



INTERNATIONAL WORLD

Art in America

VENICE '09

plus
SIGMAR POLKE
DIKE BLAIR
HONG KONG

ARTIST

EXHIBITION REVIEW



Thornton Willis: *gotham's rhythm*, 2008, oil on canvas, 106 by 65 inches; at Elizabeth Harris.



Clay Wagstaff: *Ocean No. 23*, 2008, oil on canvas, 36 by 80 inches; at Sears Peyton.

(2008). Here, rail heads and figures, room table, space. On the sea is a red fish; pickle, slogs ghetto. On the Saul's head is hovering glass, the it the end of a the studio.

—David Ebony

Thornton Willis's work is a departure from the forms of the art world varied from red abstractions to configurations of an Klun. A riff on these seems overly naive and Child recycled. Willis, in his own, using it to emphasize the

Amired for his intuition as well as process. His work, spontaneous work yielding straight up, to let you know some still redo-

lent of oil's distinctive, artisanal smell. Idiosyncratic hue trumps more neutral structure in works quirkily designed to produce emotive effects. Two other artists who make geometry equally expressive, equally personal are Mary Heilmann and Chris Martin.

Willis's highly diverse palette is more urban than pastoral, as in *gotham's rhythm*, with its browns and industrial greens and grays in combination with crimson and pink. Midnight blue is his black, and pink—a color present in nearly all the paintings—serves as his white. As a challenge, Willis puts together some risky color schemes in paintings such as *flash black*, replete with muddy, bile-colored rectangles—a kind of ground except it doesn't recede—slashed by bands of orange, red, pink, yellow and gray that often work against each other. His canny addition of a vertical, midnight-blue median snaps it all thrillingly together.

Willis's wavered bands, painted free-hand, are fuzzy at the edges, and other colors show through or outline them, evidence of what's beneath. Curiously, the bands tend to shift slightly in color as they emerge from crossing other strips. There is no real attempt to make them appear interwoven, although we read them that way at first, despite the inconsistent tones. Then they break down into the separate entities they are, a quick back and forth between illusion and reality. Willis begins with what seems a simple premise and makes it hold all he knows and loves about painting—a formal feat that is deeply gratifying to see.

—Lily Wei

CLAY WAGSTAFF SEARS PEYTON

Clay Wagstaff embeds his curious and compelling landscapes with self-conscious traces of his process. Exposed grids—lines sketched on the canvas that bleed through the oil paint—materialize in skies over seas, trees and shorelines. Evidence of an order underneath, this overt gesture on one hand telegraphs a desire to control and on the other acknowledges an *atmosphere* to Wagstaff's efforts to replicate nature. "A Natural Order" was this Utah-based artist's second exhibition at Sears Peyton. Like "Dynamic Symmetry," his last (2007), its title refers to theories of Leonardo da Vinci concerning laws of natural design.

Wagstaff often contrasts paired things in his paintings (here 2008 or '09), a duality apparent in his execution as well. His brushstrokes are rough and broad, uneven, in the skies, streaked in muted colors precisely selected to portray hazy days. At the same time, his focus on minutiae is fierce, as in *Ocean No. 23*, at 36 by 80 inches among the largest works on view, in which detailed ridges on the faces of two giant boulders make them look like embroidered tapestry. An almost paint-by-numbers quality isolates each pool of shade on the rocks and the dark spots in the light gray-green waves and foam breaking on the sand.

Some of the tension in this work stems from the contrast Wagstaff estab-



Alyson Sholtz:
Equilibrium, 2009,
stainless-steel wire,
silvered glass beads,
aluminum, 120 by
108 by 144 inches;
at Derek Eller.



Anne Neely: *Special
Delivery*, 2008, oil on
linen, 24 by 32 inches;
at Lohin Geduld.

ishes between the paired elements, where one is idealized, nearly perfect, and the other appears flawed and, perhaps, more realistic. Two treetops, alone, are rendered in vivid relief, as in a Japanese print, against a mustard yellow background in *Tree Silhouette No. 3*; one tree is whole and healthy while the other appears skeletal. In *Birds with Crescent Moon*, what look like vultures rest on the uppermost branches of another pair of evergreens. Here, one treetop is symmetrical, crowned by an opened-wing vulture, while the other is roughly shaped, with four stooped avians seemingly too big for their perches, a delicate menace.

Still, there's something soothing in Wagstaff's straightforward, undramatic settings, a sense that the world, as this artist depicts it, is quiet, calm and manageable—an effect that is heightened when we step away from the paintings. At a remove, the vultures are just birds, and you don't notice the grids keeping chaos at bay. Like a stoic cousin to the Hudson River School painters, Wagstaff, with his ideas of order, draws something spiritual out of the hush he creates in his unpeopled, un sentimental landscapes.

—Elaine Sexton

ALYSON SHOLTZ DEREK ELLER

A luminous gravity marks Alyson Sholtz's recent sculptures, each a seem-

ing Sholtz's virtuosity is most apparent. Five hundred supple piano wires strung with myriad silvered glass beads hang from an armature close to the ceiling and drop to the floor, forming a 10-foot-high cage whose gentle contours slope into a shell shaped by its own weight. Sholtz has created a work that faintly echoes Richard Serra's "Torqued Ellipses." But where his sloping walls are impenetrable steel framing actual corridors, hers are made of strands and air, and the piece may be traversed by sight alone.

Sharing the main gallery with *Equilibrium* was another sculpture from 2009, *Thread Drawing #3 (Wave)*, made of thin black thread looped under the heads of hundreds of straight pins stuck into the wall to create a shallow (2-inch-deep) relief. Sholtz modulates the spans between threads to create a net of irregular diamond shapes that, together with the shadows they cast, form an amorphous "wave" somehow suggesting musculature and fins.

The standout was the site-sensitive *Phase Shift* (2008), the sole occupant of the dimmed rear gallery. Lit from above, 11 stainless-steel wires sprayed out toward the door, each strung with glass beads and hand-cut disks of plastic lenses that cast eerie oval pockets of light on the wall, floor and viewer. Like air bubbles escaping a diver's tank, the refractions turned the space magically sonic despite its total silence.

Supercalifrag (2008) hangs from the

like ice gath
volumes ap
shadows it
to theatrical
Sholtz deftly
variables in
whole as he
The cryptic
Shift," taker
gallery, is a
tures, with t
the ephome

ANNE NEELY LOHIN GEDULD

Though man
ings (all 2008
Water," Anne
at Lohin Ged
tidal inlets ar
Maine studio
the improvis
Neely reveal
subject matt
echoes natu
dissimilar to
Snyder. In w
7 feet across
along with s
palette knife
washes, drip

The blue-
quarters of
by 72 inches
crowded wi