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Claudia Wieser

NEW YORK,
at Marianne Boesky

by Matthew Nichols

Claudia Wieser:
Untitled, 2013, gold
leaf and colored pencil
on paper, 18¼ by 13
inches; at Marianne
Boesky.



For her second solo show in New York, Claudia Wieser papered some of the gallery's walls and a portion of the floor with collages of digital prints. Mostly black-and-white, they combined enlarged photographs of ancient statuary, details of Byzantine and Renaissance paintings, and pictures of her own work in previous installations. Though Wieser displayed a few new sculptures against these backdrops, their expansive art-historical references were rather cryptic, especially since this Berlin-based artist typically explores a relatively narrow precinct of modernism. As many of her drawings and sculptures demonstrate, Wieser recuperates a mystical mode of abstraction that was once practiced by the likes of Paul Klee and Emma Kunz.

Wieser's drawings are elegant and engrossing, and 11 recent examples (all untitled, 2013) were hung in a row across two walls. Working with colored pencil and touches of gold leaf, she delineates and repeats geometric shapes to create symmetrical abstractions on sheets of blue or gray paper (most measuring 18 by 13 inches). Some drawings develop quilt-like patterns from interlocking squares and sheets of blue or gray paper (most measuring 18 by 13 inches). Some drawings develop quilt-like patterns from interlocking squares and diamonds. Others produce radial designs from nested circles and polygons. Nature, which seems to be a touchstone, is distilled into spare and elemental forms. In one striking example, four spreading lines of gold leaf descend from a central point on the paper's top edge and appear to generate an inverted rainbow at its base. While all of the drawings are precisely calibrated, countless stitchlike strokes fill their various shapes with color. These visible traces of Wieser's meditative labor solicit a comparable contemplation from the viewer.

Elsewhere in this show, Wieser adapted her abstract vocabulary to various other materials. In three relief sculptures that hang or lean against the wall, rectangular panels are faced with sheets of polished copper and glazed ceramic tiles. The tightly fitted components create geometric compositions that echo the drawings but lack compelling evidence of the artist's touch. Equally austere but more engaging are three larger rectangular panels that are covered with cut mirrors. Though their edges are carefully aligned to form harlequin patterns, slightly uneven mounting ensures fractured reflections of the surrounding space.

Wieser's most intriguing sculptures are spheres, cones, cylinders and other geometric volumes that are carved from solid wood. By painting their surfaces with inks or acrylics, she can clarify or confuse one's understanding of a given form. Nine of these smallish sculptures (none is taller than 35 inches) were arrayed on the collaged area of the floor, including a pink orb whose curving girth is reinforced by an equatorial line of changing color segments. Another sculpture mounts a cone on a hemisphere to form a seamless teardrop. Painted black and vertically scored with brightly colored lines, it appears to possess six faceted sides that do not, in fact, exist. Like the geometric drawings from which they look to be extracted, Wieser's embellished wooden sculptures are both knowable and mysterious, and seem to transcend the logic of their own making.

