

Lee Bul

★★★★

Lehmann Maupin, through June 21
(see Lower East Side)

Korean artist Lee Bul's latest show opens with a piece from 1998: a squidlike, three-dimensional form covered in sequins and matted flowers. It's a fitting preface to her newer, architecturally inspired efforts, which similarly combine beauty with a trace of menace.

Among the sculptural offerings is the show's centerpiece: a walk-in maze of mirrors and lights. Seductively futuristic and impossibly complicated, the work leaves you in a state of enchanted puzzlement.

Titled *Via Negativa II*, and prompted by the question of what constitutes the divine, the piece hovers like a dystopian mirage over mirror-tiled floor. From the outside, it resembles a boxy bus shelter, silkscreened with a text on the development of human



Via Negativa

consciousness. The inside features a disorienting mirrored environment, an inner sanctum of warmly colored lights that appear to extend into infinity in all directions.

Lee has professed an interest in early-20th-century German architect Bruno Taut and his proposal for a cathedral-like glass structure in the Alps. And in fact, her installation shares something of Taut's vision of achieving greater

self-awareness through an intense interaction with your environment. But Taut was expressing a utopian brand of optimism that is simply no longer possible. Lee acknowledges as much, imbuing her artworks with a sense of thwarted idealism made all the more palpable by their otherworldly allure.—*Merrily Kerr*

THE BOTTOM LINE Futuristic works as dystopian as they are utopian.