish Fetish art produced in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s, their association with the work of younger artists now based in New York seems peculiarly out of sync. Everyone knows the imperial claims that art made in L.A.—and elsewhere in the United States—has often derived from art made in New York. (A particularly die-hard New Yorker friend still insists, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, that L.A.'s Light and Space art is a variant of New

York Minimalism.) At the Otis Art Gallery, however, things start to go the other way.

This may be the first exhibition to imply a significant impact from West to East. Organized by Fran Siegel, an artist included in the show, it's a thoughtful and considered response to "Plane/Structures," an exhibition of work by L.A.-based artists organized for Otis in 1994 by critic David Pagel (a regular contributor to *The Times*), which traveled to Manhattan's White Columns the following year. The importance of dialogue among artists and their evolving work is often given institutional lip service, but "Transparent Facade" is commendable for taking the idea seriously.

In works of varying complexity and success, the show records an apparently broad effort to infuse fabricated objects with a pellucid luminosity. Such radiance typically speaks of a spiritual inflection. Historically, it was associated first with supernatural phenomena, then with natural ones. Here, it infuses worldly man-made things, endowing them with a sometimes gritty, sometimes whimsical and sometimes elegant kind of secular grace.

The most beautiful and captivating works in the exhibition are four wall-constructions by Christian Haub. Gridded bands of saturated color—painted, made from tape on wooden panels or refracted through the edges of plastic sheets—tend to warp visual space in surprising and unpredictable ways. Cyber-Mondrians, Haub's mostly small paintings have a distinctly iconic feel.

Mary Schiliro pours acrylic color on strips of Mylar, which she then hangs a few inches in front of the wall. Sometimes perforated, the translucent strips create optical illusions—a cloud of orange hovering behind a pink strip, violet behind blue, green behind yellow. Like Dan Flavin without the fluorescent lightbulbs, or a peculiar cross between Peter Alexander's resin sculptures and Morris Louis' poured paintings, Schiliro does a lot with a little.

Michael Rouillard creates indigo fields of squishy visual space by making tens of thousands of small marks on paper with an ordinary ballpoint pen. The saturated result is a strangely compelling object made from obsessive repetition of the absolutely ordinary.

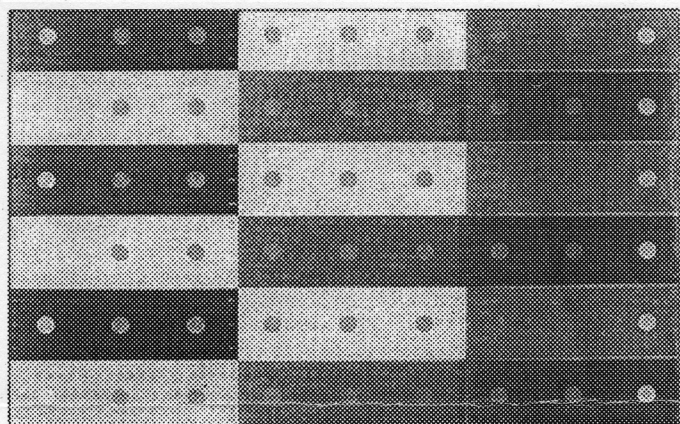
Glass sheets, small and large, are the support employed by Russell Maltz and Melissa Kretschmer. Maltz paints bright persimmon rectangles on the front and back, then hangs the glass panels in an apparently random pattern in front of the wall—to minimal effect. Kretschmer squeegees tar across the surface, corralling its flow within the confines of thick lines of silicone in odd works that suggest brittle, breakable Richard Serras.

A soft inner glow emanates from Heather Hutchinson's familiar triptych, achieved through the application of beeswax to plexiglass mounted on deep stretcher bars made from birch. Joan Waltemath employs a Fibonacci mathematical series—1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, etc.—to plot geometric shapes, which gives her paintings the peculiar look of architectural blueprints driven by an organic impulse.

Finally, Siegel has made an installation in a floor-to-ceiling corner window. The materials are simple: lime-green monofilament stretched vertically on the diagonal from bottom to top. At the bottom, the row of strings follows the right-angle corner, but at the top it ends in a straight line that traverses the corner. The splayed and twisted space that the monofilament describes is further tangled by optical effects of light, both artificial from indoor spotlights and natural from outdoor sunshine, which gleams off the strings and reflects off the Mylar-covered windows.

Siegel's installation recalls precedents by artists ranging from L.A.'s Robert Irwin to New York's Fred Sandback. As suggested by many of the other references pointedly recalled—Mondrian, Flavin, Louis, Serra—the artists in this show do not make work that is wholly defined by an ancestry in art made in Los Angeles. Instead, their work demonstrates the kind of messy lateral spread that art and artistic influence takes—and probably always has. It's just that now, in the globalizing art world, the phenomenon is much more easily seen.

• "Transparent Facade," Otis Art Gallery, 9045 Lincoln Blvd., (310) 665-6905, through Oct. 30. Closed Sundays and Mondays.



Otis Art Gallery

A light of its own: Mary Schiliro's "Stitched Dip 1998."

## 'Facade': Works Trace Ancestry to Light and Space