

ARTslant New York

Hard Abstraction

by Noah Dillon

John Morris

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D'Amelio Terras

525 W. 22nd St., New York, NY 10011

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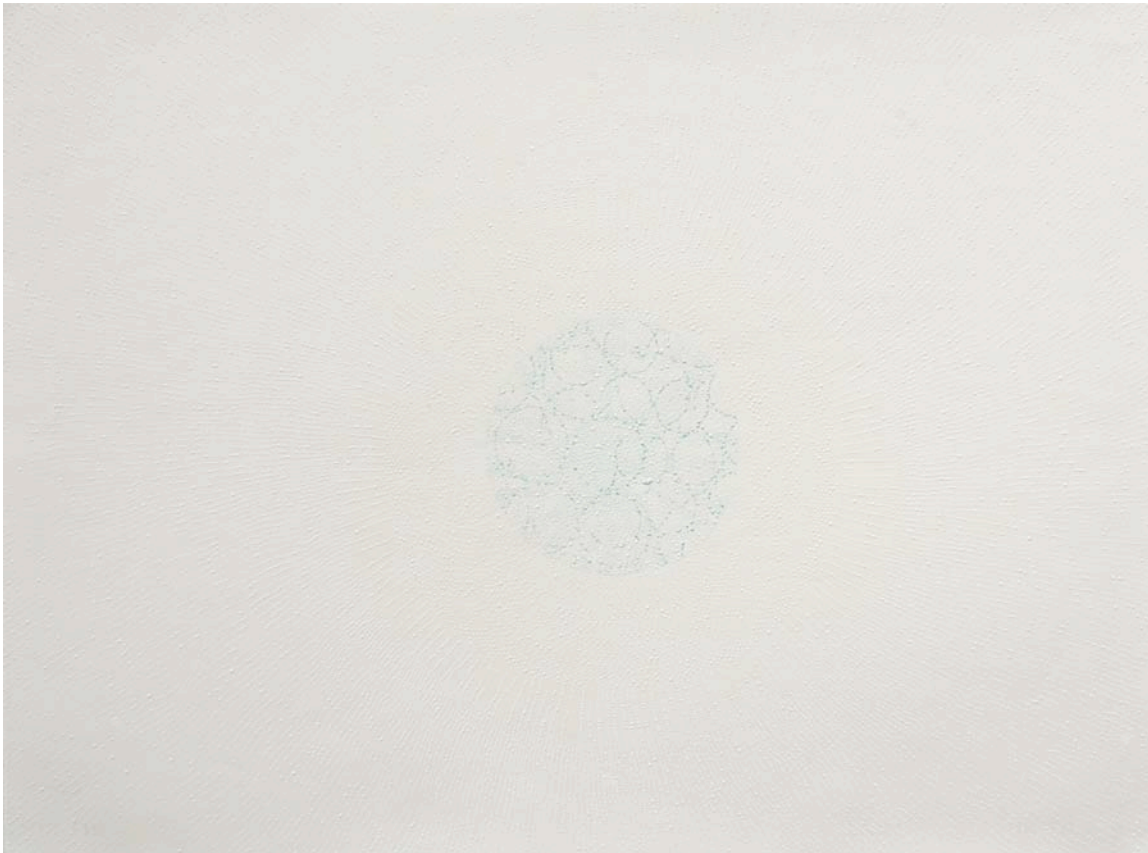
Nature is incredibly thrifty with materials, mostly using a few elements for everything living. Keratin can be found as down feathers or fingernails, carbon can be found as graphite or diamonds. The work of John Morris is about that simple variability at its heart. As in nature, with a very few building blocks, Morris creates structures of amazing subtlety and complexity, which are both strict and inviting.



Morris delivers hard edge geometric abstraction, largely absent from D'Amelio Terras's concurrent show, "Affinities: Painting in Abstraction." But his paintings seem more representational as well. They are reminiscent of Ernst Haeckel's nature drawings from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Chalky sand dollars, polyps, corals, organs, cells, and bubbling constellations are found here, engineered from a small repertoire of simple, considered marks and signs. Morris appears to be looking at process through a microscope. These eight paintings on paper, all from 2002, are reserved and studious. They are made of from small daubs of white acrylic, little beads of translucent gel, thin lines of pencil and colored ink. Most of the color is very quiet except for some yellow spots or red slashes here and there. One is required to get close in order to see what each painting is and to feel their shapely biology.

In Untitled, a cloud of radially dispersed white dots the size of a pinhead fan out from the center. They stop at a wavering circular border at the middle, thinning into a set of lines reminiscent of a cell wall. At the heart of the painting, a round nucleus is decorated with concentric circles of pale blue ink and "S" shaped filigrees. Another set of graphite circles gives the globular body shape and depth. Another untitled painting bubbles with quarter-sized rings of graphite that grow more colorful moving from the bottom edges to the top center. Some bulge with tiny acrylic beads or swirl with looping coronas. The drawing fades in from grays to hazy blues, red, and aqua, breathing upward like a spout.

Morris has previously devoted his paintings to European economists and philosophers, but here his seven paintings are economic in naturalist sense rather than a fiscal one. They are indebted to the Austrian biologist Gregor Mendel more than Morris's previous paeans to Austrian economic philosopher F.A. Hayek.



Images: Untitled (detail), 2002, ink, acrylic, graphite, and gel on paper; Untitled, 2002, ink, acrylic, graphite, and gel on paper; Courtesy D'Amelio Terras.