ARTFORUM

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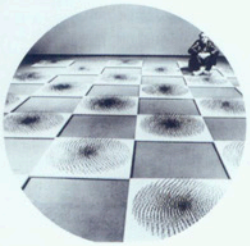
INTERNATIONAL













BEST OF 2009


PURE BEAU









$10.00





not frictionless simulations but objects with traction and tenacious purchase on the physical world. The stucco texture further has the effect of magnifying other tropes of objecthood, such as the works' wide, bulky stretchers; or that most of Halley's canvases aren't single canvases at all, but two or three asymmetrical conjoined ones, the seams between them clearly visible.

Also notable is the fact that, from the earlier works to the later ones, the masking grows ever more tactile and precise: In *Rectangular Cell with Conduit*, 1983, there is a (clearly inadvertent) suggestion of softness and bleeding where black conduits meet orange ground, but by *Blue Cell with Triple Conduit*, 1986, Halley's edges have a die-cut sharpness, the layers of paint crisply defined in visible strata. It looks as if you could take any one of his shapes' corners between your thumb and forefinger, pull, and find the paint peeling away with the satisfying smoothness of the backing on a FedEx label. The pigment comes to seem as if it has a provisional relationship to the canvas—as if it were simply there temporarily, like a Colorform. What these works finally invoke, beyond and below their imagery, is the fate of the object stripped of everything—paint, form, content, specificity, meaning—that lies so loosely on its surface. Their starkness registers as a discursive absence, like the absence of a signal on a television screen. They are broadcasting their own imperious energy; their silence feels animate and somehow withholding. In that sense, they are perhaps paradigmatic of the reified object—the object that we invest with life and that then refuses to speak. So should we call these paintings *critical* or *complicit*? Per their own program, the distinction is of course moot; for the viewer confronting them, it may become so. Provocations or not, they demand to be reckoned with.

—*Elizabeth Schambelan*

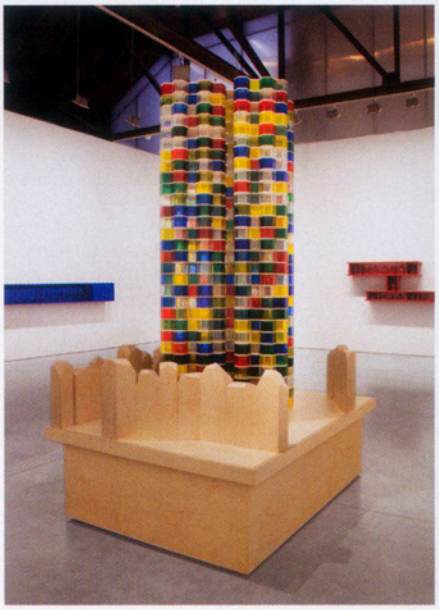
Josiah McElheny
ANDREA ROSEN GALLERY

Think of contemporary glassmakers and the first name to come to mind might be Dale Chihuly and his Murano-like anemones (so to speak). Josiah McElheny, hardly a popular purveyor of pseudo-Venetian glass, is firmly on the far side of the old Craft versus Art divide. He could produce such gimcracks with one arm tied behind his back—on the condition that the historicizing programs he favors call for such glass forms in the first place.

Spurred by the recondite history of glass (not to say art history or political theory), McElheny, on the occasion of this exhibition, has invented (or reinvented) a rivalry between two prophetic German modernists: Mies van der Rohe and Bruno Taut, the latter perhaps best known for his Glass Pavilion at the Cologne Werkbund Exhibition of 1914. Temperamentally differentiated from the stylish Mies by Soviet sympathies that put him at odds with the Nazis once they were in power, Taut went into Turkish exile during the *Hitlerzeit* and died in 1938.

Buoyed by post–World War I utopianism in Germany and the Soviet Union, architecture in the 1920s became the signal communal art, one further enlivened by the new technical possibilities that allowed structures to be built of glass, or seemingly of pure light itself. McElheny's eight-foot-high architectural tower reprises Mies's elegantly classical, earliest model of a glass-clad skyscraper (it was never built) based on the architect's famous 1922 photographs. *Bruno Taut's Monument to Socialist Spirituality (After Mies van der Rohe)*, 2009, as McElheny calls this mutant maquette, rises above a wooden ruff of Caligaresque row houses that evoke the type shortly to be deemed *echt Deutsch* by the National Socialists to whose values Mies would transiently surrender, for example when he briefly assumed the direction of an Aryanized Bauhaus after its founder, Walter Gropius, was driven abroad.

