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Art review: Light makes right in Katsumi Hayakawa's impressive show

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"Light Generating" is among the large works in Katsumi Hayakawa's show "Particles of Light," on view through Sept. 21 at McClain Gallery.

Photo: Courtesy of the artist and McClain Gallery

The sun felt more blinding than usual — even for a sweltering August day — when I visited Katsumi Hayakawa's show "Particles of Light."

Inside McClain Gallery, the air conditioning soothed me quickly. So did a triptych of small blue paintings that felt like a visual dive into a deep pool. A quartet of larger works created with amazonite pigments made me think of sea glass, and the hazy din of the city faded away.

But the cool quietude turned out to be a necessary lead-up to the stars of the show: four large-scale, multipanel drawings that feature grounds of metallic-gold paint as a ground for landscapes of white spots. Light appears to be emanating from behind them, capturing some elemental essence of physics and a mood awash in contemporary baroque glory.

“Phenomenon,” which measures about 6 by 10 feet, seems like it could blaze right through your sunglasses. But “Light Generating” brings to mind something akin to the sensations that Yayoi Kusama achieves with her “Infinity Room” installations. The marvelous thing is that Hayakawa takes you there while you’re still standing in broad daylight, employing some alchemy of light-capturing acrylic pigments on paper he affixes to wood panels.

Light also sparkles across mirrorlike surfaces within his three-dimensional, cut-paper constructions. They yield surprises from different angles, when their meticulous handwork and the influences of urban architecture become evident.

Referring to his three-dimensional work in the past, Hayakawa has talked about his intent to bridge complex and unseen substructures of the Information Age and the increasingly dense landscape of modern cities. He believes urban architecture embodies “the absence of existence, the absence of nothingness and the absence of the absence of absence.”

Wouldn’t Gertrude Stein love him?

The philosophical mind-bender is entertaining to contemplate, but I am happy just to empty my brain and stare at the “Particles of Light” paintings, which lead the gaze into an ecstatic, brilliant place that could be nowhere at all, the horizon of a city viewed from an approaching plane or heaven itself.

Hayakawa will be in Houston for a reception 6-8 p.m. Sept. 12 at the gallery.

“Particles of Light” is on view through Sept. 21 at McClain Gallery, 2242 Richmond; 713-520-9988, mcclaingallery.com.

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