

artNEWS

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Joan Witek

WERNER KRAMARSKY

Joan Witek coaxes the stark polarities of black and white into nuanced harmonies. In this show of deep, gorgeous pastels, watercolors on acetate film, and a series of encaustic and pigment on paper, her means may be extreme, but her ends are the stuff of subtle intelligence.

In the pastel *Dart*, white borders—some almost completely white, others vague and indistinct—seem to emerge out of a thickly coated black grid. Yet they could just as well be the vaporous remains of a lattice that was once entirely white. Is Witek teasing black out of its dark mood or casting into oblivion white's conventional promise of purity? *Drawing*, with its four large squares, two consisting of black grids and two of thin white lines running across black fields, similarly approaches the viewer with a sensuous balance of contrasts and degrees. In the "Ghost" series of watercolors on film, Witek's blacks and whites randomly merge on the nonabsorbent film, creating near-cartoony biomorphic shapes that become little dramas of chance.

The exhibition ended with small eruptions of encaustic seemingly hurled against paper like wild celebrations. There is indeed much in Witek's art to celebrate.

LEE SIEGEL

**Joan Witek, *Dart*, 1997,
pastel on paper, 26" x 20".
Werner Kramarsky.**

