

Mark Sheinkman
Thomas Healy through April 18
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Review

THE CRITICAL STATE OF VISUAL ART IN NEW YORK

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IF PEOPLE WERE CATS, MARK Sheinkman's exhibit would seem like catnip to collectors: it's cool, consciously self-restrained, remote and elegant. These reductivist forms of painted and smudged oil and alkyd on canvas on cardboard cylinders, all from this year, look good on the walls because they're nuanced while seeming to be straightforward, even totemic in character.

Sheinkman's objects, with their severely monochromatic tonalities, appear at first to have a menacing institutional or authoritarian look which then dissolves into a softer sensuous character. This body of new work contains reference points that unite in a very poised way various, seemingly incompatible, sensibilities.

Sheinkman's work is omnivorous. Its chief attribute is having the capacity to infer the worlds of painting, sculpture, drawing as well as photography, through its surface support or surface treatment. It then proceeds to advance (or shall we say steamrolls through) multifarious art historical territory incorporating elements of Precisionism, Futurism, Machine Art, process painting, and gestural abstraction.

The artist has already gained considerable momentum in art circles by having a lot of attention paid, perhaps too much attention paid, to his muted works on paper. He has assiduously worked with various paper formats (using long vertical sheets, or wide horizontals as well as small cylindrical rolls) on which would appear curlicues, loop-de-loops and illusionistic trenchant cut-marks carefully smeared or smudged or streaked with erasure. The results were optical effects mimicking in a vague way smeared photographic emulsion. This technique, I have been told over and over again by admiring, alarmed and envious artists, have driven collectors delirious with delight. That is to say: this Sheinkman is one smart cookie.

The new objects in this exhibition are larger than anything I have seen prior, and his shift of scale now brings more substantiality to his work, while situating them even more glaringly as hybrid objects, very handsome objects, in (and on which) which the worlds of drawing, nature, machinery and architectural motifs converge. They are particularly eerie because these works at Thomas Healy, a series of cylindrical forms and flat panels attached to the walls in horizontal or vertical formats, are painted with the artist's usual restricted palette of grays, silvers and blacks and whites, yet, while relatively inert on some level (the forms themselves and their spacing are easily comprehensible), their surfaces seem fleeting, charged with energy giving each work a tensed, motile feel.

Because the convex aspect of the cylinder doesn't allow the viewer's eye to apprehend all of the surface area simultaneously, the work contains a hide-and-seek effect that touches on issues such as of the coherency and indeterminateness of sight, the boundedness and fluidity of boundaries and containers on corporeal presence and invisibility, on stability/instability, movement and stillness.

In spite of the clearly rational architectonic aspect of the work, space doesn't seem to impose itself, and instead suggests a shifting place. They seem closer to that of the still life inherited from the cubists than the lyrical space opening up on a landscape as defined by the abstract expressionists.

Considering Sheinkman's history with paper it makes sense to consider the cylinder shape coming out of the artists' understanding and purposeful exploitation of the visual potential of the reference to vertical or horizontal Oriental scrolls where the format engages the viewer with an element of

anticipatory surprise through a suggestion of a reading of a continuously changing scene in time and space. The abstracted horizontal cylindrical form easily associates itself to the tree-trunk form, and in modern Western society it has to do with machines (think of Léger), technology or weaponry: cannon barrels, missiles — and we may also think of paper presses or other devices through which materials or substances are extruded, flattened, or printed. The vertical cylinder attains a theatrical presence, through its architectural references to weight bearing or ornamental motifs such as classical columns, or hollowed shapes such as smokestacks. Sheinkman makes good use of all of these associations to create satisfying complex amalgamations using deceptively simple two- and three-dimensional formats.

The artist marks his surfaces sparingly, deliberately and his objects, carefully controlled with color gradations in cylinders aligned horizontally or vertically, are streaked with washes of oils to produce Futurist-like effects. 3.5.98., for example, reminds me of a toboggan, and its marks insinuate whooshes of wind or water currents implying movement, force and energy. The key aspect to notice is the controlled tension that exists in the work. Sheinkman's double barreled 3.6.98. on the south wall dominates the room with its heft and size and the shimmering wave and reflection motifs on each of the surfaces makes this a convincingly lyrical work in spite of its initial steely-like character. References to aluminum, reflections on water, tree markings, and marble striations give this initially austere work an elegiac almost lyrical naturalistic quality.

Also noteworthy is 3.4.98., a complex work that seems poised between verticality and horizontality, and especially for the painterly interludes peeking on, in, and around the seven carefully arranged cylindrical units.

A strong exhibition.