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Heidi Van Wieren at Margaret Thatcher Projects

by Jonathan Goodman
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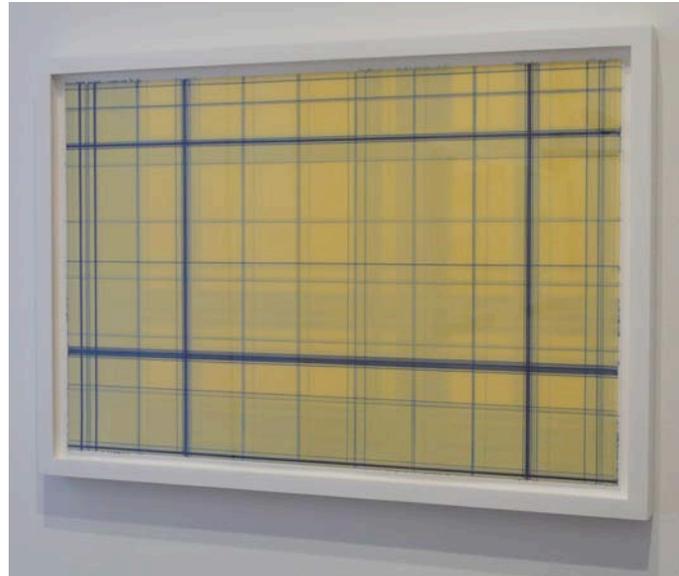
Heidi Van Wieren, *Badlands 00101* 2009.
Elmer's glue & ink on panel, 36 x 72 inches

Heidi Van Wieren's current compositions investigate the variegated skies of South Dakota's Badlands. Working with an unusual set of materials—Elmer's glue, pigment, and droplets of ink—the artist builds up layers that contain what seems to be an infinite number of stars in a night-time sky. In the case of the "Badlands" series, the drops of ink, which occur in a spectrum of sizes, from very small to rather large, are scattered across the paper or panel. The effects are glorious,

ranging from dense dispersions of rounded forms to more spare arrangements, both of which take part in creating receding layers of circular shapes. Although Van Wieren tends to stay focused on a particular palette, colors can be various. Some of the work has a majority of orange and pinkish red drops, while others are made up of blacks and blues and light browns, Van Wieren's careful placement of dots suggests an endless, receding background that reads like constellations of stars, galaxies, and nebulae. At the same time, however, it is possible to view these pieces as thoroughly abstract, in which self-referential color fields build up densities of dispersed light. The consequences of Van Wieren's style allow for simultaneous readings of her art.

In the large (three feet by six feet) panel entitled *Badlands 00101* (2009), large blue and large black drops establish a rhythm that is reiterated by smaller drips of the same colors. Across the middle and on the bottom right of the composition, a band of smallish brown drops occurs, as though they were differing star structures at some distance from the complex atmosphere of the blue and black spheres. While one hesitates to claim the influence of the New York School because of the geographical specificity of Van Wieren's series, it is possible to view the panel as an idealized abstraction, in which the drops combine to create an idealized, nonobjective format. In *Orange Fizz* (2008) we see a similar dispersion of forms, which rarely overlap and

seem to establish an agreed-upon distance from each other. *Badlands (Sunset) 00102* (2009) offers a darker, more mysterious arrangement that approximates the color schemes of dusk; here Van Wieren again uses Elmer's glue and ink on a fairly large panel, (thirty by sixty inches), building a version of a Badlands sunset in which black is the predominant hue.



Heidi Van Wieren, *Constructed Drawing 00401* 2009.
Wood glue, primer & ink on paper, 16 x 24 inches

While **Van Wieren** is committed to her idiom—most of the works shown are landscapes consisting of drops of various sizes and colors—two “Constructed Drawings” were also shown. In these works, she is more sharply rational, building patterns that relate to hard-edged abstraction and architecture. Here, in *Constructed Drawing 00401* (2009), a layer of glue covers inked lines that create squares and rectangles on top of a yellow ground; the distinctly right-angled format shows the artist at her best, in works that contrast with the more densely arranged layers of circles. Although it is possible to find precedents in the New York School—one might think for example, of the rigorous geometries of Al Held—*Constructed Drawing 00401* holds its own in terms of influence. One also is reminded of architectural blueprints, in which the layout of a modernist building is as elegant as the finished building itself. At the same time, the drawing is arranged on the plan of a grid, bringing coherence and discipline into the overall display of the composition. In both the “Badlands” and “Constructed Drawings” series, we see Van Wieren building structures whose supports are elements that are basic without becoming overly simplified. From such origins, she has manufactured images of genuine beauty.