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Denyse Thomasos: The Divide at Lennon, Weinberg
By Ilka Scobie



Denyse Thomasos *Lollipop Nation* 2009
acrylic on canvas, 40 x 54 inches
Courtesy of Lennon, Weinberg

The ten paintings in “The Divide” are the powerful culmination of many years’ research and travel. Denyse Thomasos’s long interest in the architecture of confinement has taken her to Europe, Africa, Asia, and most recently, to the new super jails Maryland. Merging indigenous structures such as Mali mud huts and Indian dwellings with hi tech prison catwalks and a punchy palette, Thomasos has made an opulent creative breakthrough in this new body of work. Known previously for her monochromatic elegance, the unexpected jolts of cotton candy colors replicate industrial stairwells and the quirky hues of current fashions.

While Thomasos shows widely in her native Canada (especially her monumental wall pieces) this is her first New York solo show in several years. In October, Lennon Weinberg included her more abstract 2001 painting, *Inside Wyoming*, in a superb group show, “Before Again”, alongside works by Joan Mitchell, Harriet Korman, Melissa Meyer, and Jill Moser. These new works of complexity and intensity are beautiful in their pattern making and pattern breaking, allegorical architectures that present new possibilities for painting.

The artist portrays futuristic environments that reference slavery and imprisonment. There is also an element of fifties space age nostalgia in her diagonally floating crosshatched apparitions. Trinidadian by birth, raised in Canada, now a New Yorker, the artist has a sophisticated visual language in which intense dimensionality allows for a free flow of ideas and information. Her masterful hand reveals poetry in the political.

If early modernist abstraction was inspired by nature, Thomasos’s vigorously contemporary abstraction is constructed upon imaginary metropolitan grids in which subterranean cages rise to skyscraper scale and architectural renderings blur into infinite space. In the receding passageways of *Inca Matrix* (2009) weirdly pastel swatches emblazon the skeletal blueprints while otherworldly structures are pierced by hot pink unwavering brushstrokes.

Form and content are inseparable in *Lollipop Nation* (2009) where a cage imprisons a vermillion-saturated block, perhaps a bloody heart. Of this particular piece, the artist has said: “We can live in luxury and the invisibility of imprisoning mostly black kids.” The methodically built textural surfaces of her imaginary infrastructures, as if corresponding to cultural codifications, intimate a nuanced view of oppression.