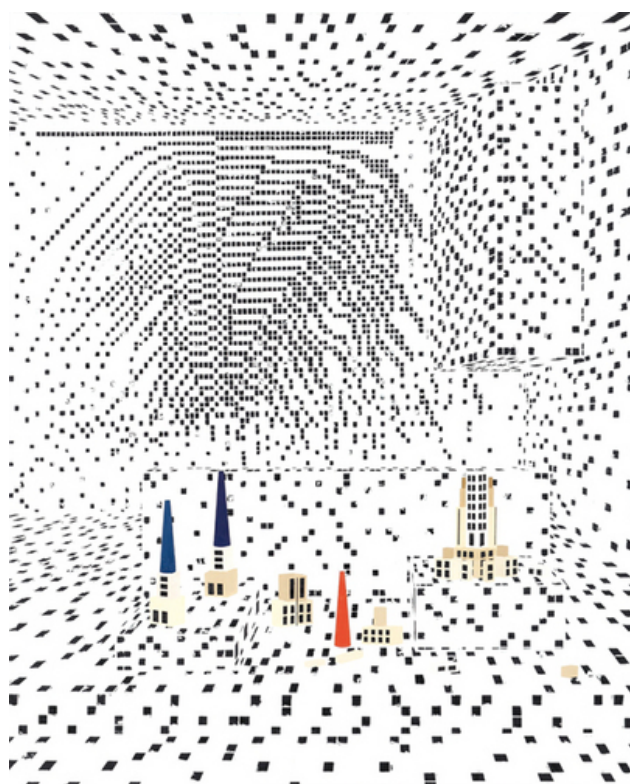


## Paris Reviews

### Farah Atassi

GALERIE XIPPAS | PARIS



Farah Atassi, *Building the City*, 2013, oil and glycerol on canvas, 78 3/4 x 63".

Those familiar with Farah Atassi's work will recognize in her latest group of paintings the strong orthogonal lines that lend themselves well to her signature tiled and bricked interiors. Adhering to an underlying grid, Atassi meticulously uses tape and layers of oil paint to construct eerily unpopulated human-scale spaces. But whereas earlier paintings featured scant domestic objects—for instance, a cluster of chairs or a dangling light fixture—evoking a kitchen or a bathroom setting, recent works show the artist moving toward greater abstraction. Now exploring the grid as a modernist concept—though without entirely abandoning recognizable objects—Atassi banishes a realistic sense of time and place from her compositions and turns her attention to geometric shapes and patterns. Refreshing the rote problematic of the flat canvas, Atassi's painted graphic environments, which are clearly influenced by computer-generated schematics, confront the planarity of screen-based virtual realities.

In six new paintings, abstract patterns challenge the credibility of representational perspectival space and vice versa. *Modern Toys II* (all works 2013) and *Playroom III* feature tangram-like designs in, respectively, steely blue and mustard yellow hues, covering the entire canvas. The all-over patterns, also reminiscent of American Indian tribal designs, reinforce the flatness of the painted surface by reducing it to a series of triangles, squares, and trapezoids. Complicating this perceived flatness, however, these shapes vary in size and appear foreshortened in certain areas—giving the impression of wallpaper covering the walls, floor, steps, columns, and peaked ceiling of a believable three-dimensional interior.

Groupings of smaller, multicolored geometric forms sprinkled across Atassi's compositions further escalate the push and pull between surface and illusionistic space. Painted on top of the all-over pattern

—bringing attention to the picture plane as well as to the layered texture of canvas's surface—these forms also convincingly reside within the space described by the painting, as objects resting on the floor, steps, and platforms. The foregrounded rectangles and triangles in *Playroom III* read as scattered children's building blocks thanks to their wood-brown color with green detailing indicating windows, doors, and roof tiles. Meanwhile, in *Modern Toys II*, similar assorted shapes rendered in solid red, yellow, blue, and dark brown are less obviously rooted in the real world and look more like the rearranged components of a Malevich Suprematist composition.

Both *Building the City* and *Building the City II* pay homage to another master of geometric abstraction, notably one who is practically synonymous with the modernist grid: A direct allusion to Mondrian is found in the central composition of *Building the City II*, which appears to be a flat back wall decorated with crisp, evenly spaced rectangles. As Atassi's one-point perspective opens outward from this "wall" toward the viewer, the dense arrangement of orange, green, and black rectangles disperses into a random tessellation that can also be interpreted as mosaic tiles covering the ceiling, walls, and floor of a mysterious room. An ambiguous collection of Atassi's recurrent blocks/abstract shapes occupies the lower half of the canvas, ostensibly resting on a series of stepped platforms. Here, more than in any of the other paintings on view, the dual function of these forms—as real-world building materials and abstract compositional components—underscores the artist's conceptualization of space as both a physical and mental activity.

—*Mara Hoberman*