

Kevin Appel

Marianne Boesky
535 West 22nd Street, Chelsea
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With a subtly ironic twist, Kevin Appel paints sleek white-on-white pictures of a Modernist architectural heaven. On large horizontal canvases, the young Los Angeles-based artist organizes white and off-white parallelograms and vertical white bands. These planes float disconnectedly while suggesting the walls, floors and columns of some ultimately purified modern interior, a Mies ghost world.

In the empty spaces between planes, sketchy lines and fields of squarish green blotches suggest background foliage as seen through glass walls, evoking an idealized fit between architecture and nature that calls to mind the houses of Frank Lloyd Wright.

We know that Mr. Appel's approach is ironic rather than romantic because of his knowing use of clichéd painterly devices: masking-taped hard edges, mechanically smooth surfaces punctuated here and there by thick strokes of impasto, and the aforementioned arboreal abstraction all read as clichés of 60's-style art and design. So the series becomes a wry comment on utopian sterility, tinged by the nostalgia of an artist who was born after Modernist dreams had peaked.

KEN JOHNSON