

**Ariella Budick, "A Whiter Shade of Pale Suggesting Angels, DNA,"
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Review

A Whiter Shade of Pale Suggesting Angels, DNA

When Kasimir Malevich created his suprematist composition "White on White" in 1918, he thought he had brought painting as far as it could go, eliminating all superfluous elements. It was pure art, stripped of all accumulation of "things."

In retrospect, it's hard to imagine the shock-value of these paintings when they were first shown. A century's worth of abstraction has succeeded Malevich's first experiments, and radical reduction has become just one more stylistic option. Many artists have discarded color, choosing white – or black – for its blankness and its multiplicity of associations. In the West, white evokes brides, angels and dentists. In the east, it is the color of mourning. If evil generally cloaks itself in black, unblemished innocence proudly sallies forth in the color of snow.

"White as Color," a new exhibit at the Art League of Long Island, gathers together artists who take an ascetic approach to hue, allowing texture and form to take center stage.

Maureen Palmieri pares down her palette, but not her flair. Her installation consists of a swarm of pale babies floating gently in mid-air. Some rest of milky pillows, while others freeze mid-fall, caught between the mezzanine level and the gallery floor. Even without gluing wings on her infants, Palmieri invokes the figure of the cherub, in all his benign guile. On the other hand, she may be hinting at the secret but probably universal parental urge to chuck a screaming baby out the window – thereby creating one more innocent angel in the firmament.

Drew Shiflett's sculptures are less literary and more tactile. Using handmade paper, cheesecloth, polyester stuffing and Styrofoam, she creates pseudo-textiles that look like iced tapestries. Each horizontal band has a distinctive pattern and texture, like the layered strata of geological time or the recordings of an ancient chronology.

Michelle Stuart's gorgeous "Seed Drawings," are all elegance in shades of beige. Rows of concentric circles, like minimalist targets, mark a broad rectangle. At the heart of each lies a cantaloupe seed, whose juice has been allowed to seep into the paper. Each circle and organic streak is different, much as any two apparently identical seeds have different DNA. Stuart obliquely implies that the uniqueness of each seed stands for human individuality, stamped on the micro level upon our genes, on the macro upon our character. But there is nothing didactic about the message – couched in scientific syntax, it plays out in the graceful simplicity of her design.

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