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Big Pins in Bloom: Tara Donovan at Pace; 'Parallax' at Lehmann Maupin

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Tara Donovan is famous for her uncanny ability to reanimate the dead effigies of mass production. She can make several thousand plastic cups, or a dozen huge rolls of adding-machine tape, look delicate and necessary because her acts of mechanical repetition are always inflected with organic variation. (She's breathing new life into Minimalism, too.)

Recently she's been looking at nickel-plated steel pins—the kind you'd find on an architect's bulletin board—and her discoveries, in the form of 12 large drawings, are on display at Pace on 25th Street.

The method is simple: Into a piece of 4-, 5-, 6- or 8-foot-square white Gatorboard (otherwise used for building dollhouses), Ms. Donovan sticks pins. The pins can be closer together or further apart, and this is the main expressive device. But they can also be pushed into different depths, their heads can overlap and they can stick out at slightly different angles, although the variation of angle, because it's barely exploited, is probably just an accident of human fallibility.

Most of the drawings are of simple motifs—a horizontal stripe, a misty sphere, an isosceles triangle descending from a point on the upper edge—and several of them come in two versions, either a positive and a negative, like the triangles, or simpler and more complex, like two drawings of rays extending from a pinch in the center. One has two rays of light, pointing up and down, and two of steely gray darkness; the other has eight and eight. Three drawings use overlapping circles of different densities to make fields of monochrome dandelions in compressed perspective. They could also be planets, or soap bubbles, or amoebas, of course, but the way the pins crowd together in partially fused collectivity is most like the disc florets of a sunflower.

A sunflower, like a dandelion or an aster, looks like a single flower but actually comprises thousands. So which is the real flower, the floret or the whole? In high-school geometry we learned that a point takes up no space, but that lines and planes are made of nothing but points. How does it work? And is there any medium so sterile that it can't convey a human intelligence?

"Drawings (Pins)" begins to ask questions like these, but it only begins. If the show has a weakness, it is the danger that the artist, having proven that she can speak through metal pins, will go looking for another such demonstration before we've finished listening to this one.

"Parallax" is what you call the way stationary objects seem to move against their background if you look at them from different angles. The effect can be used to

measure the distance of stars, and it's also the theme of a new group show at Lehmann Maupin.

Although the show ostensibly uses parallax as an occasion to explore the conflicts and deceptions of seeing more generally, most of the work is tightly focused. We see here (as we don't quite in Ms. Donovan's pins) the paradox that stripping communication to its bones, reducing a thought to a single point, doesn't reduce ambiguity but heightens it.

Robert Irwin's *Untitled (Acrylic Column)* discreetly bends light a little to the left, or a little to the right, as you walk by. Bruce Nauman's *Parallax Shell*, an enclosed little room of white walls with four vertical seams of light, is what it is and nothing more. Robert Smithson's simple but intellectually weighty pencil drawings attack one problem at a time, especially *Coil*, which is either in perspective or flat. Eva Hesse's *No title*, 1966, a square black panel on the wall that spits out a long black cord, seems frozen, as if interrupted in the act. And Mary Heilmann's painting *Pacific Ocean*, three cool blue panels with a few angled black lines, doesn't try to mystify: It's either this or it's that, and that's it.

Dan Flavin's green fluorescent lightning bolt, made of seven overlapping 4-foot bulbs, strikes from ceiling to floor but remains peacefully static, like a diagram in a textbook, and Gego's charming square kinetic sculptures, constructed of narrow tubes and chains, casting displaced, unmoving shadows on the wall, are like maquettes of themselves. Towering over the rest of it, like the very star whose distance all the other works are trying to measure, is Agnes Martin's 6-foot-square oil painting *Cow*. A muddy red circle is circumscribed in four concentric squares of four plastery shades of off-white. Ms. Hesse's sculpture has a textured, bumpy circle, Robert Morris' massive steel *Observatory* and Mr. Smithson's drawings have trembling half circles, but Ms. Martin's is the only one that's complete. If this is a cow, it is a Hindu cow, holy, heavy and serene.