

PRESSBOOK

Zach HARRIS

Artforum

February 2009

Critics' Pick
artforum.com

Zach Harris

MAX PROTETCH

511 West 22nd Street

January 10–February 21

Zach Harris seems spellbound by the push and pull of paintings and frames—his woodcut-relief borders often dwarf the images they contain. While both elements remain largely abstract, the center panels' acrylic renderings occasionally betray landscapes and other scenes: In one work, a Chinese fret motif encloses two dragons rearing toward each other. A floral filigree resembles a book's marbled endpapers in another piece; elsewhere, a city flourishes in an hourglass-shaped biosphere. Sensitive decisions appear throughout the exhibition: A downward-facing beveled edge, cast in shadow, is tinted a muted shade of Prussian blue that intensifies the surface's relatively low luminosity. Brushstrokes limn the grain of wood. The pieces embrace color and repeated forms with such abandon that it's hard not to think of the work of certain self-taught artists, in particular Adolf Wölfli's geometric layouts and Eugene von Bruenchenhein's smudgy apocalyptic visions.

Beyond its predominant resemblance to color-addled "outsider" art, though, Harris's work serves as a Rorschach test of art-historical references—here, an Op-art visual assault; there, lotus petals on a Tibetan thangka scroll. With their appearance of handmade religiosity, Harris's works are striking in their singularity, especially compared with the output of other emerging artists. If dazzling palettes and bold patterns now largely adorn mass-marketed products—whether anime plush toys or rock-'n'-roll paraphernalia—it's hardly surprising that today's neopsychedellic art investigates this halo of materialism. But Harris's hallucinations are homespun. His work, like good anthropology, reminds its audience of alternatives. In the past eras and surreal worlds evoked, color—and artmaking more generally—are reordained as crucial tools in the pursuit of interiority and transcendence.



Zach Harris, *Sunrises '88*, 2007–2008, acrylic and wood, 21 1/2 x 18 1/4 x 1 3/8".

— Dawn Chan