reviews

Yvette Kaiser-Smith, installation view of "Digits," 2008.

COURTESY ALFEDENA GALLERY, CHICAGO

CHICAGO

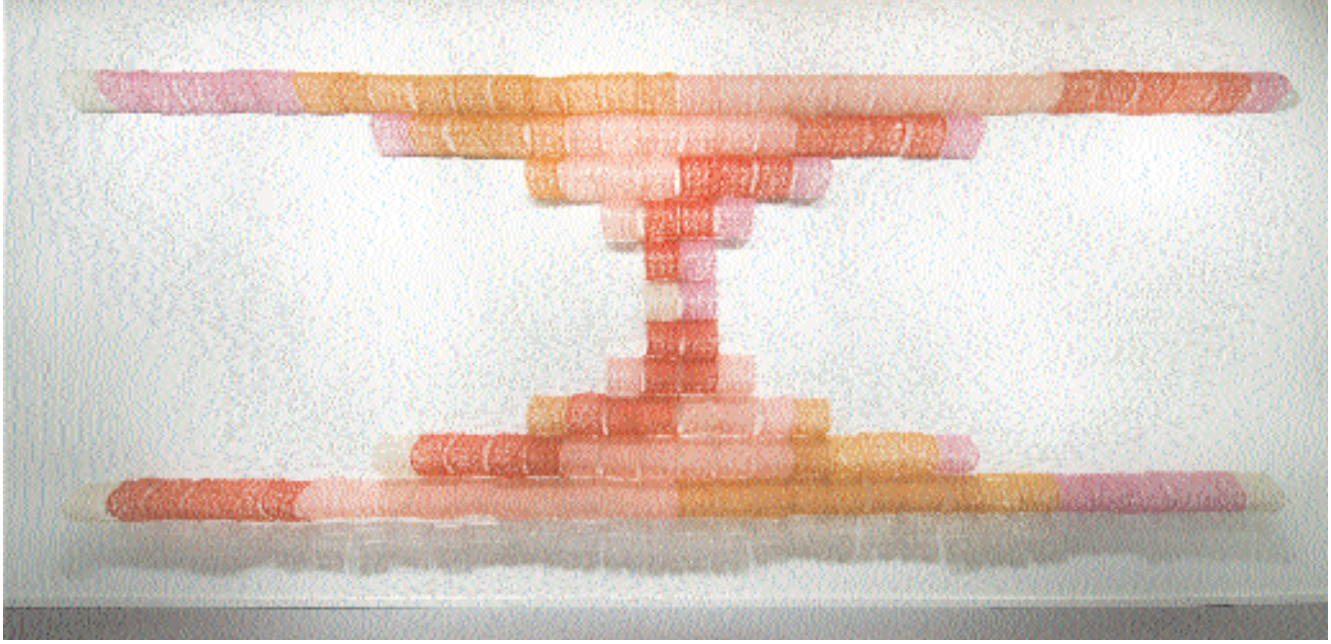
Yvette Kaiser-Smith

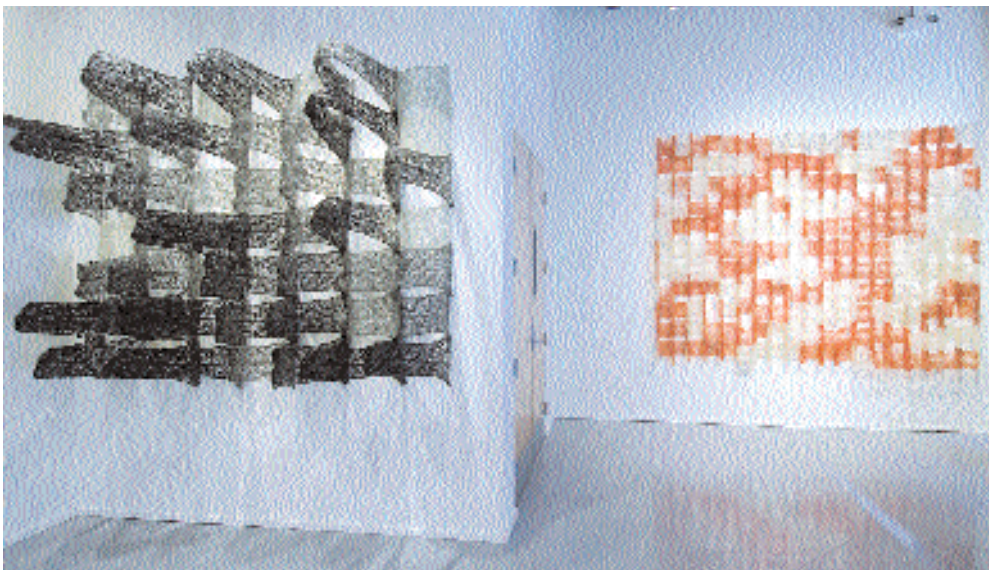
Alfedena Gallery

Yvette Kaiser-Smith's wall sculptures stretched in lacy, bone-like, monumental grids to span the walls of "Digits," her most recent exhibition. She builds the sculptures from small modular units of hand-crocheted fiberglass threads, which are then hardened with polyester resin and molded into architectural forms. Kaiser-Smith structures her sculptures, which use art forms to visualize and embody the most disembodied of processes, by sequencing the color, location, and size of the units according to various mathematical concepts such as the number pi or the geometric arrangement called Pascal's Triangle. She has admitted to a "dependence on and obsession" with primes, those idiosyncratic numbers divisible only by one and themselves, calling them "generator numbers, the root of all other numbers."

By founding her work in mathematical structure, Kaiser-Smith—who was born in the Czech Republic but currently lives in Chicago—plays with the idea of human identity as an intangible code within constantly shifting contemporary life. She refers as much to DNA or the quantifiable migration patterns of human populations as to the physical reality of the body in exploring personal individuality—although these are sculptures with an uncompromisingly physical presence.

Identity Sequence e Black (2007), for example, is a grid of 49 black, gray, and white units in seven rows (seven is a prime number), which push out from the wall in rhythmic sequences. The more architectural *Identity Sequence RW Pi* (2007–08) is a sequence of 429 panels in 11 rows and 19 columns (11 and 19 are primes). By coupling the seemingly irreconcilable practice of theoretical mathematics with laborious handwork, Kaiser-Smith persuasively suggests the aesthetic possibilities within the work of others who have also implemented crochet to materialize abstract concepts—the Cornell University mathematician who produced the first physical model of a hyperbolic plane through crochet,





Top: Yvette Kaiser-Smith, *Identity Sequence Pascal's Red Triangle Red*, 2007–08. Crocheted fiberglass, 76 x 204 x 8 in. Above: Yvette Kaiser-Smith, installation view of "Digits," 2008.

COURTESY ALFEDENA GALLERY, CHICAGO

for example, or the British mathematicians who followed computer-generated instructions to crochet a model of Lorenz equations, which describe the nature of chaotic systems such as the weather.

