

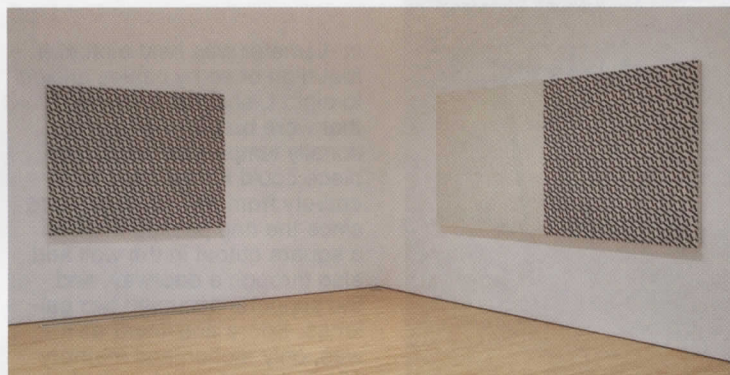
tipsy house on chicken-feet stilts tries to duck the gunfire of a blind ghostly specter at the edge of the horizontal tableau. The avian hut—the folkloric residence of the Russian witch Baba Yaga—has stepped on a hapless human body, crushing it like Oz’s Wicked Witch. Gun smoke wafts over a community of claptrap, multi-colored structures and sweeps in its wake a maelstrom of fish and drowning figures. Knechtel envisions this era (“yuga” is the Hindu term for “epoch”) as a “season of the witch,” fraught with violence and surreal bad magic.

The Cart (2007) depicts a getaway vehicle, but one loaded with risks and liabilities. Four red horses drag a circus wagon whose cargo, a fierce black and white tiger outlined in Christmas lights, is on the verge of escape. Drawn as a schematic with outlined platforms holding a miniature city, the cart is driven by a headless male figure who seems oblivious to the violent force he hauls behind him. Knechtel’s wild ride may be rudderless but it packs a ferocious filligreed punch. In his resonant theatrical set pieces, the props themselves spin tales of everyday survival and unfathomed dreams. Knechtel translates allusive metaphorical ideas into arrays of images that haunt the mind.

—Michael Duncan

John M. Miller at Margo Leavin

John M. Miller’s paintings are familiar to Los Angeles viewers who have encountered them in numerous solo and groups shows over the last three decades. Having decided on a compositional structure—a repeating pattern of



Left to right, John M. Miller’s *Untitled (GRV) SDV* and *Untitled (WWVV) 3DV*, both 1995; at Margo Leavin.

diagonal bars on raw canvas—in the 1970s, he has continued to refine, resize and experiment coloristically without substantially deviating from his original vision.

For this show, Miller’s pristine, majestic canvases occupied one large skylit room and two smaller galleries at Margo Leavin. The main gallery included four same-size vertical canvases, approximately 7½ by 6 feet, two on the long wall opposite the entrance and one on each side wall. Bathed in sunlight and glowing with deep, rich color, they were perfectly scaled to the architectural space and projected a commanding presence. Painted with acrylic and resin, the bars on two of the canvases are green; one bar is so dark that it’s almost indistinguishable from black. Although Miller’s palette has expanded since the ‘80s, when he worked primarily with different shades of black, the darker tones are still difficult to identify. He now includes abbreviated names of his colors in the paintings’ titles. The dark green bars in *Untitled (DEEP GR) SR* (2006) had the surprising effect of throwing a gray-green cast

(rather than one tinted red by an afterimage) onto the beige canvas. Likewise, the raw canvas of *Untitled (R) SR* (2006) was warmed by red bars, which lessens the contrast between figure and ground. The color of blood (rather than of Coca-Cola packaging or a fire engine), the red is specific, if not referential. This powerfully emotive work and the second green painting were installed halfway through the run of the show, replacing a 25-foot wide, five-panel painting. Miller prefers to emphasize the junctures, which he calls “divi-

sions,” where the panels meet; thus the title of this black, green, blue, red and black painting: *Bang (BKGRBLRBK) 4DV* (2006). Not on view when I visited the show, the work was reportedly a triumph of subtle but complex color and monumental scale.

Two other gallery spaces held three paintings each. On smaller canvases, the bars are scaled down proportionally and create a tighter field. One way of thinking about the production of Miller’s paintings is to imagine the field as potentially endless and emphatically planar, with the artist placing a rectangular frame over a preexisting section of the field rather than beginning with a blank canvas and filling it in with a pattern. This would account for the ways in which the bars are cut off by the framing edges and the fact that, while still part of the established progression, one diagonal bar often falls at the dead center of a multipaneled painting, split between two panels.