McElheny's model subverts the crisp and sleek architecture associated with Mies by bombarding it with bits and pieces conjured from Taut's far less suave, rather plodding signifiers of class consciousness—his blunt use of painterly primaries, for instance. And McElheny's supplanting of the Miesian curved wall with Tautian hexagonal units makes you think that this new skyscraper dedicated to the socialist spirit is no more than a glass hive for worker bees, perfect proletarian drones busy at work within a framework of historical inevitability that would, in time, end the class struggle with the inauguration of a classless utopia—the ultimate socialist delusion. Pure Taut, that: He died after the Moscow show trials had begun but prior to the Hitler-Stalin pact or world knowledge of the Gulag.



View of "Josiah McElheny," 2009. From left: *Lilly Reich (and Wilhelm Wagenfeld), Blue*, 2009; *Bruno Taut's Monument to Socialist Spirituality (After Mies van der Rohe)*, 2009; *Charlotte Perriand (and Carlo Scarpa), Red*, 2009.

The more engaging, nostalgic associations of this exhibition are McElheny's reconstructions of designs for shelving—each assigned a primary color—that celebrate underknown (when not simply forgotten) female designers who are imagined to have collaborated with more famous men: *Lilly Reich (and Wilhelm Wagenfeld), Blue*; *Aino Aalto (and Tapio Wirkkala), Yellow*; and *Charlotte Perriand (and Carlo Scarpa), Red* (all works 2009). *Blue* reimagines Wagenfeld's Bauhaus-inspired, beakerlike transparent glassware as a set of pale blue vials that are placed in a Lilly Reich cabinet (of a type she might have designed for Mies, as one of his principal collaborators). *Yellow* combines Aalto's birch overlappings with Wirkkala's glass forms in an exquisite yellow. And *Red* echoes shelving that could have been made in the Jean Prouvé workshops after a version of the well-known Perriand design, which is filled with '40s-ish glass caprices on themes of Carlo Scarpa that recall the twentieth century's highest achievements in Venetian glass—think Venini.

In verbal description all this is a bit daunting—overstated didactics, really. While it is easier to relate to the lighter, feminist patch of the exhibition rather than to an abstruse rivalry between Mies and Taut, the actual experience of McElheny's brainiac work is astonishing when one realizes how much is achieved through glassblowing alone. As in the past, the virtuosity of McElheny's glassblowing shields it from facile popularization and signaturization. But to insist on this argument alone presses McElheny back into the ghetto of contemporary crafts while, in fact, his world is far wider and deeper than those overtrod precincts.

—*Robert Pincus-Witten*

Tauba Auerbach
DEITCH PROJECTS

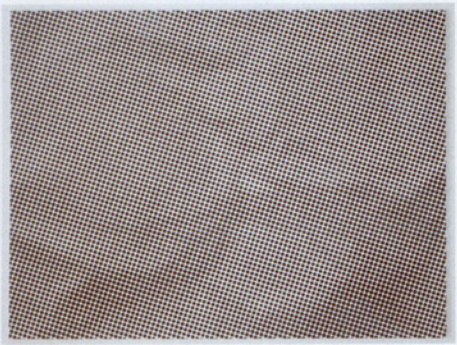
Tauba Auerbach hit the ground running a few years ago with a well-received debut at Deitch, followed by her recent participation in the New Museum's "Younger Than Jesus" exhibition, and now this

second buzzed-about show at the gallery—and she's not yet thirty. Precociousness often keeps company with impatience, and on first look it seems Auerbach has dispensed with the concerns of her earlier work with typography, alphabets, and codes in favor of the even brainier bailiwicks of logic and physics. She, however, identifies a through-line: A previous interest in how language can embarrass and even violate its governing principles has developed into a preoccupation with what the show's press release described as "the collapsing of two conflicting states." Paintings, photographs, sculptures, and a musical instrument were marshaled into a meditation on the standoffs between, and ultimate implosion of, two- and three-dimensionality, pattern and accident, past and present.

This is heady territory (as a side project, Auerbach is designing mathematical symbols for a Cambridge University logician) that in exhibition format hazards a certain diffusion, as if she is road testing different theories, moving from one thought experiment to the next and from one medium to another in order to explore, for example, the copresence of order and chaos. It is thus all the more remarkable that these forays hang together, and that most of the resulting objects reward contemplative viewing. Exemplary in this regard is a set of six rectangular monochromes spray painted to look as if their canvases had been folded before being stretched. Trompe l'oeil effects of pleating and creasing, played out in a span of earth tones from rust to ocher to olive to black, are arrestingly beautiful, but equally provocative is the imparting of a temporal dimension to the stalemate between painterly illusionism and modernist frontality: Resolutely two-dimensional surfaces trumpet their flatness even as they summon a previous three-dimensional state. Related visual high jinks animate a pair of works from Auerbach's 2008–2009 "Crumple Paintings" series, allover expanses of halftone dots that coalesce, from afar, into images of crinkled sheets of paper—Op art that acknowledges its own fugitive tactility.

