

# Artweek

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Celebrating Thirty Years

■ Bruce Conner ■ Enrique Martinez Celaya ■ Marina Forstmann Day ■ Larry Calkins

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miliar territory. The exhibit at the satellite gallery, Colorado One, does serve to emphasize the crucial importance of context. I doubt that any casual passerby lured into the Colorado One storefront gallery in Old Town would even begin to guess that this was work by any specific ethnic group. The work resembles a gallery group show boasting diversity, yet sharing a subtle idealism and distinct craftsmanship. Thus stripped of the Pacific Asia Museum wrapping, here we are free to meet this art with an open mind, and can explore and enjoy it for its own sake.

—Victoria Martin

*Shifting Perceptions: Contemporary LA Visions* through October 29 at the Pacific Asia Museum, 49 N. Los Robles Ave., Pasadena. Other artists included in the exhibition are Carl Cheng, Kai Bob Cheng, Margaret Honda, Bari Kumar, Dinh Q. Le, Yong Soon Min, Art Nomura, Ji Young Oh, Ben Sakoguchi, Pornlip Sangvanich, Kamiol Tassananchalee, Alan Valencia, Diane Shui-ii Wong and Suong Yangchareon.

Victoria Martin is a contributing editor to *Artweek*.

### Marina Forstmann Day at Don O'Melveny Gallery

*The sun ... / In dim eclipse, disastrous twilight sheds / On half the nations, and with fear of change / Perplexes monarchs.*  
—John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 1667

**B**lack suns or eclipsed suns have often served as catalytic events. In fact, their occurrence has been implicated in the way several important historic episodes played out. For example, according to Dr. Eric Flescher at his Black Sun Web site, Christopher Columbus was stranded in 1503 on the island of Jamaica. Initially the local inhabitants gave him and his crew food but the altruism of the native islanders soon abated. Columbus used his knowledge of an impending eclipse (February 29, 1504) to trick the locals into believing the gods were so displeased by their selfish behavior that the sun was to be blotted out. He then, ostensibly, negotiated a return of the sun. Food was

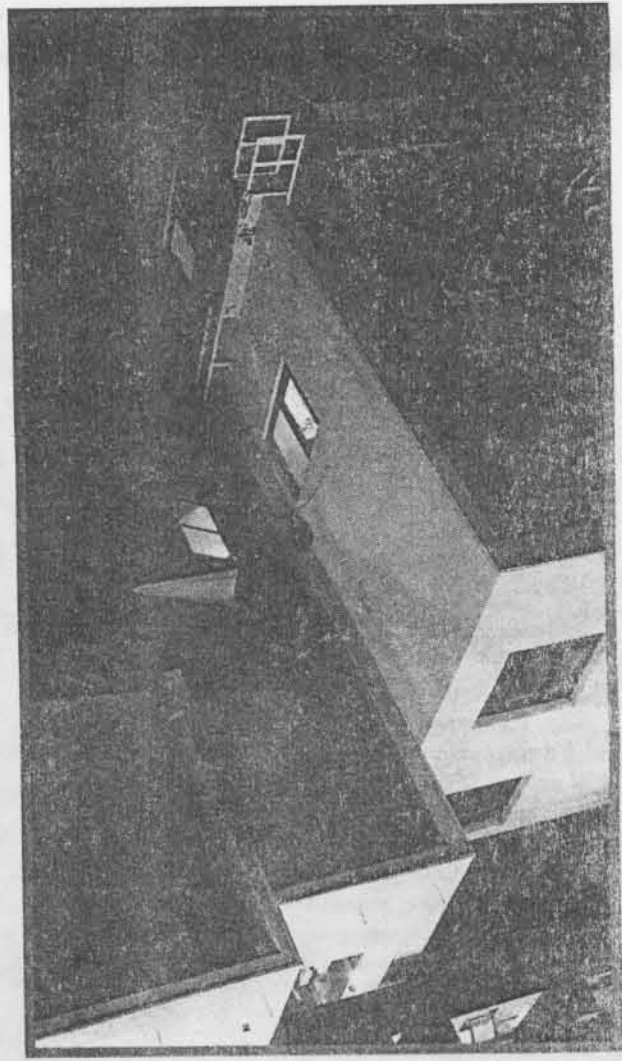
restored and the Spaniards were eventually rescued. And, as recently as 1948, national elections in Korea were postponed because a total eclipse was predicted on the set date. Real and fictional eclipse stories abound. Marina Forstmann Day uses the black sun as focal image and metaphor within a series of mixed-media wall works and assemblage sculptures recently on view in an exhibition titled *Black Sun Stories* at Don O'Melveny Gallery.

