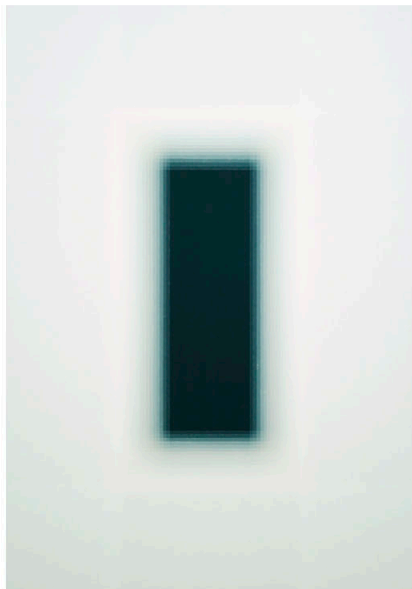


Northern California

Patsy Krebs at Haines Gallery

Patsy Krebs dreams in sublime, frosty color. In her seventh solo show at Haines Gallery, aptly named *Hibernal Dreams*, Krebs presented a series of unframed panels, each deftly layered with a latticed grid of translucent acrylic. The rough geometry of these overlapping beams of color generates a deceptive depth and an elusive sense of motion, a somewhat disorienting effect of moving through space towards a denser core, or of being pulled away from a center of gravity, by turns.



Patsy Krebs, *Measure of Time By Trees*, 2007, acrylic on wood panel, 26" x 18", at Haines Gallery, San Francisco.

In prior series, Krebs has made reference to objects in the natural world with paintings whose colors approximate those of specific bird's eggs, or canvases whose composition reveals a horizon line and a light source reminiscent of diurnal phenomena. Aided by the power of suggestion, paintings in the Haines Gallery show such as *Hibernaculum* (Latin for "tent for winter quarters") and *Measure of Time By Trees* can also be read as extreme abstractions of biomorphic forms.

The pale grays and spectral blues of *The Study of Trees in Winter (Grey)* shiver against each other as their edges sharpen, then blur, their tones perpetually shifting. *Pearl Dor*, named for a variety of rose with an apricot hue, has perhaps the most inscrutable blend of colors in the exhibition, holding the barest trace of a core and inducing a sensation approximating

snow blindness, with fuzzed-out spots of luminescence emerging and fading.

This is a highly organic op art that plays its tricks on the senses not with calculated optical technology or a woozy psychedelia; rather, what appears to be cool precision melts into an almost imperceptibly modulated, natural line from a very near distance. It is this slight concession to the inexactitude of her own hand that lends Krebs's virtuosic handling of paint and perceptual control an air of natural instability.

Krebs received an MFA from Claremont College in the early 1970s, at a time when artists loosely associated with Southern California's light and space movement like James Turrell and Robert Irwin were studying and teaching nearby. Now based in Northern California, Krebs spends a significant amount of time in the Southwestern United States, a region renowned for an atmospheric quality of light that lends itself to a barely-there aesthetic shared by many of its residents—Agnes Martin, Richard Tuttle, Larry Bell and Turrell among them. Her biography mentions a specialization in "light and space design for small meditation rooms and chapels," marking an affinity with Mark Rothko and his eponymous chapel as a sculptor of immersive spaces and environments unabashedly geared towards the uplifting and transcendental.

A spiritual bent is evident in titles of earlier works which make veiled reference to Books of the Hours and illuminated manuscripts; in the series recently on view, *Panis Angelicus* (borrowing a line from a liturgical hymn) stood out as one of the most luminous panels. Even her work that addresses the mundanities of nature retains an ethereal, otherworldly quality (an effect quite difficult to achieve with relatively unforgiving acrylics). These panels unfold at a glacial pace, but they are undeniably time-based pieces that reward an observant, sustained gaze. A close reading of these paintings reveals an awesome sense of texture, neither pixelated nor flawlessly smooth, that is increasingly absent in a high-definition, screen-based visual culture.

Krebs has weathered more than thirty seasons of a volatile art market, and her *Hibernal Dreams*—mounted during a rare San Francisco heat wave and an economic meltdown—provided an oasis of relief and proved that cooler heads can prevail.

—Christie Bradley

Patsy Krebs: Hibernal Dreams closed in May at Haines Gallery, San Francisco.

Christie Bradley is a freelance writer based in San Francisco.