

RACHEL HELLMANN BOATS ON THE CEILING



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SWOPE ART MUSEUM

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January 30 – March 16, 2019

190 Orchard St, New York, NY 10002

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Standing Straight / 2018 / 30" × 22" × 6.5" / Acrylic on poplar wood



Blaze / 2018 / 26" × 21" × 7" / Acrylic on poplar wood



Twofold / 2017 / 45" x 47" x 6.5" / Acrylic on poplar wood



Voyage / 2018 / 22" x 24" x 7" / Acrylic on poplar wood



BOATS ON THE CEILING

ANGELICA FREY

The transformation of architecture into something magical and otherworldly permeates Rachel Hellmann's *Boats on the Ceiling*, which consists of a combination of two-dimensional paintings on paper and three-dimensional wooden sculptures made with acrylics on poplar wood, all adorned with brightly colored linear patterns that occupy the intersection between geometric rigor and surrealist illusion.

Transformation happens on different levels of the work, especially in sculptural pieces. The most apparent transformation is the material one: wood, a tribute to the artist's family ties to carpentry, is already a transformed material, having gone through different cycles in its natural and artificial states. The physical aspect of the works also contains elements which rest on the level of dialogue with the person in front of it, with strong architectural and, consequently, experiential components. Three-dimensional sculptural paintings are fully painted on the back and sides and, as a consequence, physicality shifts depending on the point of view of the observer, who has to physically move to fully investigate the piece.

Hellmann recreates prism-like transparencies in both formats, which contribute to the illusionistic experience, like light bouncing off a wall and color shifting in space. The play between actual space and illusion is explored along with the slipperiness between dream and memory. Painted transparency is, in itself, a parallel of memory: layers of painted space mirror the layers of memory.

In fact, *Boats on the Ceiling* is the concretization of a recurring daydream Hellmann had as a child; the church she attended with her family had a wooden, beamed ceiling that fascinated her. In her daydreams, the rectangular segments of the ceiling would quietly break apart and they would morph into rafts: there was a flood happening and people needed to escape.

The language of music informs Hellmann's creative work. What it does is give clarity of language to works that are abstract, making them accessible. Pitch and frequency help articulate the concept of vibrancy coupled with geometric rigor in a way that implies a sensory connection. Strong memories come from vibrant experiences, and vibrant experiences are rendered in vibrant colors. Ambitious colorplay explores the ties between memory and sensory experience, with contrasting yellows, greens and purples vibrating with the friction between the abstract and concrete.

What can be done in a minimal language is an important question surrounding the conceptual component of Hellmann's work. While the actual construction of her pieces is quite complex, on both a conceptual and formal level, one of the simplest way to create form is through a fold, a bend or a crease, and she uses bends and folds as essential components of her three-dimensional works, which follow the shapes and dynamics of origami or, even more, kites: kites bend space and activate the air, and their potential is not apparent until air is around them, and, much like kites, her works achieve their full expressive potential once they physically occupy their surrounding space.

Angelica Frey is a writer based in Brooklyn by way of Milan, Italy. Her work appeared in the New York Times, New York Magazine's Bedford+Bowery, Hyperallergic, Observer, The Outline, Lenny Letter, Atlas Obscura and more.





