

(Miami), for example, a lime green grid imposes a distinct horizontal plane well "within" the painting, while numerous criss-crossing diagonals break the rest of the canvas into two-dimensional shards of aqua, pink, mauve and tangerine. This prismatic treatment may describe rays of light penetrating water or colorful reflections of the surrounding city playing on the surfaces of its ubiquitous and emblematic swimming pools.

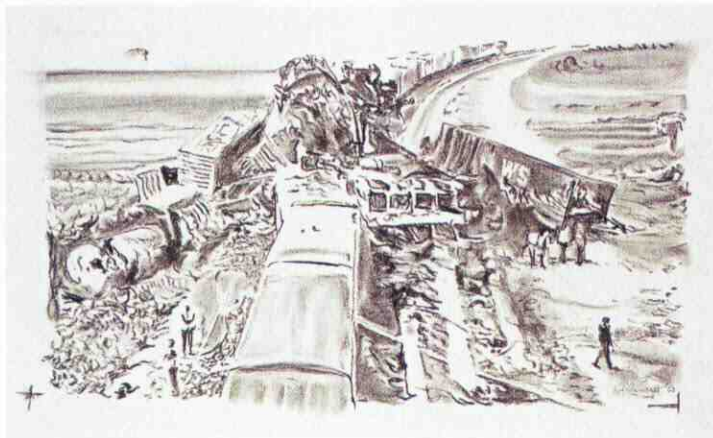
—Matthew Guy Nichols

Richard Artschwager at Anthony Grant and Nolan/Eckman

When it first appeared on the art scene in the early 1960s, Richard Artschwager's work seemed situated somewhere between Pop and Minimalism. His boxy sculptures celebrated a reductive geometry while retaining a reference to everyday objects such as chairs, tables and framed pictures. His paintings, linear representations of banal scenes, combined a Pop-style mockery of pictorial illusion and a Minimalist reliance on industrial materials (his favored support was Celotex, a textured ground created from sugarcane pressed over panels).

In the 1980s, the conceptual aspects of his work came to the fore when a younger generation embraced his art as a precursor to their own interest in appropriation and "simulacra." Suddenly, the wood-grain pattern of the Formica veneer that sheathed Artschwager's sculptures was not just retro, but spoke of the "post-natural" state of contemporary reality, while the machine-like Celotex paintings were seen as prescient challenges to the myths of authenticity and self-expression.

Richard Artschwager: *Untitled (Train Wreck)*, 2003, charcoal on paper, 16 by 29 inches; at Nolan/Eckman.



The work in Anthony Grant's condensed survey of four decades of Artschwager's work still looks fresh and provocative. Full of visual paradoxes and formal conundrums, the textured paintings and pieces of strange quasi-furniture now seem less about exploding the conventions of modernism than about challenging habits of perception. This show also suggested that Artschwager emerged pretty much full blown: pieces from the 1990s convey the same kind of thematic concerns and visual sleight of hand as those from the 1960s. A notable exception is an unusually direct body of work from 1994 that consists of plywood crates built to suggest the forms of the absent objects that they would enclose—identified in titles as coffins, confessionals and crosses. These sculptures have a strangely religious specificity and an unsettling funereal quality.

A concurrent show of Artschwager's recent drawings at Nolan/Eckman pointed to a new direction. Done in charcoal and displaying occasional smudges, these drawings are unabashedly hand-drawn, but the images are as deadpan as ever. Many appear to be based on news photos—an aerial view of a train wreck, for instance, or a crowd scene that the title identifies as a group of North Koreans. Several drawings present the contour of a single strange shape, identified variously in titles as a bladder, an arm or a hot water bottle. These almost abstract images draw attention to the quirky outline of the surrounding negative space. Here, as in Artschwager's earlier work, we are never quite sure what we are looking at or even if we should bother trying to identify the images. Whether working in two dimensions or

Shirazeh Houshiary: *Iota*, 2003, Aquacryl and ink on canvas, 74 1/2 inches square; at Lehmann Maupin.

three, Artschwager continues to tease us with his deft slippages between the banal and the enigmatic.

