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ARTFORUM

Critics' Picks: Mary Corse



Mary Corse, *Cold Room* (detail), 1968/2017
Argon, Plexiglas, high-frequency generator, light tubes, monofilament, compressor, refrigeration panels, plaster
50 x 50 x 6 1/2". Installation view.

It is a wonder to step inside Mary Corse's *Cold Room*, 1968/2017, an installation that took the artist nearly fifty years to realize. Once you're past the sliding door and within the small, freestanding space, a distinct feeling of solitude descends. Immediately, skin responds: every exposed inch enlivened by the temperature-controlled room. A floating plane of light (argon and tubes) flickers with inconstancy, powered from a distance by a hidden Tesla coil. (The artist has been building high-frequency generators for similarly functioning works since she took a physics class in the late 1960s.) Unlike Yayoi Kusama's mirrored infinity rooms, which tend to drive even the most dispassionate art viewer into a social-media frenzy, *Cold Room* is a place of retreat and quietude, absorption and reflection.

This is true, too, of the other works in this show, all paintings completed in the past seventeen years. In art-historical accounts, if Corse is discussed at all, she gets placed at the edges of California's Light and Space movement. This is at once apropos and entirely beside the point. Phenomenological perception of light is certainly a major theme in her work—as evidenced by the prodigious use of tiny glass microspheres, the kind used to paint white lines on asphalt roads, which shimmer and animate the surfaces of paintings such as *Untitled (White Multiband, Beveled)*, 2011. But there are other concerns as well: the way the spheres seem expressionistically streaked in raking light, or how the five untitled paintings from the ongoing "DNA Series," 2017–, employ shiny black acrylic squares, as if someone had dragged a Barnett Newman painting through a Bob Mackie showroom, lifting some of the seriousness of Corse's sparse palette.

— Andy Campbell