



"UNTITLED," 2009, Craig Kauffman
DRAPE-FORMED ACRYLIC, ACRYLIC LACQUER AND GLITTER, 36" X 40" X 8"
PHOTO: VICKI PHUNG, COURTESY THE ARTIST ESTATE AND FRANK LLOYD GALLERY

LOS ANGELES

Craig Kauffman: "New Work" at Frank Lloyd Gallery

When he died in May, Craig Kauffman was mourned by the entire Los Angeles art world, and with good reason: the native son left behind more than a half century of formally, subjectively, and technically innovative work that had consistently set the tone for Southern California's artistic discourse, helping to establish LA as an art center of international stature. Happily, Kauffman bid us adieu with an exhibition that spoke to his strengths and sensitivities, at once recalling his breakthrough work in industrial-material reliefs and hinting strongly at his origins in painting. What has turned out to be Kauffman's last body of work is a series of drape-formed concave plastic hexagons coated (or infused) with acrylic lacquer and glitter, at once icy and luminous, hard and milky, as dazzling as jewels, as sensuous as flowers, and as matter-of-fact as wall fixtures. The botanic simile maintains most vividly throughout, given the repeated structure, a glistening opaque nucleus (missing pistil or stamen but suggesting the presence of pollen) flush with the wall and ringed by a bowl-like, multi-creased petal of contrasting, but no less radiant or elusive, hue.

The works are all identical in size and shape, implying the use of a mold; but as exhibited, the standardized format steered attention away from issues of size and scale and toward issues of presence and the embodiment of beauty. The format is just provocative enough to conjure the poetic likenesses sampled above, but just plain and self-effacing enough to propose a circumstance of near-invisibility, a *disembodiment* of beauty that sets color free from shape. Kauffman explored such a perceptual condition over and over again throughout his career, helping to establish it as one of the central tenets of the Light-and-Space movement in which he figured so prominently—hell, which he practically invented. This untitled series does not go as far as some of his earlier work (and that of several of his peers) in suppressing shape altogether; rather than elusive, hard-to-pin-down objects, neither painting nor sculpture, the coda to Kauffman's career comprised exquisite painting-sculpture hybrids, sweet-natured and beautiful but tough as diamonds.

—PETER FRANK