Day, however, puts a spin on the metaphor and takes a less cataclysmic approach to the black sun legend than many—because of its historic apocalyptic connotations, it is currently a favorite image of the death metal genre, a group of skin artists and some hard-core environmentalists among other groups, who focus on disaster. Her approach is more benign and self-centered. It is more in tune with the actual physical demonstration of an eclipse than its common metaphorical insinuations. She has chosen to focus on implications of the slide of shadow between two moving bodies that, for a period of time, obliterates the view of one and not the mystical fears inspired by the event. Thus the image functions for her as reference to passages, pathways and, by default, temporarily obscured views. Each black sun in Day's work represents a period, a pivotal point, but also a space of transition—like an open onto closed and then open doorway—wherein or within the obscurity of the shadow personal development (self, spirit, philos-

ophy, etc.) undergoes an epiphanic change. In essence, this sign stands in for the potential for transcendence at intersections. This is the crux of Day's current series.

Of course revamping the implied meaning of a metaphor that is in common use requires a complex support system to direct the audience toward the new territory. So, though the black sun is the figure that activates Day's mixed media and assemblage pieces, it is also a figure that demands an especially resonant ground. Her choice of ground in many cases has been old maps. These outdated charts are almost obliterated by gestural marks. Lines, patches, drips of paint and collaged objects applied to their surface in a seeming attempt to overwrite the now invalid system of the maps. A rambling, subjective expression is imposed over a rational blueprint. The black sun, placed in the brackets of this conflict, leaps to the foreground and lays crisply, in sharp focus, on each surface. The conflict between the subjective and the systematic devolve, momentarily, into visual babble that forces attention to the hard-edged form. In other words, Day convincingly insists the black sun is a portal through which the viewer must pass to gain access to the other visual information she presents.

Day uses a tough but effective visual stratagem, a combination of structuralist-based formalist concepts like focal points in conjunction with post-structuralist theories that suggest you must also pay attention to context when attempting to make sense of a thing, to arrive at complex, informative, visual presentations that add another dimension to an ancient metaphor. And it's quite a spin—black sun commonly perceived as exit, the end, can be seen in Day's work as black sun the entrance, a beginning. Perplexed monarchs like King Louis of Bavaria who died of fright in 840 A.D. when experiencing a total eclipse may have benefited from this view, but then his



Amir Zaki, *Untitled (Down\_SM 07)*, 1999, laser direct type C-print, 30-3/4" x 19-1/2", at Roberts & Tilton, Los Angeles.

three sons would not have divided his empire into France, Germany and Italy and who knows....

—Charlene Roth

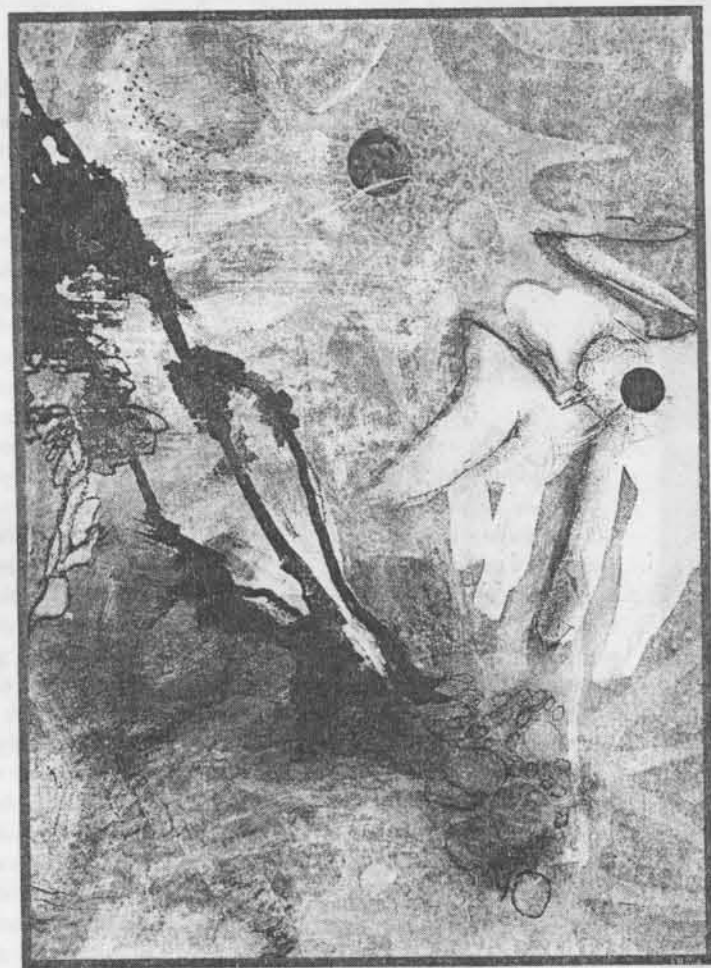
*Marina Forstmann Day: Black Sun Stories* closed in May at Don O'Melveny Gallery, West Hollywood.

