

# NEW YORK OBSERVER

*Going off the Grid: Wiley at Beauchene, 'Towards a Warm Math' at On Stellar Rays, Simon at Callicoon*

By Will Heinrich 5/22 5:17pm



**Chris Wiley is interested in meaning.** Not meaning as a verb, requiring a particular, limited object to act upon, but meaning as a noun, a slippery, nebulous object to be acted upon in its own right. Though it exists only provisionally, it can still be diagnosed, highlighted, elicited, created, arranged, denied, misrepresented or implied—not to mention interpretively postulated by a viewer or reviewer. But if meaning is the medium, the product will have to be a practice.

Mr. Wiley's *Technical Compositions* is a small show consisting of 13 numbered ink-jet prints (not counting a couple of extras in the gallery's office) of digital color photos. *13* itself—that's the same ostensibly irreducible prime that Judas Iscariot infused with such dynamic potential energy—shows a field of tile-like plastic panels divided by thin steel borders into a checkerboard pattern of alternating reddish oranges. The view is at an angle, so that the lines of the borders converge to the right. The fact that we can't tell whether it's a ceiling, a wall or a floor makes clear that it's meant to be, simply, a *grid*.

In 3, there's another grid, this one composed of bricks, concrete and the squares of a sidewalk; 4 is a shimmering grid of watery shadows on the gray wall and street-level exhaust vents of a windowless corporate building; and 9 has a complex and musical grid made by the deft cropping of stairs and heavy, ornamental bank columns. In 5, a grid of blue tile is interrupted by a pile of sand; in 8, a grid of shelter is constructed haphazardly and impermanently from corrugated tin; in 6, a dark concrete wall of tiny squares half eaten away turns the destruction of information into the creation of new information; and in 7, which shows the colorful wall of some exotic temple or bathhouse, a grid metamorphoses into a multitude of rosettes.

But though the focus on corners and building materials and shadows and walls, the extravagant sense of flatness

created by a tight depth of field and matte finish, would make any of these pictures look like a composition study even when considered alone, with the exception of *13*, it's only the context they all create together that guides our attention to the grid. And without that grid, they would be, as photographs, both heavier and less interesting. They're like stones in an arch, whose function would be not merely diminished but actually evaporated by the removal of the other stones. In *1*, hiding behind a column as a discreet nod to the agency that actually creates meaning, is an empty, discarded armchair.

**Further north** on Orchard Street, at the gallery On Stellar Rays, Mr. Wiley has curated the serendipitously concurrent group show "Towards a Warm Math." Mel Bochner's *Perspective Insert (Collapsed Center): Color*, a 1967/2011 c-print mounted on aluminum that shows a crumpled reddish-orange grid set over a receding white one, establishes the grid's photographic bonafides, but it's Melvin Way's two pocket-size drawings, the mostly red *Kum (H<sub>2</sub>O)* and mostly black *HOCH<sub>2</sub>, CH<sub>2</sub>*, that really set the terms: the question here is how public systems of meaning—such as language, theological or political orthodoxy, or geometry—are adapted or subjected to personal intentions.

Mr. Way's drawings, somewhat bent and smudged at the corners because he carried them in his pockets, show apparently meaningful chemical equations surrounded by blocks of color—but what the lambda surrounded by glowing lines would mean to a chemist is one question, and what it meant to Mr. Way is another.

Eugene von Bruenchenhein contributes to Mr. Wiley's show two beautiful ballpoint drawings of vaguely ornithological geometric patterns; John Houck, two carefully, deliberately creased, computer-facilitated grids; and Ionel Talpazan, two large, exuberantly colorful diagrams of the UFOs that we can expect any day now, complete with explanatory texts that might or might not make sense if you read Romanian.

Thomas Bayrle's 1970 *Stalin (rote Version)* depicts the iconic dictator using repeated red iterations of his iconic mustache. Brody Condon's *Vat Flesh on a Pedestal of Imitation Jade* is like a four-foot-high geodesic spermatozoon, in which the pattern of expression adapts itself to the pattern of growth. Oliver Laric's *Versions*, three small, motley-colored, polyurethane sculptures, wade into iconoclasm, Walter Benjamin style: reproducing an altarpiece figure in St. Martin's Cathedral in Utrecht that was defaced during the Reformation, they were poured by the artist in a mold made from a model built to order in China from digital photos the artist collected on the Internet.

The last word here goes to Lucas Blalock, whose 2011 silver print *Numbers*, which shows heavy black numbers, including the much-praised 1, the controversial 3 and the mysteriously powerful 23, against a windy grayish background, serves simultaneously as the show's joke, question, précis and punchline.

**After you come out of** On Stellar Rays, walk over to Forsyth and hang a left, because meaning can also be donated, catalogued, exploited, oppressed and discarded—or salvaged, memorialized, repurposed and put up for sale. For 34 years, until she was laid off after helping to lead a strike, Mary Corliss managed the five million images of the Museum of Modern Art's Film Still Archive. Jason Simon's *Festschrift for an Archive* combines, between sober gray covers, an interview with Ms. Corliss, two judgments by the National Labor Relations Board and a publicity still (not from the archive) from a Hollywood film about labor. Most of the book's edition of 200—along with images of Charlie Chaplin, Marcello Mastroianni, Thommy Berggren playing Joe Hill and another project called *Two Essays on Banks*—are on display at Callicoon Fine Arts.