

Op at Up

Up & Co. through July 18

BY J. BOWYER BELL

OP & CO. WOULD appear to be one of those establishments that spring up out of the void to boutique magazines, fashion, furniture housewares or cutting edge art — many are apt to have short half-lives. In this case Tom Moody, who includes himself, has brought together a mixed group of the very sharp-edged engaged in Op Art, which the dull thought long dead. Wrong says Moody. Op is for always; color moves; art can or need not be static; light can dance, and images creep about courtesy of the laws of nature — optics for the now generation.

What first is interesting in this small collection is that all seem fresh, not necessarily super and great and significant, but fresh, from now not back in the sixties when Op Art did have its obligatory fifteen minutes after Pop and before Minimalism, appearing for a whole season at Howard Wise,

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until the major players like Bridget Riley went back to making more typical stuff, back to their school.

Here in the one room on Church Street there is no school emerging — only one work really recalls Riley: Mark Dagley's *CONCENTRIC SEQUENCE*, 1996. It spins and whirls and blurs, and despite or because of all of this remains appealing, decorative not profound, handsome, not so much contemporary as cunning. Moody's own work, *PIPES 2*, 1998 of laser print and linen tape, theory aside, blurs out nicely, not as appealing or as decorative as Dagley's, but definitely as Op had promised. Alicia Wirt does small, slight objects that in various lights reflect a hidden spectrum on the wall, eerie or precious depending on one's taste. And David Clarkson has deconstructed Op into parts up on the wall, wood and light bulbs, motors and wires, Plexiglass, red and blue, the sum not quite equaling the parts; an idea going someplace, perhaps toward sculpture, but not quite. Here it may relate to Op, but anyplace else it would fit in with the present crowd.

Ray Rapp offers bubbles on video, that is, if you want to watch bubbles on video — much that is on video, commercially, artistically, whatever, seems to be Pop Op or Op Pop anyway. Rapp obviously feels more is not enough. Mark Dagley has a wood construction with glass and a geodesic sphere that is neither Pop nor Op, not closely related to anything else, but fits the present category of works that almost look like something else: a mistake by a cabinet maker, a machine shop practice model, a packing crate with grace.

Anyway, there it sits. And despite all the blurs and reflections, whatever Tom Moody may intend or feel, this eager eye is not convinced that Op is either with us again or here to stay. Dagley's archetypal optical basis will

have to live or die on the degree of its novelty not the weight of tradition — and so too Moody's object. The others are really engaged in other matters that are optical, but give the impression of arriving at such effects on the way to someplace else from someplace else. Wirt's objects are curiosities now, but who knows what comes next, or for that matter what came before. Now they, like most of the other objects, can be clumped into an Op slot that emphasizes certain aspects at the expense of others — which is a good thing during the month of round-up, grumble groups, and attenuated collections.