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## ART IN REVIEW; PETER HALLEY

by Ken Johnson

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That Peter Halley has been painting variations of the same basic picture for almost 20 years without going stale is cause for wonder. In the early 1980's, his cerebral parody of Mondrianesque abstraction was perfect for a time when theorists delighted in uncovering the hidden ideologies of mainstream formalism. Guided by Mr. Halley's theoretical writings, viewers learned to read the simple, rectilinear elements of his paintings as "cells" and "conduits": the fundamental units of a coercively rationalized society.

The surprising thing in retrospect was that rather than developing in terms of iconography or formal complexity, Mr. Halley's paintings became decoratively richer, to the point where the conceptual dimension could seem to fade next to the sumptuous surfaces. The trend continues in his new painting, in which he has incorporated a new palette of metallic and pearlescent colors.

One does not necessarily feel that Mr. Halley has abandoned the cheerfully dystopic vision he began with. The simple blocks of textured color, some with barred windows, and the bands of smooth, raised paint that frame and join them, still read as the architecture of an ominously networked world. And the over-the-top confectionery appearance invites an interpretation of the paintings as mock commodities: Jeff Koonsian symbols of the commercialization of the spirit.

But in the end, Mr. Halley elicits something similar to what one feels about Barbara Kruger: that the artist's strongest suit is that of a graphic stylist.