



## AT THE GALLERIES

By Karen Wilkin | Arts Review



Harriet Korman, *Untitled*, 2023. Oil on canvas, 48 x 60 in. Courtesy of the artist and Thomas Erben Gallery.

Also in Chelsea, at Thomas Erben Gallery, Harriet Korman showed “Housing Development: New Paintings and Drawings,” a group of vibrant canvases and oil stick drawings unified by their exploration of the possibilities of nested rectangles. Korman says she thought about traditional, expedient representations of a house as a square surmounted by a triangle. “I knew I didn’t want to do that,” she says. Her recent paintings could be described as about “house-ness,” with the rectangles stimulating our sense of being within a foursquare enclosure or confronting a structure based on vertical and horizontal relationships. Despite the reliance on what appears to be straightforward geometry, Korman’s nested rectangles and their defining boundaries are handmade,

without the use of a straight-edge, just as her compositions, symmetrical or not, are made without measurement, so subtle deviations from true and fair animate the works.

It was illuminating to see a wall of urgent, relatively casual oil pastels testing what seemed to be the infinite variables of Korman's basic composition and to compare them to related paintings. The works on paper are not studies but have a character of their own. The canvases are more precise, with cleaner edges and uninflected expanses; they are equally lively but in a different way. The full-throttle color of the paintings—a seemingly endless range of intense yellows, greens, reds—both reinforces their forthright geometry and disrupts it, just as the slightly wonky “drawing” does. Spend some time with a painting that seems symmetrical and balanced or a group made with repetitions of a particular color, and we discover that things are a little off, not quite what we expected, just as we find that each iteration of green—say—is different. Korman captures us, at first encounter, with the deceptive simplicity of her images, then compels us to look harder. When we do, we discover nuances and shifts we hadn't registered at first. Nothing is quite what it seems. As we have come to expect of Korman, she gave us a lot to look at and to think about in “Housing Development.”