Untitled (WWVV) 3DV (1996), for example, includes four abutted canvases: two on the left with white bars and two on the right with very dark violet bars. At the center, bisected by the abutted edges of the two middle panels, one bar is exactly half white and half violet. The vertical divisions counteract the tendency to read the field as a landscape or the painting’s shape as an object. For all their abstract, structural precision, the paintings’ scale and handmade touch—especially evident in the way the edge of the painted bar bites into the raw canvas—are indelibly human.

—Frances Colpitt

Channa Horwitz at Solway Jones

During this show of recent work by veteran Los Angeles artist Channa Horwitz, there hung, in the gallery’s back office, a schematic

pencil-and-collage version of her proposal (dated 1968) for “Art and Technology,” the landmark 1970 exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. (The proposed piece, featuring floating colored fluorescent lights held in position at designated intervals by means of powerful magnets, was not accepted—nor was the work of any other woman.) With an understatement consistent with this artist’s approach, the work’s presence here telescoped four decades of studio toil and implicitly celebrated the deliberate unfolding of a long, fruitful and still-thriving career.

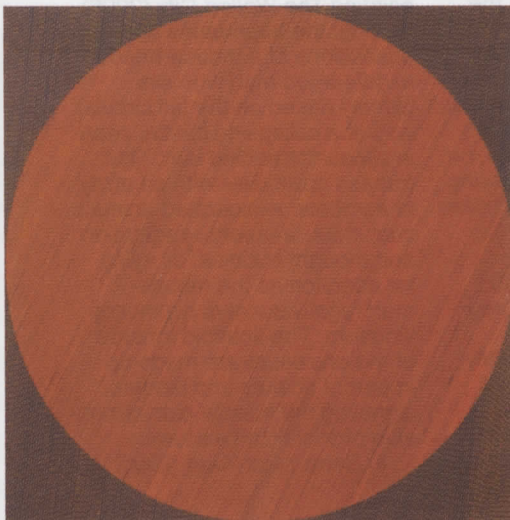
Stealing the show (titled “Variations,” all works 2007) were two series in casein on paper, each consisting of eight individual works. Both are predicated on



Brian Calvin: *Coatcheck*, 2007, acrylic on canvas, 48 inches square; at Marc Foxx.

a circle centered on a square sheet, over which two sets of innumerable closely spaced parallel lines are painted. The tautly ruled lines could pass for colored pencil; they form a scrim through which the circle is glimpsed, and their differing angles of slant produce the optical crackle of moiré. In “Pink to Burgundy Circle Variance,” the components progress in size from 13 inches to 28 inches on a side; the circle is orange and the palette of overlaid lines deepens through the series, from the pale and frosty *no. 1* through yellow and green, slate blue and sturdy red, ending with the darkly radiant *no. 8*, in which the lines are maroon and blue-black. The overall effect is as sonorous as a foghorn. The “Brown to Green Circle Variance” series displays a similar progression, keyed to the title colors. Here the circle remains the same size throughout while the sheets become larger, so that in *no. 1*

Channa Horwitz: *No. 6*, from the “Pink to Burgundy Circle Variance” series, 2007, casein on paper, 23¾ inches square; at Solway Jones.



it is contiguous with the edge of the 13-inch-square sheet but floats within the surrounding field in the 28-inch-square *no. 8*.

Horwitz has long-standing ties to the L.A. dance and music communities, and it is easy to imagine these steps corresponding to the eight-tone scale. While the artist's attitude is rigorous and systematic, the effect of the inevitable, minuscule deviations in her conceptual program is unexpectedly sensuous.

A number of works on paper explore interval and interference using a central rectangle shape, but these are less compelling than the two largest works, 42-inch-square black-ink drawings in which the salient optical mechanism is plain to see but nevertheless entrancing. In *Wave Moiré I*, two sets of parallel lines crisscross a large white disk that looms out of surrounding black. One slants left and one right just a few degrees from the vertical, producing that moiré effect of movement and secondary pattern, in wavering lateral bands where the sets of lines crisscross. *Wave Moiré II* features a disk of tightly spaced concentric circles, again centered on the sheet, overlaid with right-leaning lines. The optical confusion is here confined to a horizontal band through the center of the circle. In our current revisiting of Op art, this fascinating body of work is an important reference point.

—Stephen Maine