

# Arts & Reviews

## Barbara Broughel: *The Broken Grid*

At: Barbara Krakow Gallery, 10 Newbury St.,  
through April 26. 617-262-4490.  
www.barbarakrakowgallery.com.

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Art is artifice — an attempt to represent something else, whether that's a landscape, an emotion, or an idea. In her previous exhibition at Barbara Krakow Gallery, conceptual artist Barbara Broughel laid bare some tools of the trade — the trapdoors and sleights of hand that make the magic trick of a painting so seamless. She imagined the studio of a Northern European artist, circa 1700, and built several optical devices that could help a painter delineate a still life.

Among these was a long table with a standing grid. Looking through it at a subject, the painter could break an image down into its component parts. Two hundred years before abstract painting, artists utilized abstraction by breaking their work up into discrete squares in order to create — voila! — a representational image.

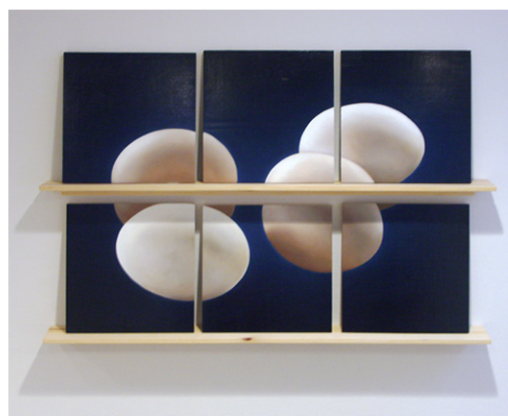
In her new show, Broughel offers stunning and disarming painting installations that have made use of that standing grid. Yet even as she demonstrates one trick up her sleeve, she withholds others (did she use a camera?), perpetuating illusion. The paintings, most of them presented propped on shelves in grid form, are deft and nearly photorealistic. They show eggs floating in space, or a stretch of lace, or a narrow but deep landscape with tulips.

The compositions are contemporary. The tulip painting, in particular, looks as if it must have been based on a photograph. The lace, rippling over a black ground across three floor panels leaning against the wall, takes on a modern formal austerity. Broughel revs up the tension between the fiction of representation and the deconstructive practice of abstraction, offering us lush, beautifully painted works that appear, broken down and reconstructed on shelves, still in the process of invention.

That, of course, is Broughel's conceit: This installation is complete, expertly portraying work in process to illustrate the complexities of perception and creation, and the never-ending cycle of invention and fiction in art.

# Installment plan

Paintings in grid form show tension between representative and abstract



"Vermillion Broken Tulips" (above) and "Broken Eggs #3" (left), part of Barbara Broughel's show "The Broken Grid," are beautifully painted, completed installations that portray work in process.

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