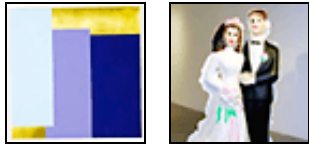


## Casentini's rectangles tease the eye

KENNETH BAKER

Saturday, January 12, 2002



Milan painter Marco Casentini appears to risk little in his recent work at Gross. But he risks redundancy, no small gamble for an abstract artist.

Casentini paints flat rectangles of alkyd color on small sheets of metal.

Carefully tuning hue and value, he keeps the eye asking whether forms that abut should be seen as overlapping, whether cognate shapes of different dimensions mark differences in depth.

Look at a color plane that shares an edge with the unframed surface of a Casentini, and the painted shape's dimensions appear certain: The size of the shape equals the size of the object. Where the profile of the same painted shape falls within the composition, its measure seems ambiguous; it engages the undercurrent of imagination in ordinary vision.

Such compositional mechanics have a long line of descent, from constructivism to the work of Americans such as Ellsworth Kelly, John McLaughlin (1898-1976) and David Simpson. But Casentini has evolved his own way with them.

Pondering the ambiguities in his paintings, a viewer will probably think beyond hard-edge abstraction to the studied impaction of Giorgio Morandi's still lifes or even the occlusion of stucco walls in a tight Mediterranean town and their depiction in early Renaissance art.

In "The Sweet Light II" (2001), he clusters blue rectangles on a brass support, leaving it partly exposed to exploit the peculiar optical depth of its greenish gold sheen.

Here Casentini refers directly to the gold grounds of very early Renaissance painting and the yearning for transcendence -- divine light -- that they symbolize.

### Sharon harper in 'flight'

Seldom do we see an artist make memorable work simply by breaking the rules as photographer Sharon Harper does.

Harper shot from moving trains in Germany the black-and-white pictures in her series "Flug (Flight)," handsomely installed at Sitcoske.



Trees, roads, clouds and buildings accordingly register as blurs of gray on gray, as if drawn in smeared charcoal.

All this is bad photographic form that makes us wonder whether Harper ever knows just what she will get when she shoots. But it yields dreamy images, befogged by a kind of free-floating expressive energy. Their agitation might be that of exuberance or fear.

At their most abstract, as in "Germany vii" (2000), Harper's pictures can call to mind the "blackboard" paintings of Cy Twombly.

More straightforward prints, such as "Mise en scene vi" (1997), a white crossroads on a dark slope, flattened into a flaglike emblem by the camera's motion, suggest pictures rejected from the family vacation album.

Knowing that Harper shot these images from trains does matter. For throughout the modern era the train has served as a metaphor for the forces of history -- in whatever terms they are conceived -- carrying people inexorably into the future.

The double meaning of "Flight" -- airborne travel and effort to escape -- is less immediate in the German "Flug," which encourages the tense double reading that Harper's pictures invite, as documents of reverie and of helplessness.

### **Wolberger and Katchadourian**

Those who missed San Franciscan Yoram Wolberger's remarkable "Toy Soldier" (2001) at Refusalon recently can see it and two newer sculptures at New Langton Arts.

Wolberger makes digital scans of plastic figurines, has them fabricated in plastic at human scale and paints them to resemble the originals.

When he blew up a wedding-cake ornament to make "Bride and Groom" (2001), its twinkle of saccharine optimism got blindingly magnified as well.

Wolberger's pieces are in the realm of Jeff Koons' monstrosities of kitsch but are funnier. They also make a smarter marriage of pop art and minimalist tactics: finding icons in popular images and heightening their meaning by industrial fabrication.

New York artist Nina Katchadourian has a wall-size installation of "Paranormal Postcards."

Using red thread, she has intervened in postcards of all kinds, tying together without explanation details that the eye might otherwise never link directly.

Red lines painted on the wall connect clusters of mounted, embroidered cards as if they supported some grand unstated theory of What's Really Going On.

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## Gallery show

MARCO CASENTINI: DIARY: Paintings. Through Feb. 2. Brian Gross Fine Art, 49 Geary St., San Francisco. (415) 788-1050, [www.briangrossfineart.com](http://www.briangrossfineart.com).

## Shows

SHARON HARPER: FLUG (FLIGHT): Photographs. Through Jan. 26. Marcel Sitcoske Gallery, 251 Post St., San Francisco. (415) 434-4804.

PARTING LINE: NINA KATCHADOURIAN AND YORAM WOLBERGER: Sculpture and found object installation. Through Feb. 9. New Langton Arts, 1246 Folsom St., San Francisco. (415) 626-5416.

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<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2002/01/12/DD79458.DTL>

This article appeared on page **D - 1** of the San Francisco Chronicle

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