Charlene Roth is a contributing editor to *Artweek*.

### Amir Zaki at Roberts & Tilton

**T**wo of the hallmarks of photographic modernism are its attention to the urban environment and its use of previously unseen perspectives. Amir Zaki's exhibition, *Photographs From*, embrace these two modernist elements and infuse them with added contemporary issues. Zaki's suite of color photographs are mostly made from elevated perspectives, transforming the urban landscape into patterns of grids, angles and artificial lights.

Photographing at night, the colors are muted and the images appear mostly monochromatic. The elevated viewpoints and sharply downcast angles remove the images from the realm of representation and suggest a mysterious, imaginative environment reminiscent of film noir.



Marina Forstmann Day, *Black Sun Paradiso*, 1999, mixed media, 23-3/4" x 19-1/4", at Don O'Melveny Gallery, West Hollywood.

Devoid of people and of movement, Zaki's richly textured imagery has the solitude of a Edward Hopper painting without eliciting Hopper's sense of loneliness. In these photographs, there is no human despair—but no companionship either. Here, the urban environment is a series of block-like industrial buildings and illumination is barely provided by street lights and the occasionally lit interior. The rich blackness of the night gradually appears from behind the dimly lighted architecture.

Many photographers believe that taking a good photograph is a matter of where one stands. If so, Zaki knows where to stand. Like the modernist masters Alexander Rodchenko and László Moholy-Nagy, Zaki seems to take delight in showing us unfamiliar views of mundane metropolitan locales. He transforms the most banal buildings and streets into sensuous images and reveals an underlying order within our routinely urban chaos.

In *Up\_UNIV 01*, the artist photographs from street level, directly up at a skyscraper. From such an extreme angle the building becomes a triangular form of converging lines, and the pattern of lights from the windows directs our eye into the picture's center. To the right is a bushy tree, some of its leaves brightly lit from a street light while others descend into an inky black. Balancing this vertiginous view is the moon, a glowing white ball at the bottom center of the image. Zaki has cut and mounted the photograph into a huge, 67-inch oval, radically rejecting the norms of standard photographic presentation as either a rectangle or a square. In doing so, the photograph is transformed from a traditional photographic representational view of the world into a wholly imaginative, otherworldly cityscape.

In *Down\_SM 06*, Zaki looks down at an anonymous industrial building. The facade is lit by street and security lights and the severe angle and tight cropping leave little to identify the structure. Instead, his attention is predominately directed at the roof and a gentle shadow that falls upon it. The result is a wide, gray-green band of concrete, diagonally filling the picture. Nothing is photographed head-on, there is always a perspective view, creating the diagonals within the picture's rectangle. The image is tightly framed, giving us no context or expanse in which to place the structures. Conversely, the rooftops that Zaki shows are expansive, the one area of open space in an otherwise compact environment.

This vision may seem antithetical to a humanistic view of the city, which it mostly is, but Zaki also brings a discreet playfulness to the work and a gentle reminder of the people that occupy these organized spaces. In *Down\_SM 07*, the artist looks on blocks of gray-green con-

crete and the ensuing diagonals recede into blackness. In the center of the image is a lit interior. Though we see no one, there is a work table with black and white photographs laid out on it, a humorous reminder of the photographer at work, toiling alone, at night, in the densely packed city.

—Thomas McGovern

Amir Zaki—*Photographs From* closed in May at Roberts & Tilton, Los Angeles.