Eight large up-close photographs of television-screen static corroborate the thesis that form can emerge, unanticipated, from naught. Grainy motifs, including a houndstooth design in *Static 14* (all works 2009) and wavy, full-spectrum strata in *Static 11*, materialize from what should be random fields of scrambled (or absent) analog signals. The notion of inexplicable relatedness also underpins a two-part sculpture (*Entanglement*), a black orb comprising three flat, intersecting disks that hung outside the gallery, and a rod, suspended from the ceiling indoors, that terminates in a blazing light. Their oscillations are synced, illustrating the marvel of separate photons that appear to communicate with each other across distances.

If the sheer visual intrigue of Auerbach's art offsets its cerebral aspects, an additional sensate element was provided by *Auerglass*, a custom-built, two-person wooden pump organ created by the artist and Cameron Mesirow (of the band Glasser), who every afternoon of the exhibition's run performed a melancholic, ruminative, and semi-improvised composition that seemed made to order for our moment. The instrument has a de facto contrapuntal quality—each player's keyboard has alternating notes of a four-octave scale, the wind for which is supplied by the other's pumping—that rounds out the show's both/and themes.



Tauba Auerbach, *Crumple VII*, 2009, acrylic and ink-jet on canvas, 8' x 10' 8".

A while back, an interviewer asked Auerbach what reaction she hoped to elicit in viewers. Her reply, "confusion and then clarity," locates her work, rightly so, on the sunny side of Ed Ruscha's distinction between bad art (which prompts a "Wow! Huh?" response) and good (which yields "Huh? Wow!"). But Auerbach took the exchange a step further, betraying a restive curiosity worth monitoring in the years to come; the last part of her answer was, "—and then confusion again."

—*Lisa Turvey*

Carter

SALON 94 FREEMANS

Carter's lack of transparency about his name has garnered its fair share of critical attention, with biography (or, more precisely, its lack of specificity; it is no secret that his first name is John, but what does that tell us?) functioning in determined lockstep with the work itself. Indeed, the evasions of his self-proclaimed "anonymous portraits" and their combinatory, exquisite corpse–like logic serve as Carter's imprimatur. All the more surprising, then, to discover Carter in conversation with curator Matthew Higgs in a recent catalogue disclosing early memories that bear fairly directly on the above. Carter's revelation that his childhood neighbor Betty Kripinsky remained an active presence after her death through uncanny surrogate wig stands in the form of foam heads is almost too pitch-perfect. Here is Carter: "The foam heads had detailed faces drawn on them with ball-point pen and the makeup that had once belonged to her. Henry [her husband] kept these heads on top of a tall cabinet. . . . We were never sure whether Henry had drawn the faces on these heads, or if Betty had done it for practice. Nevertheless, they were unsettling facsimiles of Betty that continued to exist after her death."

Carter, *1955, 1978, 1981, Area*, 2009, digitally altered, folded, and defaced laser prints, acrylic ink, paint, and gel on paper and canvas, 86 x 72".

This would seem to give away Carter's game were it not for the fact that his second solo show at Salon 94 Freemans, "And Within Area Although" (itself an echo of "And, It, the, Constant, Although," his exhibition at London's Hotel gallery earlier this year) is finally less about identity as such—its permutations, peregrinations, and so on—than about how it operates in and through architectural space. A subtle shift, to be sure, since the appropriated interiors that swell to fill his large grayscale paintings are still modish ciphers; the lives of these rooms and the residual traces of their inhabitants, too, materialize as the marks and erasures of pentimenti and stand in for an idea of (raffish, by turns distantiated) portraiture.

What appear to be film sets or old-fashioned interiors (think 1940s and '50s modern with Rococo furnishings) form digitally altered and collaged photographic backgrounds for *And Within Area Although #1* and *And Within Area Although #2* (all works 2009), upon which Carter builds intricately worked surfaces. These and other works, including the *Mad Men*–ish office in *1955, 1978, 1981, Area* and the images self-consciously engaging sculpture—e.g., *Item Placed in Area (Unfolding Abstract Modern Sculpture)* and *1942, 1955, 1977, 2009, Portrait of a Thoughtful Abstraction with Arranged Interior and Modern Sculpture*, which both feature a generic, corporate office