

In Galleries

By Jan Dibbets

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Joan Witek

'Black Translations'

CDS Gallery

76 East 79th Street

Through Feb. 20

Black is Joan Witek's painting language, one she speaks with great fluency. On white gessoed grounds, she lays down a dense overall scheme of sinuous, calligraphic black markings, often inflected by small black squares. The markings are elaborate, suggesting labyrinths, ancient texts and jungle undergrowth, and are sprinkled with near-images that could almost be read as signs and symbols. The white ground filters through, allowing the dense orchestrations of black to breathe.

In "The Raven," Ms. Witek moves from lighter to darker black and back again in a tapestry of intricate strokes, broken up by tiny linear grids, the white of the canvas and four small, symmetrically placed black rectangles. It's an elegant, mysterious creation that puts one in mind of Mozart's night music.

In "Transfigured Night" Ms. Witek is on a different tack. A black square whose upper half is punctuated by tiny white marks, the work reads like a landscape with the faint lights of city buildings. It is much less effective than her labyrinthine canvases, a mode of which she has a fine command.

GRACE GLUECK