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# Art in America



View of Thomas Kovachevich's *Solid Geometry*, 2013, corrugated plastic, 35 sculptures, 96 by 54 overall; at Callicoon.

## THOMAS KOVACHEVICH Callicoon and Show Room Gowanus

The paradoxical multi-medium work of Thomas Kovachevich is incredibly permissive in the company of viewers. The work's paradox lies in its ability to balance quotidian and intimately understandable materials, such as tape, cardboard and tissue, with the creation of an ethereal and alien physical presence. The work is permissive in the sense of allowing viewers to activate it with the movement of their bodies through the gallery. Kovachevich's latest exhibition—at Callicoon's two Lower East Side spaces and at Show Room Gowanus, in Brooklyn—featured paintings, sculptures and video from 2013 and adhered to a material language of paper and cardboard that he developed during the early 1970s, but the work does not feel dated.

Kovachevich's art eruditely borrows from and references different schools of art-making, including Minimalism, Post-Minimalism and Light and Space, but the artist maintains his own formal vision. Take *Red White White Blue*,

four 4-foot-high columns of corrugated plastic hung on the wall in a row; the back of each is lined with a colored light gel. What results is a piece that seems to glow and expand according to the gallery lighting. Across the room stood *Solid Geometry*, a grouping of 35 heterogeneously shaped and sized black corrugated-plastic totems, backlit by the storefront window. Each tower has the formal elegance and austerity of a John McCracken, but upon closer inspection, the humble materials—plastic and hot glue—imbue the work with a refreshing at-home intimacy that would not be achieved if it was fashioned in industrial steel. Kovachevich's artistic sense is formally sophisticated and materially simple, engendering complex works that are also legible.

The 12-inch-square paintings on view at Callicoon's small Forsyth Street gallery are beautifully gestural and capable of standing alone, but when digested together they read like a processional map of cellular evolution. Perhaps this is due to Kovachevich's background as a physician. Delicately rendered small forms that recall the structure of mitochondria, as seen in *Angel* or *That 70's*, float amid a collection of other shapes on a deep black acrylic ground.

There is a sterility to Kovachevich's work that evokes the operating theater, as in his clean pale gauzy papers—absent of marks from the artist's hand—that are often loosely affixed to the wall with tape or magnets. *Portrait of a Character (black)* features three pale wall-hung rectangles, presenting different gray amorphous shapes, which Kovachevich refers to as "personal geometries." He establishes the gauzy effect here by placing a colored gel on a piece of thin opaque cotton and shrouding it with a layer of translucent cotton. Given his former profession, the work suggests patients obfuscated by a clinical curtain in a hospital. The edges of the paper flutter as viewers pass by them. Kovachevich seems fascinated by paper and emphasizes the ways atmospheric conditions can cause it to contort and bloom, recalling the sensitivity of epidermis.

*Portrait of this Room (Black and White Triptych)* consists of three squares, each 10 feet to a side. They are composed of long, thin strips of paper tape, each with black ribbon running lengthwise down the middle. The strips are pinned to the wall loosely with brads. As if it were a living organism, its ribbons delicately curl, opening and closing in reaction to the moisture in the air. When open the work has a Daniel Buren graphic quality, and when closed it fills with light and volume like a Robert Irwin.

—John Arthur Peetz