—Eleanor Heartney

Shirazeh Houshiary at Lehmann Maupin

Last year's exhibition "Between Word and Image" at New York University's Grey Art Gallery revealed calligraphy to be a central motif in modernist art from Iran. Iranian-born, London-based Shirazeh Houshiary does not belong to the older generation of artists included in that show, but her work reflects the Persian tradition of using the written word as a formal device. This show comprised a series of monochrome works on canvas and on paper imbued with what appears at first glance to be delicate atmospheric fields. Compositions on white paper seem gently washed with faint shadows, while those on black paper are inhabited by cloudlike presences made of tracers of white filigree lines. Up close, the subtly shifting tones reveal themselves to have been created by thousands of tiny marks that are, in turn, based on Arabic letters—one word per composition. Though virtually illegible, these words ground the works in an ancient script.

Iota (all works 2003) is a square black ground invaded by a central

white circle that radiates rings of dissolving intensity toward the edges. It has a nebulalike quality, suggesting infinite distances. *Gaze*, by contrast, presents a ghostly triangular form that hovers on the square white canvas, bringing one in close to seek the source of the discoloration. In other works the marks suggest bands, waves or amorphous puffs of smoke. Often they are barely detectable from a distance, creating a perceptual conundrum in which presence and absence are interchangeable.

Houshiary's closest Western kin is Agnes Martin, whose paintings present similar perceptual challenges. But Martin's work is more overtly nature based, evoking the subtly shifting colors of the Southwestern sky. Houshiary, by contrast, turns to a more internal source. The marks are applied in what the artist describes as a meditative, even trancelike, state. The ritual of writing and rewriting the word seems to dissolve the distance between action and thought.

The concerns of the paintings and drawings extend to a digital installation that was given its own room in the gallery. Here a funereal lament sung in four languages accompanied slowly shifting patterns of white marks on midnight blue grounds presented on four monitors recessed



in the wall. The white flecks slowly accumulate to form small clouds and then vanish, only to begin again. The installation is titled *Breath*, suggesting that this cycle of emergence and disappearance alludes equally to the expanding and contracting cosmos and to the continuous intake and expulsion of air that keeps us alive. —Eleanor Heartney

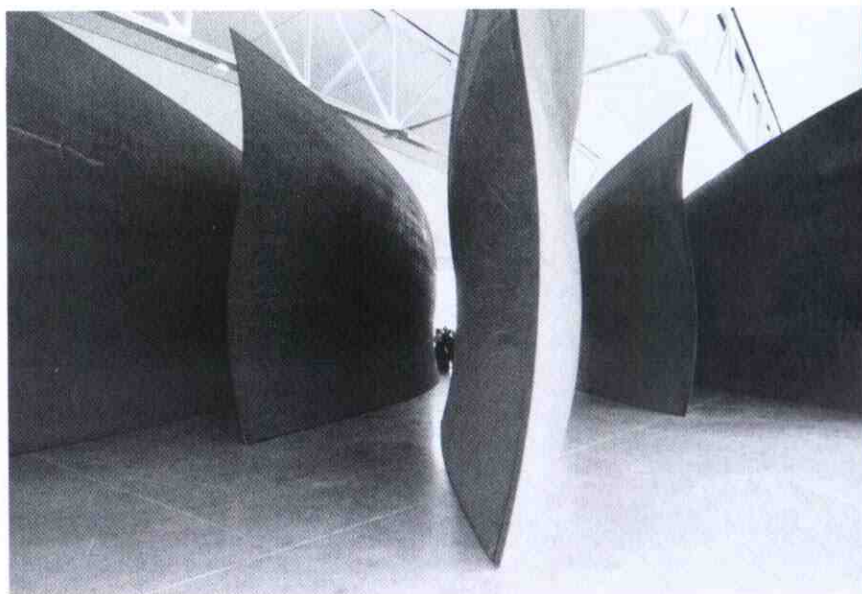
Gregor Schneider at Barbara Gladstone

West 24th Street between 10th and 11th avenues is known for its blue-chip galleries, but it's also home to garages, a car wash, a ragged Indian takeout joint frequented by taxi drivers, several industrial concerns, office buildings and a construction lot. It's not surprising, then, that casual passersby hardly registered another nondescript industrial space—one that looked like a cross between a garage, an empty warehouse and an alley—as a major new work by German artist Gregor Schneider. Essentially, Schneider turned the gallery's pristine exhibition room inside out, transforming it into a rugged, 13½-by-15-by-45-foot industrial space next door. One entered this new space not through the gallery's front entrance, but through a garagelike

metal door on the sidewalk that was always pulled partway down.

