

# Art in America

INTERNATIONAL • REVIEW



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CHARLES AVERY REPORT FROM PAKISTAN MARTIN BARRÉ  
VENICE ARCHITECTURE BIENNALE





Patricia Iglesias:  
*Floor plan I*, 2008,  
mixed mediums  
on vellum, 24 by 36  
inches; at Fake Estate.



Isabel Bigelow: *falling (grey)*,  
2008, oil on panel, 40 by  
72 inches; at Sears Peyton.

Iglesias's second solo show at the gallery. The artist was born and raised in Buenos Aires but has lived in New York for the past few years.

The architectural plans that she salvaged are of the Caledonian Hospital in Brooklyn, and are signed by Samuel A. Haffey, A.I.A., of Park Avenue. They show, with professional attention to detail and meticulous annotation, such things as the "Foundation to Sub-Cellar Plan," and include the standard symbols for stairs, doors and other features. They reveal signs of age—discoloration and fading. Onto the rational T-square-and-compass order of the plans, Iglesias has introduced unruly blobs and squiggles of color in intuitive interactions. Her pools and splotches of paint sometimes follow the architecture but more often defy it. The meandering lines, smudges and doodles bring to mind blood- and liver-colored organs, intestines, flesh-toned tubers and pale bodily fluids. Iglesias has used this type of mark-making before, so the meeting of what she calls her "vocabulary of images" with the hospital plans is both fortuitous and fitting. In previous paintings, she pursued affliction as a topic. Here the paint suggests the undoing of the best-laid designs of medicine.

It is difficult to say anything about the shows at Fake Estate without mentioning the gallery itself. This matchbox of a space, 8 by 10 feet at most, is

so tiny that two visitors cause crowd conditions. The name is a tribute to the artist Gordon Matta-Clark, who, in the early '70s, bought useless scraps of New York real estate such as a foot-wide space between two buildings, documented the plots in detail and called them his fake estates.

—Michael Harvey

## ISABEL BIGELOW SEARS PEYTON

For the eight new oils on panel in this exhibition, Isabel Bigelow reduced natural forms to iconic silhouetted shapes in compositions strongly influenced by Japanese prints. Minimalist and decorative, her work makes landscape the occasion for an extremely refined treatment of materials and painting surfaces.

Each work assumes a distinctive size and format—panoramic horizontal, small square or large diptych—in which she investigates relations of dimension, proportion and shape. The group (all 2008) included allover paintings, near-monochrome paintings, and paintings that emphasize both asymmetry and strong contrasts between dark and light.

In the nearly monochrome, 22-inch-square *untitled (space between yellow trees)*, the shapes of tree branches against sky articulate a composition that moves from the panel's edges to frame a vacant central space. Yellow

forms are barely differentiated from yellow ground. In a reverse configuration, the spectral image in *red tree* is centered. Both paintings rely on a relative evenness of tonality and invisibility of facture, as compared to other works on view in which the surface treatment assumes prominence.

In three allover paintings, *snow*, *falling (grey)* and *falling (blue)*, Bigelow manipulated the surface through an extended process of painting and sanding, transforming individual snowflakes (in the first painting) and crescent-shaped leaves (in the other two) into marks of varied densities and transparencies. This is especially effective in *snow* and *falling (grey)*, where the layering of shapes on burnished surfaces and the streaking of color residue through the pale grounds introduce a sense of time and motion. In *untitled (grass)*, the individual arching, linear blades laid down in two different greens and their overall configuration in the field strike a balance between the deliberately clustered and the randomly dispersed.

Asymmetry serves to slacken the tension between image and abstraction in Bigelow's paintings of willow trees. In *blue willow*, her use of a high-gloss varnish, as well as her meticulously geometric stylization of individual leaves, signal her prioritizing the painting's decorative details over its character as object. Such an emphasis was easily encompassed in



## EXHIBITION REVIEWS

Whiting Tennis:  
*Rooster*, 2008, acrylic  
and collage on canvas,  
70½ by 55½ inches;  
at Derek Eller.



the show's broad premise of formal variation, linking Bigelow's project with both 19th-century symbolist landscape painting and 20th-century seriality.

—Susan Rosenberg

### WHITING TENNIS DEREK ELLER

In his third solo exhibition at Derek Eller, Seattle's Whiting Tennis winningly conjured a nostalgically tinged, derelict rural America. The 22 works shown (all 2005-08) ranged confidently across sculpture, painting, printmaking, collage and drawing; most represent weathered, tumble-down structures and seem stuck together with string and spit. They recall artists from Philip Guston to H.C. Westermann, but strike a highly individual tone and, in the case of the paintings, incorporate an unusual combination of mediums.

Though they're looming and dark, the ramshackle appearance of the two-dimensional works' subjects lends them an endearing vulnerability. In fact, gallery staff says, the 54-by-40-inch, acrylic-and-collage-on-canvas *Senior* recalls, for the artist, an elderly figure leaning on a walker. It depicts a seemingly unfinished gray stone tower; two uneven walls give way to a spindly wooden skeleton, and a hunched blue patchwork form suggests a figure leaning into

the interior. *Rooster* (70½ by 55½ inches) shows a tower with trapezoidal windows that is seemingly built from large scrap boards. In all the images here, Tennis uses a monotype process to capture the grain of various pieces of plywood on odd-shaped pieces of paper, from which he assembles his fanciful structures on canvas; he paints the backgrounds. The funniest of the lot was the 7½-foot-wide *Blue Hamburger*, which at first seems an abstract composition of collaged wood-grained paper and painted blue and white passages. Look closer and there emerges a small house cobbled together from collaged-paper simulations of plywood sheets. Gaps in its surface are covered with blue plastic tarps or clear plastic sheeting, and a sign on the latticed wood door reads "back in 5 minutes."

Two large floor sculptures on low plywood bases bring the paintings' quirky edifices into three dimensions. Standing 83 inches high, *Boogeyman* is a roughly pyramidal wooden form, with an appendage on one side supported by four-by-fours, the whole covered in tar for a shiny, tactile black surface. A latched door suggests possible entry, as though this were some rural Darth Vader's own privy. *The New Green*, at a more modest 56 by 34 by 32 inches, is a narrow, five-sided, irregular-shaped wood chamber clad with wood shingles painted a pale green that shouts '70s

suburbs. An open part of its top is faced with polyethylene sheeting, providing the only glimpse into a dark interior. But it also sports a small latched screen door, which makes it resemble a compact pigeon coop.

Several wall-mounted, painted-wood sculptures, each between 1½ and 2 feet high, suggest birdhouses; one is called *Dead Bird*, another *White Owl*. The similar-sized *Shop Kit*, with various found objects hanging from hooks on a pegboard—including a letter postmarked 1976, a prescription bottle from the 1960s and a checked tea towel—veers too much into the literal. For my money it was the only false note in an otherwise delightful evocation of an old, weird America.

—Brian Boucher

### LEIF KATH ELIZABETH HARRIS

If Myron Stout were to come back as a midcareer Danish artist, his work might look like that of Leif Kath, whose show was among the first in a spate of New York exhibitions last year of small geometric paintings, and one of the best. Kath's work is intimate and unassuming, modest in size—most are roughly 16 by 20 inches—but strongly graphic; any one of these paintings could hold its own alone on a wall while displaying