

Eli Langer

WHARTON + ESPINOSA

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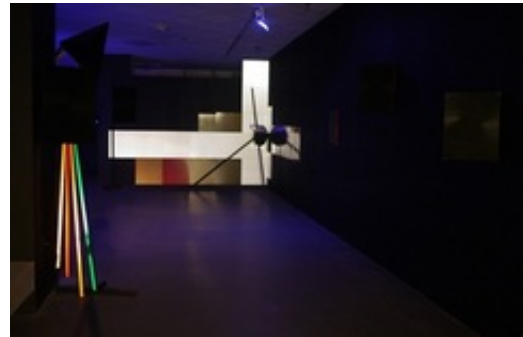
September 19–November 2

Having established himself over the past decade as a semiunderground mainstay of the LA scene, Canadian-born painter Eli Langer has only recently hit upon a new way of working that could be called indigenous to his life here. Departing dramatically from the understated, mildly twitchy, but rather familiar oil abstractions for which he'd become known, Langer's practice now investigates the ravishing properties of retroreflective materials (used in traffic signs, paving, and cycling gear for nighttime visibility on roadways) to construct incredibly atmospheric viewing environments.

Langer's current exhibition creates one such nocturnal viewing environment, awash in sparkling azure moonlight as though out of Kenneth Anger's *Rabbit's Moon* (1950). The main gallery is blacked out and punctuated with microprismatic vinyl and mirrored sheets arranged sculpturally in color block panels and diagonal lines like a Constructivist-inspired cyberpunk club. The spare configurations come off as alternately haphazard and weirdly elegant. Colored bulbs strategically positioned throughout the space on disjointed scaffolding sculptures locate sweet viewing spots where directed beams of fluorescent blue and amber light bounce right back off the radiant surfaces and turn them on like flashing neon signs. In the darkness, there are a couple large photographs and some black, grooved paintings that angle off the wall to catch light glancingly like shiny hair. More paintings, drawings, and large photographs of tree bark oozing sap hang in the gallery's brighter glass-front antechamber. But, on the whole, the pearlescence, iridescence, and electric buzz of retroreflectivity glowing in the dark define the experience.

While Mary Corse pioneered a similar evanescent and glittering optical effect in painting by suspending glass microspheres in acrylic in the late 1960s (also in Los Angeles), Langer's use of retroreflectivity is synthetic, pop-graphic, and, ultimately, photographic—its power not only hinging on strictly controlled lighting conditions and prepared POVs but actually reaching its most stunning effects when mediated through photography (especially flash photography), which best activates and captures the material's luminosity, as seen in installation shots. Langer's new installations seem so much made to be photographed that they clarify the medium's potential, in the midst of its ongoing digital crisis, to produce ecstatic, private, one-on-one visual turn-ons.

— Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer



View of "Eli Langer," 2012.