

## Art Review

Ilene Sunshine, Sarah Lutz  
The Painting Center

By MARY HRBACEK

Calling attention to the work of two very different artists, this show is essentially two one-person exhibitions which share adjoining venues in *The Painting Center*, a not-for-profit institution in SoHo that helps painters to show their work in New York.

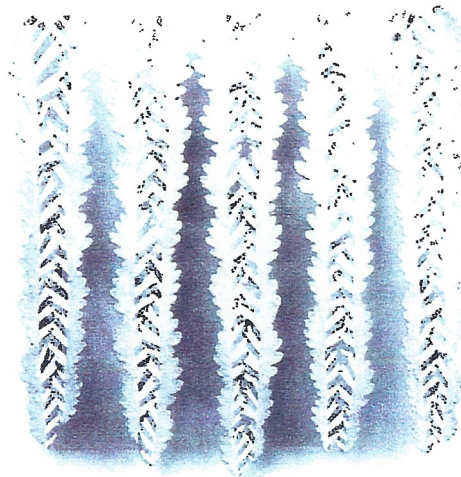
In the first venue (called the Project Room) Ilene Sunshine's sculptures converge with painting to reconstruct nature through human applications. Carefully collaged into rows of leaves, these fragile, delicate works form rhythmic, brightly painted patterns. Natural materials are stitched into small appliqued emblems which are attached to strings in triangular configurations, sometimes nailed to the wall.

Poetic and yet enduringly practical, Sunshine's work uses leaves as a metaphor for the dialectic between stability and flux. While the pieces are light as a feather, there is nothing sparse about their construction; every stitch is placed at an equal distance from its neighbors with a precision that contrasts with the seemingly free-form designs that appear as if they could float on air. The leaves themselves create well shaped forms that predetermine the surface appearance of the sewn leaf pieces.

In *Papaya Sky*, for example, a pattern of leaves is stitched into a yellow screen in three columns of pale blue and yellow-red stripes. The flat opaque quality of the acrylic and pastel hues gives these works a spare essence of Scandinavian design, while the screen beneath the stitching produces an after image of shadow patterns. In *S.L. #1 (Gariahat)* the collaged plastic, screen and natural materials make for a complex design that seems to mimic a snowflake. These understated, highly personal works quietly defy the inherent impermanence of nature, insisting with diligent reverence on safeguarding that which Sunshine considers valuable and worthy.

In the second venue (the larger space) Sarah Lutz's semi-abstract oil paintings, have a biological theme; the "morula," a dense spherical cell mass created during the early stages of embryonic growth. Lutz varies the color, number, size and placement of these morulas in her pictorial space. Outer space is said to be composed of the same structure as inner space; here, the artist puts this knowledge to plausible use.

Lutz handles paint with sensitivity; scratching and scraping pentimenti that arise



Ilene Sunshine *S.L. #5 (Papaya Sky)*, 2003. Leaves, gesso, plastic mesh 18 x 18 inches. Courtesy: The Painting Center, New York

through thin washes of liquid pigment, she penetrates these surfaces to create the illusion of space. Dark green areas on the horizon in the painting, *Ripe*, (2003) recede, and this affects a perception of distance. The sphere may fill the whole picture, leaving only a small "sky". Elsewhere, several orbs occupy the picture plane and relate to one another according to their spatial placement.

Against dark and light backgrounds, the volumetric morulas suggest planets suspended in space, delineated by lines that sometimes become forms in themselves. In another painting, *N.P. No. 2*, (2003), the morula rests on a sliver of ground surrounded by "stars" in a dark sky. The blue, sepia and off-white cell mass seems to pulsate with energy.

These morulas hover in a non-threatening manner that conjures a friendly presence; human psychological underpinnings redefine science in paradoxical terms, evoking romantic notions of outer space. The suspended spheres read as responsive celestial bodies that follow cyclical rhythms in an organic pictorial universe. ♡