

group shows and presented the following projects: *Transphysics*, Art and Culture Center, Hollywood (2017), *100+ Degrees in the Shade: A Survey of South Florida Art* (2015), *MIA-BER*, Berlin Arts Club (2014), *Following the Line*, Girls' Club (2012), *I Triennial*, Santo Domingo (2010), *globe>miami<island*, DC Museum of Contemporary Art (2002) and The Bass (2001). Rifas is represented in various permanent collections, including The Bass (Miami Beach), Fairchild Tropical Gardens (Miami), Metro-Dade Art in Public Places Trust (Miami), Museo de Arte de Ponce (Puerto Rico), Museum of Contemporary Art (North Miami), Perez Art Museum Miami, and Valencia Community College (Orlando).

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MAY 24 — OCT 21, 2018

# KAREN RIFAS: *DECEPTIVE CONSTRUCTIONS*

## Notes

- 1 The enormous creative potential of the constructive principle as it is found in the work and ideas of the Russian avant-garde helps to account for the great variety of work produced between 1912 and 1932. The constructive principle reflects a way of seeing the world. As such, it becomes a principle for organizing this way of seeing through objects and in life. "*The Idea of Construction as the Creative Principle in Russian Avant-Garde Art*, Patricia Railing, Leonardo, Vol. 28, No. 3 (1995), pp. 193-202.
- 2 Rifas' consideration of scale is devised using physical models. "I make to-scale' maquettes of the space and work out the details down to the exact angles and number of cords. Once I begin working on the maquettes, a preconceived idea evolves just as does a preconceived painting or drawing." March 12, 2018, conversation between Karen Rifas and curator Leilani Lynch.
- 3 Swiss German artist, Paul Klee noted that, "Color has always got something mysterious about it that cannot be properly understood...Colors are the most irrational element in painting. They have something suggestive about them, a suggestive power." *The Suggestive Power of Color*, Michael J. Zenzen, The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Winter, 1977), pp. 185-190.

## Images

- 1 Karen Rifas, *0433*, 2018, acrylic on gesso board, 45 x 60 x 1.5 in. Photography by Frank Casale. Image courtesy of the artist and Emerson Dorsch.
- 2 Karen Rifas, *0333*, 2016, acrylic on paper, 45 x 45 in. Photography by Frank Casale. Image courtesy of the artist and Emerson Dorsch.
- 3 Karen Rifas, *0219*, 2016, acrylic on paper, 45 x 37.5 in. Photography by Frank Casale. Image courtesy of the artist and Emerson Dorsch.

Based in Miami for over 60 years, Karen Rifas' artistic practice is rooted in an unwavering exploration of geometry and the possibilities of the straight line. Like Albers, Rothko, Herrera, Mondrian and Lewitt before her, Rifas reshapes perception and proposes new worlds using a pared down language of line and, now, color.

From minimal cord installations that alter the viewer's understanding of space, to methodical drawings that negate the artist's hand, Rifas is committed to this exploration in all forms. *Deceptive Constructions* surveys the recent expansion of the Rifas' formal and material vocabulary to include color, comprising works created in the last two years. This new body of works, many on view for the first time, utilize notions of architecture and the tenets of the Bauhaus and Russian Constructivism<sup>1</sup> to create two- and three-dimensional artworks simultaneously communicating flatness and expanded spatiality that feel akin to virtual landscapes.

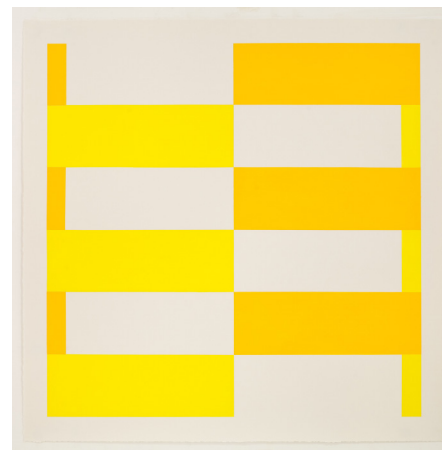
Though her recent paintings and sculptures privilege color as a dominant formal strategy, Rifas' work has long been constructed through the use of black and neutral tones. However, Rifas' oeuvre has never been completely devoid of color. In works prior to 2015 she used a Mondrian-like palette of yellows and reds that could soften or heighten the effects of her installations. Illustrative of her adherence to a monochromatic palette, Rifas' newly pigmented artworks originated with experimental black and white paintings, like *0219* (2016) and *0354* (2016), which balance voids and forms within roughly square formats. Through subtle shifts between black, gray, and white, the perspectival alignment of shapes suggests a landscape or three-dimensional

area, referencing Rifas' established formal language of invoking new spatial relationships within existing architecture.

