

The New York Times

What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries Right Now



CHELSEA

Harriet Korman

Through April 9. Thomas Erben, 526 West 26th Street, Manhattan; 212-645-8701, thomaserben.com.

Harriet Korman's paintings have been good for a while. Now they're getting better. In "New Work," she continues her longtime practice of destabilizing geometry, making it a living, breathing, uneasy thing through asymmetry, personal touch and an unyielding palette. Especially important is her virtual banishment of white — which is so closely tied to geometric abstraction's supposed purity, from Malevich and Mondrian forward.

For most of the 2000s, Korman specialized in paintings that were seemingly fractured into varying triangles, interrupted by occasional curves and ovals. Around 2016, she went symmetrical, most impressively with a series of [cruciform compositions](#) defined by right-angled bands of slightly jarring colors radiating into the paintings' corners. They seemed to almost stretch before your eyes.

Now Korman has turned to concentric rectangles. These also radiate toward the edges, but concentricity bestows all sorts of associations — with picture frames, television logos, underground film and especially irreverent riffs on Josef Albers's "Homage to the Square" paintings. In contrast to the master's carefully calibrated proportions and colors, Korman's homages to rectangles jump in and out, thanks to abrupt changes of width and color. Their frequent caramels and khakis flirt with tastelessness while bonding with adjacent blues, reds, greens and yellows, usually not very pure. Korman's refusal of rulers also adds vitality. Made strictly by hand, the bands of color wobble and occasionally curve emphatically. These are delightful, elucidating paintings, with their own off-center ideas about beauty. Most of all, they are alive.

ROBERTA SMITH