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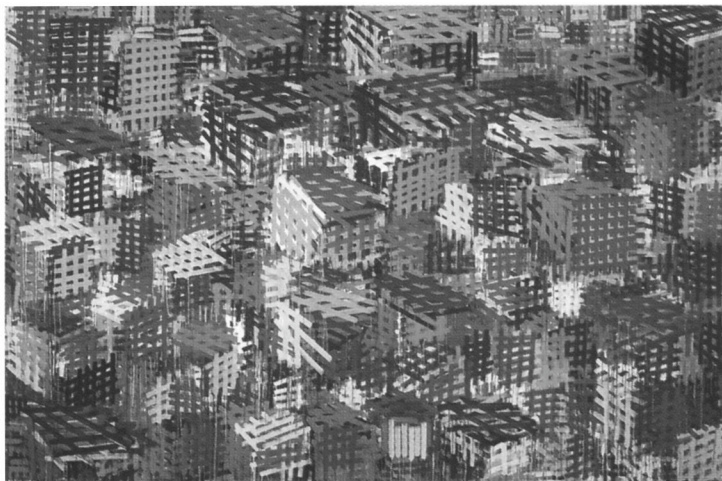
Denyse Thomasos

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Art in America

February 1998

Denyse Thomasos: *Urban Jewels*, 1995, acrylic on canvas, 10 by 16 feet; at Lennon, Weinberg.



Denyse Thomasos at Lennon, Weinberg

The paintings of Denyse Thomasos, a young artist born in Trinidad and now living in New York City, deploy dozens of adjoining squarish grids across the canvases in a quiltlike arrangement. Each grid section is made from criss-crossing horizontal and vertical stripes of various colors. Although based on simple marks and configurations, the resulting patterns, which resemble broken-up lattice work, are formally complex and capable of suggesting many kinds of experience.

The 13 works in this show ranged from small 14-by-12-inch canvases to large paintings such as the massive 10-by-16-foot *Urban Jewels* (1995). The white, black, red and orange patches distributed evenly throughout

Urban Jewels lend it coherence and structure, while the intermittent light-blue and orange units add brightness. Drips of paint flowing from the individual brushstrokes intensify the painterly atmosphere. Interestingly, Thomasos angles her latticelike squares so that they sometimes appear to form cubes, unexpectedly creating the illusion of spatial depth. As with many of the works in the show, the improvised, free-floating structure of *Urban Jewels* is suggestive of both jazz and big-city life. One also notices how, in its intricate overlays and randomly applied colors, the painting conveys the density and chaos of urban experience in a very different fashion from Mondrian's famous New York City-inspired grid paintings of the 1940s.

The small works in the show were equally of interest.

Composed of thick superimposed black, brown, gray and light blue strokes, *Spell* (1997), for instance, although only 14 by 12 inches, has the feeling and power of a much larger painting.

Thomasos's paintings are compositionally strong, yet in an artist's statement she makes it clear that her concerns are not only formal: "I link . . . my personal history with my historical past. Slavery marks the start of my history; each stroke—a lash, each mark—resilience in the fields." She thus connects her painting process with the historical memory of servitude. In these powerful, densely structured paintings, Thomasos has created an abstract body of work that is all the more compelling for its evocation of actual experience.

—Jonathan Goodman