From these experimentations with color-blocking and spatial perception, Rifas began to ardently employ color in her works on paper in early 2017. This body of work embraces hard edge painting and saturated color. Exemplified by *0333* (2016) and *0281* (2016), Rifas' palette ranges from bright, almost fluorescent yellows and oranges, muted, yet dense blues and greens, to softer lilacs and light pinks. These works oscillate between spaces and planes, deftly highlighting the nexus between perception and cognition of space through vivid tonal shifts.

Signaling a further alteration of dimensionality, Rifas' paintings on wood panel depart from bordered paper works and move toward clean-cut edges with dense color-blocking. Through the mistaken purchase of 24 in. square panels of varying depths, Rifas came to accentuate the movement and architectural likeness of this work by pairing these panels together. The work titled *8973* (2018), a two-by-two panel composition of yellow, orange, and red triangles, exemplifies the topography and movement within Rifas' works on panel that edge into the sculptural. Harkening to Op Art, *8973*'s transition between color and scale appears to move and transform when approached by the viewer.

Using standard dimensions of 24-by-24 in. 16-by-16 in, Rifas continually deploys the square as both a material framework and art



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historical foundation for her painted configurations. Though she does not limit herself to squares within the compositions, there are no rounded forms within the exhibition.

Augmenting the wall-works, The Bass' Harrison Gallery is framed by vinyl-covered wooden sculptures and a floor applique, site-specific in scale and pattern to the architecture of the gallery<sup>2</sup>. A vertical, L-shaped sculpture echoes the doorway height while a sculpture suspended in the room's corner utilizes the gallery's volume, seeming to defy gravity like a simulation. Once again, anchored by the square, Rifas' turquoise, pink and orange floor vinyl becomes three-dimensional with the layering of two, L-shaped, horizontal sculptures of the same palette. Functioning as seating, from which to experience the totality of the exhibition, the sculptures are manipulated and moved by the artist throughout the duration of the exhibition.

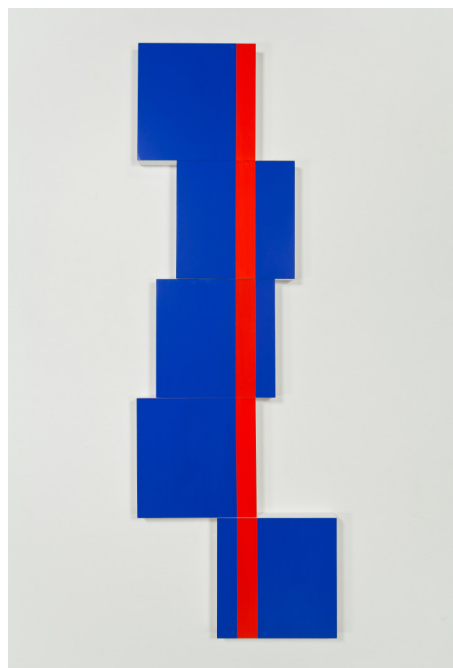
Throughout her oeuvre, Rifas underscores an interest in how to

efficiently communicate space. Following principles of the Bauhaus, Rifas' recent progression into color can be interpreted as an amalgam of visual strategies encoded to read as depth, form, or even object and narrative. These "deceptive constructions" are alternately immersive and impenetrable, enforcing a certain distortion between the viewer, the artwork, and the room. In 2018, these paintings refer to Paul Klee's theory of "suggestive color"<sup>3</sup> as much as computer-generated virtual realms.



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Karen Rifas (Chicago, b. 1942) lives and works in Miami and is a professor at New World School of the Arts. Recent solo exhibitions have been held at: Emerson Dorsch (2017), Meeting House Gallery (2016), De La Cruz Collection (2010), Pinnacle Gallery, Savannah College of Art and Design (2007), Polk Museum of Art (2004), and Museo De Arte Contemporaneo, Panama City



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