



## **CHRISTOPHER BADGER: Review - "Lunar Mirror"**

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For his current solo exhibition at Jessica Silverman Gallery, Christopher Badger has created a suite of paintings and sculptures that draw on the aesthetics of Minimalism while incorporating pedagogical and informational forms of display. The pieces in *Lunar Mirror* explore territory well beyond their primary subject matter—the moon—and illustrate related phenomena, such as the physics of astronomical orbits and a variety of mathematical concepts, with the elegance and economy of a physics equation.

Cast in shiny, unadorned aluminum, the sculptural works, such as the wall-mounted *Necho* (all pieces are from 2013), and *Rima Hadley*, displayed on short table legs in the middle of the gallery's floor,

call to mind the minimalist tradition, particularly the work of Larry Bell. Like Bell's sculptures, these pieces refract the gallery's ambient lighting and pick up the color of any surrounding light or material. Unlike Bell's works, their intricately modeled surfaces offer no clear reflection of viewers' bodies circulating the space but instead resemble topographical maps of the moon's surface. Rather than serve as accurate replicas, these works are in fact the product of a series of translations. First, Badger created digital files from aerial photographs of the moon from the 1970s, a process requiring speculative interpretation to generate topographical information such as relative altitudes and slopes. Working from these flattened images based on his calculations, Badger then created three-dimensional models of the terrain depicted. This allowance for interpretation opens up each sculpture's final form: what are actually peaks could feasibly become valleys in the piece.

For example, the contours of *Necho's* central depression, which appears to recreate the piece's titular meteor impact site, compose an elaborate guess as to the actual dimensions of the famous crater. Although Badger based the piece on an old photo, *Necho's* finely detailed topographical form gives the appearance, and implicit authority, of a scientific or educational model. Badger's decision to work from archival images, especially when the specific measurements of the objects in question are instantaneously available, is a move that privileges past scientific representations rather than currently verifiable information.

Similarly, the paintings—done in oil and chalk on black-gesso panels—reference in their scale, arrangement, and overall appearance the sort of blackboard diagrams frequently used to illustrate

academic science lectures. *Decagon Construction* hangs directly above *Pentadecagon Construction*, recalling both the blackboards hung in a similar manner in classic '60s or '70s photographs of the physicist Richard Feynman's lectures and the minimalist display practices of the same era by artists such as Daniel Buren, Robert Ryman, and Donald Judd. Each of these paintings bears a number of concentric rings and intersecting lines, usually including a polygon; each illustrates a variety of mathematical relationships that are presented cleanly and precisely but are not explicitly labeled except perhaps by the piece's title. The geometric information is being presented but not illuminated. Many sections are handcolored with Badger's uneven but consistent marks, which create pleasing gradients and emphasize each composition's flat abstraction. *Shadow Phase* (2013), the largest painting, and the only one not explicitly titled in relationship to its central geometry, portrays the familiar phases of the moon, with additional lines indicating epicyclical orbits or astronomical transits. Alternately, the piece can be read more abstractly as a map of flat, tangential relationships or symbolically, bringing to mind both the historical astronomers Tycho Brahe's and Johannes Kepler's diagrams, which attempted to prove Copernican astronomy, and Nancy Holt's *Dark Star Park* (1984), an earth work that simultaneously illuminates and mystifies the human relationship to celestial bodies.

Badger seems to share Holt's interest in both science and mysticism. Two paintings, *Hexagon Construction* and *Pentadecagon Construction* feature the Flower of Life, an ancient symbol of sacred geometry, a thought system that conflates mathematical purity, perfection, truth, and patterns in nature. Badger, however, depicts the Flower of Life as the product of mathematic relationships that don't seem, on the surface, to support the same transcendent claims to the motif's significance that New Age writers have more recently ascribed to it. Viewed together, this collection of work points both inward and outward simultaneously, not only ostensibly examining cold and remote celestial bodies in space but also contemplating the history of astronomy, physics, and mystical representations of those same bodies. The work holds such seemingly paradoxical modes of thought as mysticism and mathematics, intuition and empiricism, and aesthetics and scientific representation in careful balance.