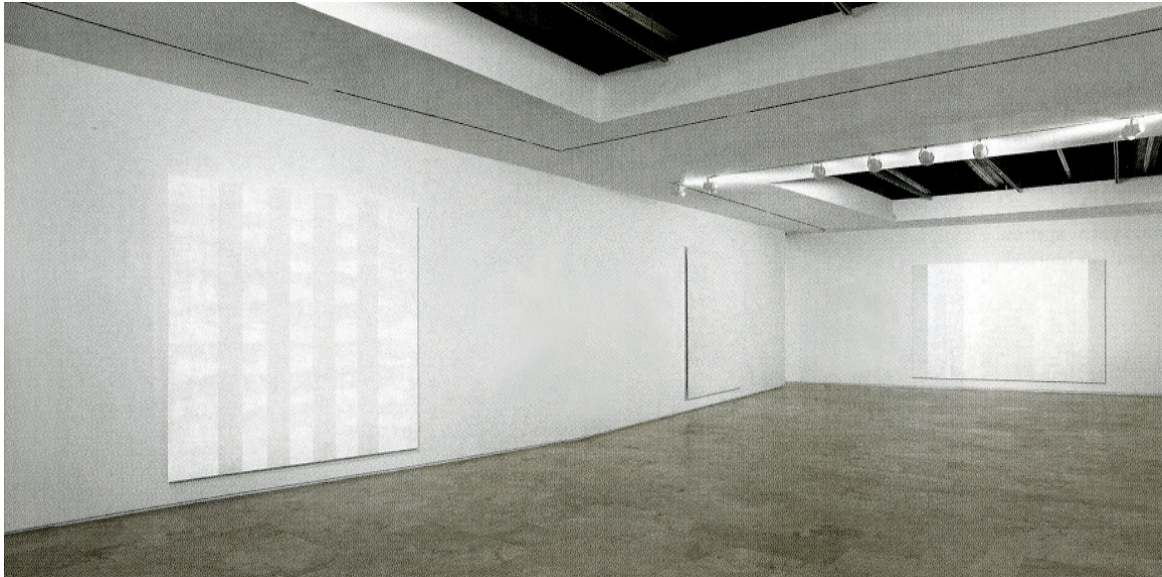


Kayne Griffin Corcoran

Art in America

Exhibition Review: Mary Corse at Lehmann Maupin



View of Mary Corse's exhibition, showing three works, all 2011, glass microspheres in acrylic on canvas, at Lehman Maupin.

MARY CORSE LEHMANN MAUPIN

Not unlike her scintillating paintings, Mary Corse has flickered in and out of visibility during the past five decades. While her early association with the California Light and Space movement brought her significant acclaim, many younger viewers are experiencing her works for the first time, largely due to the widespread and renewed interest in the Los Angeles art scene of the 1960s. For a recent solo show at Lehmann Maupin, her first in New York since 1995, Corse exhibited five new paintings (all 2011) that demonstrate her abiding commitment to the monochrome and its attendant perceptual pleasures.

In 1968, after creating a series of works that encased fluorescent bulbs in Plexiglas boxes, Corse discovered glass microspheres, the tiny reflective beads that are commonly used to brighten highway signage. Corse has long combined these microspheres with white acrylic paint, carefully brushing the mixtures on large

canvases before sanding certain areas to a pristine finish. Though they sometimes appear blank and uninflected, the "White Light Paintings" are highly responsive to their environments and reveal internal complexities when lighting conditions fluctuate or viewers change their positions.

Emphatic grids tend to govern Corse's earliest works, but all five of the new paintings are subdivided into wide vertical bands that gain and shed luminosity as one moves through the gallery, a mysterious effect that seems to derive from variable brushstrokes and microsphere densities. *Untitled (One Inner Band)*, for example, offers uniform whiteness from certain angles while revealing its tripartite composition from others; the central panel of this 8½-foot-square canvas can suddenly glisten like a silvery mirror. Similar oscillations greet the mobile spectator of *Untitled (Four Inner Bands)*, for whom the multiple vertical stripes continually trade inert mattiness for a lively shimmer. And here, especially from a raking perspective, one also notices the horizontal

brushstrokes that cover the ground and provide a gestural counterpoint to the painting's geometric rigor.

The primary experience of Corse's work is no doubt phenomenological, betraying her emergence as an artist during the heyday of Minimalism. But aspects of this show might place some viewers in a meditative state. While four of the paintings were hung in pairs on opposite walls, the fifth and largest work spanned an adjacent wall to create a chapel-like space that Mark Rothko might have appreciated. Measuring 8½ by 13 feet, *Untitled (One Inner Band with White Sides)* resembles a lustrous polyptych whose narrow outer bands are painted a flat white. Possessing the scale and structure of an altarpiece, it induces quiet contemplation of its three central panels, which invariably leads to fleeting moments of illumination.

—Matthew Nichols