Titled *517 W 24th*, Schneider's installation announced its precise location, but prior to this show there was no such address in New York, due to the vagaries of building numbers. With Sheetrock walls that looked to be concrete and authentic pipes, drains and ducts found elsewhere and transported to the site, this ersatz industrial space at a phantom address convincingly masqueraded as a normal, if excruciatingly banal, part of the city. In a marked shift in gallery protocol, Schneider's work was open to the public 24 hours a day, and one wonders exactly what occurred there in the off hours. Tar-streaked walls, an oil-stained floor, caked plaster and traces of petroleum jelly gave this spare environment a nasty edge. A bare light near the back was exactly what you'd expect to find in an empty warehouse or garage, but it also implied prison courtyards and interrogation chambers, as well as lonely streets at night in provincial German cities. (Schneider lives in Rheydt, about an hour from Cologne.) A stoppered drain suggested no possible release from sully influences. Pipes and ducts protruding from the walls and the floor were appropriate but

dysfunctional, and they were not connected to any behind-the-scenes infrastructure. Slightly raised platforms on either side of the narrow space were at once precise and ungainly, and when one discovered that the walls were indeed Sheetrock, the whole place seemed precarious, like a jury-rigged movie set or a nightmare in which familiar things are not at all what they seem. The more time one spent in Schneider's public hideaway, the more unnerving it became. Even though you could easily leave, you still felt trapped, and it was hard to shake the feeling that a crime had perhaps been committed there, or soon would be.



Richard Serra: *Wake*, 2002-03, weatherproof steel, 14 by 75 by 46 feet; at Gagosian.

That's Schneider's forte: banal architectural spaces that shade into eccentricity and obsession, carrying a disturbing psychological charge. For years, Schneider has compulsively renovated the interior of a nondescript house in Rheydt, fitting it with hidden rooms, claustrophobic corridors, walls built in front of other walls and traces of the alleged inhabitant—one Hannelore Reuen, who is probably a fictive figure invented by Schneider (*House Ur*, 1985-present). When whole sections of this house were transported to the German Pavilion at the 2001 Venice Biennale, Schneider, who already enjoyed a cultish notoriety, hit the big time and came home with the grand prize. This new work confirmed that his peculiar conflation of mundane architectural spaces and pressurized psychology remains vital and engaging.

—Gregory Volk

Richard Serra at Gagosian

In his third major exhibition at Gagosian, Richard Serra presented three new monumental works expanding the experience of viewers moving through, around and within the constituent elements, and one work consisting of a single thick sheet of steel resting on the gallery floor. In *Wake* (2002-03) he aligns five towering, closed volumes of weatherproof steel in such a way that the serpentine passageways between them seem to shimmer with light. The five forms curve with or away

from each other—both vertically and along their lengths in a flattened-S toroid form—to create a series of spooning or ovoid spaces. *Wake* is 14 feet high and 46 feet wide by 75 feet long overall. In their related courses, the volumes, up to 6 feet wide, resemble the weathered hulls of slender freighters competing in some impossible regatta, with expressive splashes of rust from bow to stern. The three that appear to be the longest are placed forward of the convoy to convey the motion and tension implicit in Serra's "race."

The lyrical *Vice-Versa* (2003) consists of two curving walls that are simply articulated in opposite directions, creating a generous corridor of back-to-back crescents that curve gently from top to bottom and more deeply from end to end. More than 15 feet high, 38 feet long and 10 feet across, this work came closest to touching the building's ceiling. Bathed in a warm afternoon glow admitted to the space by skylights, the element closer to the center of the gallery was vivid with largely vertical bands of almost painterly corrosion. In this installation, it replicated the curve of the closest wall of *Blindspot* (2003), an eye-shaped spiral 13 feet high, 54 long and 32 across. *Blindspot* is scored and otherwise marked along its lengths with flakes of patina and bright, reflected scars of abraded steel. Given the potential for anxiety or mischief in the narrow passageway of the spiral, gallery attendants limited the number of viewers admitted at any one time.

Gregor Schneider: *517 W 24th*, 2003, steel, iron, concrete, wood, plaster, motor oil, petroleum jelly, street light, acrylic paint and shellac, 13½ by 15 by 45 feet; at Barbara Gladstone.



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