

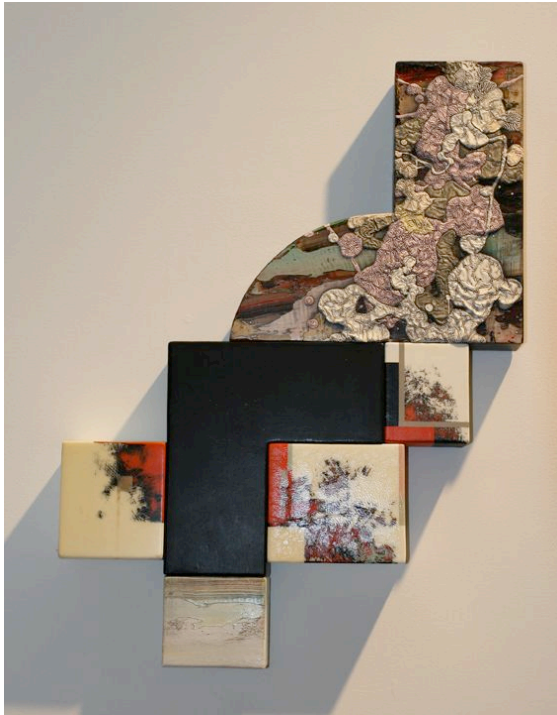
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SAN FRANCISCO



**Cornelia Schulz: "Recent Paintings"
at Patricia Sweetow Gallery**

"Cross Chatter," 2009

Cornelia Schulz

Oil, alkyd, acrylic on canvas

20" x 15"

Photo: courtesy of Patricia Sweetow Gallery

In the 1950s and 1960s, art critic Clement Greenberg championed abstract painting that would explore color, shape and structure divested of references to the real world; the non-rectangular geometric canvases of Frank Stella epitomize that anti-illusionist logic. In the '70s, postmodern theorists argued instead for an art of inclusive "complexity and contradiction," to quote architect Robert Venturi, that would embrace the rich messiness of the world and eschew single (and thus limited) interpretations; much contemporary art follows this path, prizing concept and process over visual effect or emotional affect. Such dichotomous thinking results in polemical, programmatic art: minimalism can be emotionally abstemious, while kitchen-sink maximalism can lack coherence and force.

But need one choose? The abstract assemblage paintings of Cornelia Schulz synthesize both approaches, combining their virtues and canceling their defects. In the 1970s Schulz juxtaposed Hofmannesque color blocks with penciled grids and squeegeed slatherings of paint to create complex visual spaces; she has carried this dialogue between the gestural/ spatial and the

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geometric into her current works in canvas over wood. These small works are eccentrically shaped à la Stella, but his orderly progression of parallel stripes gets replaced with the discordances of collage; Schulz bolts together oddly-shaped canvases, with their orthogonal bends and zigzags, notches, rounded corners, and semicircles, into configurations, that suggest architectural floor plans with their rooms, walkways, and decks. To this irregular Tetris-like geometry Schulz adds illusionism, or, rather an illusion of illusionism; her poured, dripped, smeared, splattered, puckered, and sanded markings (in oil, alkyd resin, acrylic and ink) never cohere into representation, but their organic textures and aqueous or magmatic flows sumptuously evoke landscape, topography, and cartography. The effect is of architecture set within landscape—the phenomenal world recreated metaphorically in paint. The contradiction between the paint layers and the interlocked puzzle pieces keeps the images surprising, yet the colliding information is kept firmly contained within the compositions—as Schulz’s playful, witty titles (Faux Simile, Topical Turn, Pressing Issues, Cross Chatter, Jolie Laide, Character Analysis, Bold Over) similarly link discrepant meanings.

—DEWITT CHENG