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Stargazing in Brooklyn: New Art at Trestle Gallery

In Brooklyn, on a sunny spring afternoon, heavy machinery was razing the sand-colored silos along the Gowanus Canal. This "Gowanus" area of Park Slope is one of the most robust artist neighborhoods in Brooklyn. Like the current "Stargazing" exhibition at Trestle Gallery, the area synchronizes nature and industry: a curving canal and cement sidewalks, thin, recently planted trees and ancient factory warehouses, and blue sky obstructed by loft buildings in ongoing states of conversion.

The "Stargazing" show, elegantly curated by participating artist Catherine Cullen, pays homage to the pioneering Swedish abstract artist and mystic Hilma af Klint. It features the work of four of the most resourceful abstract artists at work in the New York City scene. Its theme is the influence of nonhuman geometric forms, such as stars, circles, bands, lines, arcs, pentagrams, polygons, squares and triangles, on the human sphere. The show is daring. It seeks insight and transcendence from the rhythmical dynamism of geometry.

The highlight of the show consists of two monumental multimedia paintings by the renowned painter Regina Bogat.

insert Regina Bogat's The Secret Seven

Bogat's artistic career spans six decades. She is still hitting her stride. In her recent Star series of paintings, she creates sharp, diagrammatic designs. These paintings are completed through a fluid painterly presentation. Her abstractions are contemplative, enticing, pleasurable; her patterns produce eloquent visual vocabularies that guide the viewer into meditation on their color schemes, forceful angles, and layered planes.

Bogat's work is attracting more and more enthusiasts in New York City and well beyond. In addition to the Stargazing exhibition at Trestle, her art is featured in an upcoming production at the Tang Museum in Saratoga Springs, New York, where her work is being set to music by the iconoclastic composer David Lang, a project that runs into early 2015. Last fall's well-attended retrospective of Bogat's paintings and sculptures at Zürcher Studio in the East Village followed her recently well-received solo show at Williamsburg's Art 101. And her retrospective just crossed the Atlantic and is on exhibition until July 12 at Galerie Zürcher in Paris. The north star of abstraction keeps on rising. Bogat is

the ideal figure to spearhead this local Stargazing show about the sublime rewards of such a style.

insert Heptadic #1

Her recent paintings demonstrate a consistency that sets her apart from artists who disappeared because they depended on fashions that vanished as quickly as they had appeared. Mathematical in her schematic foundations and a lyricist in her subtle application of paint, Bogat is inspired by the philosophical ideals of Pythagoras and the I Ching in equal measure. The harmony of the spheres corresponds to the hexagrams formed by the yin and the yang.

Bogat's recent star paintings outline and penetrate the symmetrical integrity of that hidden physical realm. While her paintings outline the strict angles and sharp contours of the astral form, she generously fills in the star's grid with pulsating colors from acrylic, pastel and india ink.

insert Bogat's Decagon 3, 2008

Her star paintings draw the eye toward the constant flux inside the fixed arrangement. In "Decagon 3" (2008) the inner and outer outlines of the star shape are softened by the pink and blue coloring that merges, blends, and floats before our eyes. The image seems to both contract and expand at once.

Bogat knows how the operations of color field painting inform the shifting effects and emotional significances in an abstract work. In "Decagon 2" (2007), the black and brown bands of color reinforce the astral points outward. These bands provide the structure within which black ink melts and gravitates downward, as if from the sky to earth. The painted black ink takes on the shape of dendrites and the branch-like silhouettes of sea algae. The organic liquidity of this dark ink draws the pale green washes into dramatic relief. The solidness of black engages with the vague, fluctuating state of the paint behind it. The overall effect is ravishing and enigmatic, as if it were a painting of absolutely stilled movements, living before our eyes yet existing outside of time too.

insert Decagon 2, 2007

Bogat's painted star structures invite us to link our visual consciousness to vaster, invisible relations and her rich and nuanced colors release us into our individual realms. This is how her art draws our attention to the hidden changes that link the earth's tenuous elements to the dispassionate and remote constellations above.

Curator Catherine Cullen's sculptures also reposition the viewer into enjoying the interrelationship between vision, knowledge, changeability, and symbolic form. As a sculptor, Cullen is interested in the natural weightlessness of both natural and artificial structures. She creates moving portals for human vision that derive from abstract configurations of metal, plastic and wood.

Like Bogat's art, Cullen's work plays on the tension between the seemingly infinite grace of a circle or square and the finitude of the human gaze on that form. Within that interaction between the permanent and the fugitive, the attentive viewer is drawn into an attractive force field that strengthens as the viewer walks around her sculptures.

Cullen's small steel "Cloud Messenger" (2012) exploits the circle in its completeness and in arcs that interrupt those otherwise finalized circles. The graceful manipulation of the curved, white-painted steel is as hypnotic as the experience of staring up at passing clouds.

insert Cullen's Immaterial Material 2013

Cullen's "White River Terma" (2014) is a plank sculpture that tapers delicately upward, the whiteness of the suggested river interrupted by grooves and hieroglyphs cut out in the wood.

Her "Immaterial Material" (2013) is the most playful installation in this show. It is a free-standing abstract figure. Three long, thin and flattened limbs support a square box fronted by orange Plexiglas. Within that cube, round metal tubes protrude surrounded by cut-out circles on its sides. The figure calls into question categories of "inside and "outside" or "within" and "without." The eye is then drawn downward in an almost triangular motion to the square base on the floor that symmetrically supports the boxy head above. The result is a perfectly balanced abstract meditation.

Insert Schiliro's detail Moon Dip 1, 2005

Artist Mary Schiliro is equally interested in the possibilities of geometric shapes imposed within or upon one another. Her "Moon Dip 1" (2005) is in blue acrylic painted on a mylar base. The blue band has been punctured by eight circles. The effect of the background and light on these circles suggest, all at once, the phases of the moon. Or moons. The blue and white create optical illusions of simultaneity. Once in a blue moon. And many moons in one.

Insert Olson's Vessel States, 2012

Sculptor Craig Olson evokes primitive art or fossils to breath new life into small-scale abstraction. His "Vessel States" is a beautiful fan-shaped wood carving within which he has painted a bone-colored, shell-like creature that has eight valves. Like the abstract figure of "Tusk" (2013) Olson's image on "Vessel States" connotes sunken worlds, hermetic icons and symbolic languages.

Walking from the Trestle Gallery to the Manhattan-bound subway station, I paid fresh attention to everyday totems in Brooklyn thanks to the intoxicating influence of these Stargazing artists. I found mystery in the thick brown lines formed by crooked wooden telephone poles. I imagined random, cryptic messages in the flashing spokes of a passing bicycle wheel. And in the middle of the day, I wondered how much more I would know of myself and my world if only I could look up and study the stars at night.