

# HOUSTON★CHRONICLE

## Shinn's Refuge seems simple at first glance

## But the metal sculpture, painting and lighting combine to make it complex

By DOUGLAS BRITT ©2010 Houston Chronicle Aug. 11, 2010, 5:28PM (photo: Jeremy Keas)

Jay Shinn's *Shattered-X*, 2010, was created not with metal but with projected light and paint.

### JAY SHINN: REFUGE

- **When:** Through Sept. 4
- **Where:** Barbara Davis Gallery, 4411 Montrose; 713-520-9200



Dallas- and New York-based artist Jay Shinn's solo exhibition at Barbara Davis Gallery proves achieving simplicity in art is no simple feat.

Even discussing Shinn's spare, geometric work risks oversimplifying matters.

Take the pieces made mostly from aluminum or stainless steel.

As three-dimensional objects, they obviously qualify as sculpture, but their effects owe a lot to painting and to installation art. You'd ruin them if you fiddled with the lights in the gallery. Take them off the wall, and you might as well take them to the scrap heap.

Both *Dividing Wall* and *Reverse Shadow* start with a stainless-steel rectangle mounted against a wall.

In repeating units, steel lines extend from the top bars of the rectangles, bend to create new lines that run parallel to the wall, then bend again to connect with the rectangles' bottom bars. Both pieces use shadows to suggest volume and depth.

The difference is that while both sculptures cast real shadows thanks to Shinn's careful use of the lights in the gallery, one of them also includes imaginary shadows.

Shinn created them by painting directly — and subtly - onto the wall.

Or - look again - did he paint not imaginary shadows but the negative spaces defined by real ones?

Part of the appeal of Shinn's sculptures is figuring out which ones deploy up to three key elements - metal, paint and light - and which ones only use two.

Even when you've solved the puzzle, your eyes don't quite believe you.

Shinn's newest work, *Shattered-X*, dispenses with metal altogether. Shinn projects a geometric design onto a wall painting to create what artist Kurt Mueller, a recent critical-studies resident in the Glassell School's

Core Program, describes in an exhibition brochure as "a dodecagon that appears as both a corrugated star icon and a recessive vortex."

But it's also too simplistic to focus solely on the gee-whiz optical effects of Shinn's sculptures, delightful as they are.

The work's real power lies in the way it transforms the gallery into a serene, chapellike setting. The exhibition's title, *Refuge*, hints at a spiritual impulse behind the work, as does the interdependency between the objects and their setting, neither of which is complete without the other.

Related 12-by-12-inch prints, part of Shinn's *Powdered Icons* series, are also more complicated than they seem.

"For each, the artist screen-printed digital scans of individual chalk lines onto three sheets of glass and then a mirror," Mueller writes. "Stacked and framed together, the sheets composite an image that is physically separate but optically unified."

It all adds up to a less-is-more vision that draws on the legacy of minimalism but ultimately feels more generous than austere. But you need to experience the work in person to glean its impact.

That much, at least, really is that simple.

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