

Sculpture

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Fran Siegel

Margaret Thatcher

"Interference," the title of Fran Siegel's show, suggested a complex interaction between what the artist allows to be seen and what is actually there. An artist often interested in the transparency of light and its effect on the viewer, Siegel continued her penchant for making art that stretches the boundaries of the visible. The audience gains knowledge of and insight into the work through bits and pieces; often a small shift in perspective will result in a very different visual experience. Siegel's plan is to subtly involve the viewer, so that the interaction becomes part of the view. In this way her work can be related to California's light and space artists, whose work challenges the relationship of audience to art on an experiential level. Even so, it should be remembered that Siegel makes individual works whose effect can also be likened to the tactile organicism of a sculptor such as Eva Hesse.

64 Balls (2001) consisted of that number of paper balls hung from the ceiling by fishing line. The balls, constructed from rice papier-mâché, are simply made by blowing up balloons and placing the paper around their volume, after which the balloons are popped and removed. The balls were arranged in eight rows of eight and hung two to three inches off the floor. On the ceiling above were small circular mirrors 1.5 inches in diameter; on the floor below were circular mirrors an inch larger in diameter (both sets follow the gridded arrangement of the balls). These mirrors intensified and compressed the space. The balls were painted on the bottom with two layers of color.

As the lightweight balls swayed in response to slight movements of air, the viewer could see the patches of color move in the mirrors directly underneath them. Here Siegel created a fluctuating, in-between space enlivened by the reflection of the balls moving in the mirror.

The tension created by the two sets of mirrors intensified the space of the entire sculpture. *64 Balls* is about textures and densities of space, both open and closed volumes. The light passes easily through the monofilament line but must be reflected upward from the mirrors underneath the dense arrangement of balls. The mirrors above tend to pull the balls upward in perspective, which gives the sculpture the appearance of greater density at the top of the work. While the sculpture recognizes a grid system in its placement of the balls, the balls themselves are organic, nearly exquisite forms whose subtle variations result not from industrial methods but rather from the eccentricity of the hand. This happens often in Siegel's art. For example, in *Frequency* (2000), a piece shown late last year in Boston, the curves of river stones act in contradistinction to their placement in a rectangular pattern. Oppositions occur naturally in the work, with the meaning derived from the contrasts of different kinds of form.

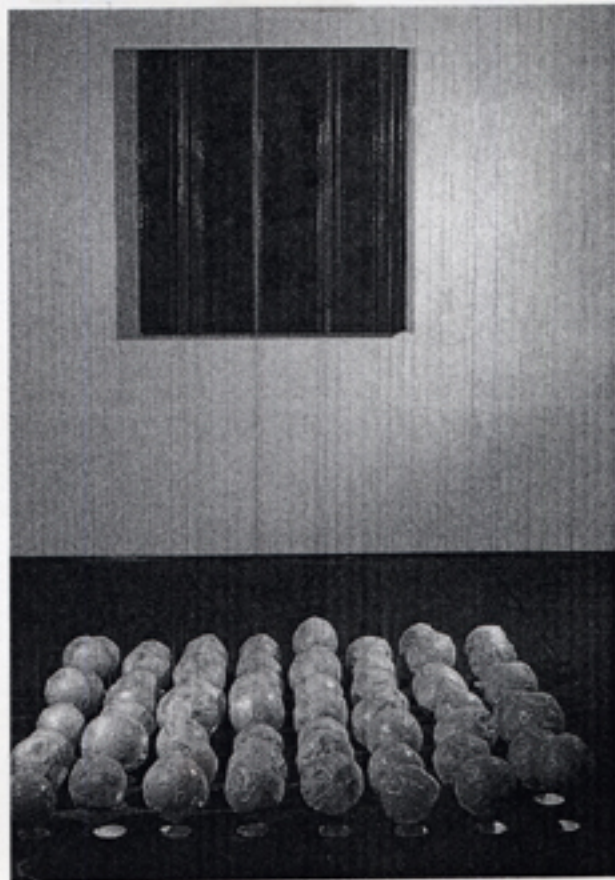
Siegel's relief work made up the rest of the show. Part of an ongoing series, entitled "Interference," the individual works have a front made from stainless steel wire, which has been punctured hundreds of times with a motorized tool. The wire is used industrially as a filter, and is employed in the series as a filter of light. Siegel varies the size of the puncture; the

longer the tool remains in one spot, the larger the hole that results. A space of about two inches occurs in back of the mesh, at which point a piece of colored Plexiglas gives the space between two surfaces its hue. The entire work is three inches deep, framed with Plexiglas sides.

In the "Interference" series, Siegel focuses on both a frontal pattern and a colored shallow space. The front acts as a filter or interference for what goes on behind it, and the intricate whorls and spirals of tiny holes in the mesh can be thought of as paths in a field. This work is both delicate and exacting; there is the sense that the intricacy of the patterning

can be compared to embroidery. In a way Siegel is transforming the tedium of what used to be called women's work into a decorative surface and structural space. In *Interference 04* (2000), a kind of golden glow can be seen emanating out through the intricate matrix of punctures; the depth between the mesh and Plexiglas appears to be filled with light. There is a Minimalist impartiality to the construction, but one which is transformed into a statement of intimacy and even belief. Siegel's art pushes past the circumstances of its making into a space which is refulgent, flowing, and free.

—Jonathan Goodman



Fran Siegel, installation view of *64 Balls*, 2001, papier-mâché, and *Interference*, 2000. Installation at the Margaret Thatcher Gallery.