Staying Afloat / 2018 / 42" x 34" x 6" / Acrylic on poplar wood



Wander / 2018 / 39" x 34" x 5" / Acrylic on poplar wood



Air Glide / 2018 / 28" x 24" x 7" / Acrylic on poplar wood



Glance / 2018 / 25" x 23" x 6" / Acrylic on poplar wood



Surge / 2018 / 27" x 22" / Acrylic on paper



Dusk / 2018 / 27" x 22" / Acrylic on paper



Diffract / 2018 / 27" x 22" / Acrylic on paper



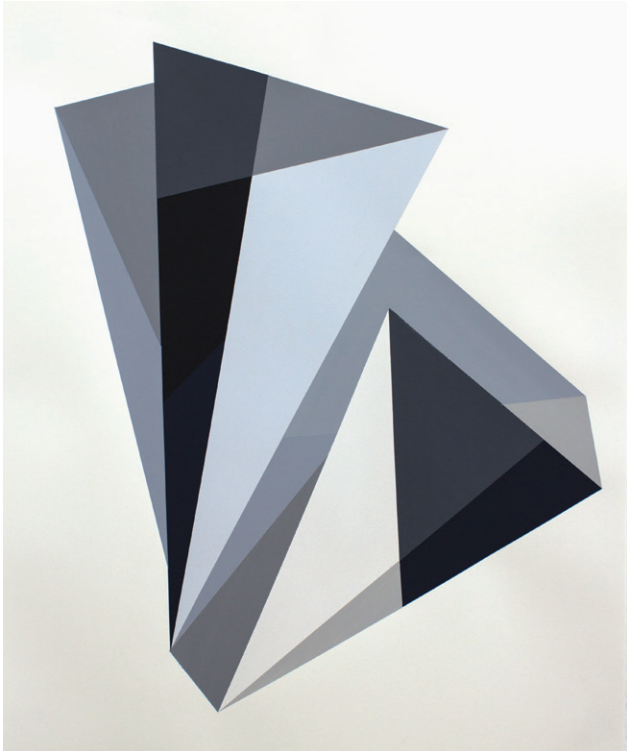
Glitter / 2018 / 27" x 22" / Acrylic on paper



Polarize / 2018 / 27" x 22" / Acrylic on paper



Fleeting / 2018 / 27" x 22" / Acrylic on paper



Soar / 2018 / 27" x 22" / Acrylic on paper



Sail / 2018 / 27" x 22" / Acrylic on paper



Glo / 2018 / 27" x 22" / Acrylic on paper



Sky Drift / 2018 / 27" x 22" / Acrylic on paper



Recording Time / 2018 / 27" x 22" / Acrylic on paper



Flash / 2018 / 27" x 22" / Acrylic on paper

RACHEL HELLMANN

Rachel Hellmann is a multi-disciplinary artist who is known for her ongoing series of meticulously-crafted geometric sculptures and paintings. Her works fuse the mediums of painting and sculpture and seemingly defy the movement of the solid and heavy wooden-medium with their carefully coordinated use of light, shadow, and dimension. Working both three-dimensionally and on paper, the resulting forms explore the way in which the viewer's perception is disoriented by the distorted sense of gravity caused by the careful interplay of geometry, light, and color.

Hellmann is interested in utilizing painting in a way that tests the limits of the medium by creating structures that function as objects, physically occupying their surrounding space. Similar to the hard edge work of Ellsworth Kelly and the three-dimensional shaped wooden paintings of Charles Hinman, Hellmann's works demonstrate unassuming techniques that emphasize simplicity of form and bend the limits of the medium. Drawing from her family's extensive experience in carpentry, Hellmann is passionate about the mastery and precision in her created structures – and her pieces necessitate this careful attention to detail. Though the process of creating the paintings is slow and requires precision, the works are just as reliant on Hellmann's intuition as they are on her planning.

Rachel Hellmann lives and works in Terre Haute, Indiana. She holds an MFA from Boston University and a BFA from the University of Dayton, OH. Her work has been exhibited widely both nationally and internationally at a variety of venues, including the Addison Gallery of American Art in Andover, MA, the University of Maine Museum of Art in Bangor, ME, the Danforth Museum of Art in Framingham, MA, and the Elmhurst Museum of Art in Elmhurst, IL. Hellmann has been the recipient of the Blanche E. Colman Award for Painting, the Constatin Alajalov Award, and was awarded residencies at the Ragdale Foundation in Forest Park, IL, Platte Clove Preserve, Catskills, NY and Playa in Eastern Oregon. Her work is included in a number of collections including: the Addison Gallery of American Art, Fidelity Investments, William P. Clements Jr. University Hospital, and the University of Maine Museum of Art. She has been a professor of art at multiple institutions and has been a visiting artist at many colleges including: MassArt, Boston, MA, Dartmouth College, and Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI.





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