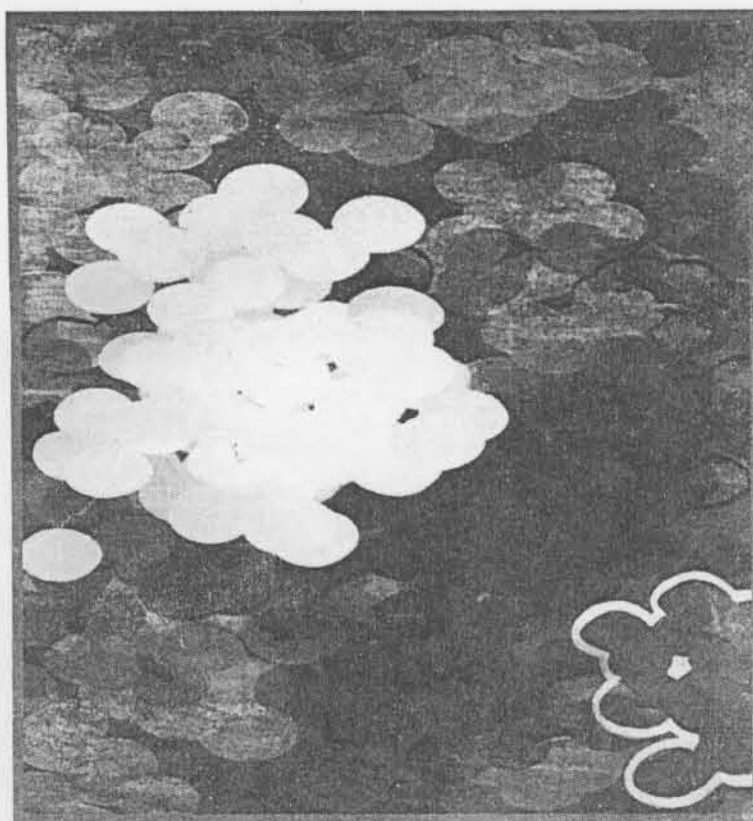
Thomas McGovern is a freelance writer based in Los Angeles.

## Jeehee Paik at Cruz L.A. Gallery

**C**ircles abound in *Unfold*, the current work of Jeehee Paik—evidence of her exploration of the effects of multiple geometric shapes.

In a previous exhibition, at the Kumho Art Museum in Seoul, Korea, Paik developed repetitious overlaid colored rectangular lines in some paintings, and circles in others. Now, the LA-based artist presents thirteen canvases, ranging from small to large, which explore the visual interplay of solid, flat, and colorful circular shapes, one on another.

A dominant feature of Paik's work is that, with laborious concentration—using oil on acrylic on wood panel—she constructs a ground composed solely of countless round shapes. The spherical/



Jeehee Paik, *Heirloom*, 2000, oil and acrylic, 15-3/4" x 15", at Cruz L.A. Gallery Venice.

oval, bunches of grape-like shapes are meticulously rendered as Paik builds layer upon layer of them.

Consequently, as clusters of colorful shapes converge, a solid and voluminous mass evolves. The results are organic and often delicately sensual. Paik is clearly a colorist, as she focuses on a distinctly vivid color palette for each canvas.

Sometimes there is an almost startling contrast of unlike colors; in others, she maintains a compatibility of color as she employs a similar range of tones, and still in others, the artist stays with a variation of one color.

*Greeting 2000* is an example where Paik employs contrasting tones. Here, a ground of golden yellow circular shapes of varying intensity forms the backdrop for randomly accented bubble-like, vivid

blue tones. *Heirloom 2000* stays within a warm, autumn brown tonality, while with *In a Flurry 2000*, Paik works completely in a singular blue tone, painted from its lightest to its brightest. The illusion of depth is attained by Paik's placement of increasingly lighter tones near darker ones. Several analogies come to mind. It is as if the viewer can see through water to submerged layers; as if when one gazes at a reflecting pool filled with leaves, the leaves below the surface gradually become less distinguishable when overpowered by the rounded, brighter leaves on top of the surface. The work is also similar to an out of focus camera, where solid form becomes distilled points of light. It can also be seen as champagne, where bubbles bounce about exuding an energy that is both elegant and evanescent.

Paik, who is an emerging artist, creates art that is serene and visually pleasing. The repeated roundness of circular shapes and her concentration on solely colorful surface designs makes her work highly decorative. The reviewer considered whether the work's decorative quality is rooted in an Asian influence, and concluded that it is not. Decorativeness is not a sensibility but rather symptomatic of a need for Paik to expand her artistic understanding. In order to grow as a painter, Paik needs to focus on visual space as much as she does on the painting's visual shapes. At this time, there lacks an interrelationship of the form to the space surrounding it. Specifically, her

paintings lack the poetry that spatial considerations give a work of art. Her shapes seem to be placed randomly on the canvas with little sensitivity to edge and with limited awareness of visual rhythm.

However, in *Above*, Paik comes closest to dealing with the spatial dilemma. In this work, composed of sensitively placed clusters of gold and silver circular tones, the artist establishes spatial tension by placing forms on top of the canvas and letting color gently drip down as the surface ground gradually becomes a darkened gold. The painting is effective because Paik extends herself and takes into consideration all factors—color, shape, line

Victor Raphael, *The Three Triangles*, 1983, oil pastel and metal leaf, 40" x 30", at the Frederick R. Weisman Museum of Art, Pepperdine University, Malibu.

