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LENS CRAFTER

by Peter Schjeldahl JUNE 1, 2009



Sigmar Polke's "Lens Paintings," at the Michael Werner gallery, are a potlatch for fans of the mercurial German master. While executing a major project of stained-glass (and sliced-stone) windows for Zurich's Grossmünster Cathedral, Polke has also been making eccentric paintings that recycle nearly a half century's worth of his motifs and ideas in a gorgeous guise. Most of the supports are vertically ridged sheets of semi-transparent, hand-cast resin, with the consistency of antique glass. Their form is lenticular, yielding effects of flickering animation when your viewpoint shifts. Working on the ridges—and at times on surfaces mounted behind them—Polke deploys an indescribable abundance of figurative and abstract imagery and painterly techniques. Each of the pictures (there are twenty-six here) is one of a kind. Some are anamorphic: distorted images snap to attention when eyed from certain angles. The show breaks down the familiar repertoire of Polke's wondrous imagination and reassembles it into something like Heaven. ♦

ART: SIGMAR POLKE, "UNTITLED (LENS PAINTING)" (2008)/COURTESY MICHAEL WERNER GALLERY