The impact of Kaiser-Smith's sculpture emerges particularly from its hybridity—its convergence of handcraft, abstraction, industrial materials, and historical textile tradition. While her work owes as much to Eva Hesse's quirky, modular sculpture as to Sol LeWitt's formal, mathematical grid forms from the 1960s, it is her conviction that the natural world is infused and informed by a mathematical aesthetic (she comments that plant leaves tend to grow on branches in primes, for example) which provides a resonant model for the long-desired rapprochement in our digital culture between the world of theory and the world of corporeal life.

—Polly Ullrich

WASHINGTON, DC

Benjamin Jurgensen

Meat Market Gallery

"Don't Ready To Die Anymore," the grammatically strained title of Benjamin Jurgensen's recent debut solo show, is a reference to the 1994 debut studio album by Biggie Smalls, aka the Notorious B.I.G. *Ready To Die* was the New York rapper's first major salvo in his civil war with West Coast star Tupac Shakur, or at least, that's how Shakur saw things; before the end of the decade, both men would be dead—but their violent, lyrical coastal rivalry paved the way for a national hip-hop following. Jurgensen includes sculptural markers for both artists. Smalls appears in the form of a squat engine, made with MDF and painted in gold acrylic, titled *life after death, ninety-six, woulda stayed fine had puff daddy been a better father figure*, and topped off by a jaunty gold crown, the likes of which the rapper was known to sport. The Shakur piece (*nine fourteen ninety-six, above the rim on vhs served as reference*) is a slimmer, platinum engine wearing a tell-tale bandana.

Cultural drivers like these are among the sources that Jurgensen, a young artist who has only recently completed his bachelor's degree at the Corcoran College of Art and Design, employs in his sculpture. His works range from clever to didactic in their examination of atmospheric factors. One video piece—the only non-sculpture work in the show—states it too plainly: *solastalgia*, a mash-up projection showing simultaneous scenes from two films (*The Graduate* and *The Little Mermaid*), unambiguously presents the ambiguity of adolescence. Another piece, however, combs the same ground more successfully. The harpoon and trident (as well as the compositional cues and mysterious scoring) in one aqua-tinted piece unmistakably call to mind Matthew Barney—relating his presence to the Disney tunes happily absorbed by young minds.

Jurgensen both works in and references his chosen medium, MDF. His handworked and machined pieces are original but do not disguise the influence of other contemporary artists, whether it be Barney or Banks Violette, whose work and approach to space are closest to