

# Art in America

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SANTA FE  
**SUSAN YORK**  
THE LANNAN FOUNDATION

Susan York's reductive recent work differs dramatically from her early configurations of swept sawdust, as well as from sculptures of the late '90s involving fragile ceramic shards stacked precariously on aluminum shelves. Nevertheless, her preoccupations with the optical and physical properties of space have remained steadfast. Over the past five years, these interests have been realized in geometric graphite floor pieces whose powdery, silvery gray residue is rubbed directly onto the walls and floors of crepuscular rooms. This body of work has appeared at the Museum of Fine Arts in Santa Fe as well as the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Most recently, the Santa Fe-based artist has focused on more intimate, wall-mounted arrangements of cubes, rectangles and trapezoids in the same material. In an impressive new twist, *3 Columns* (2008), at the Lannan Foundation, involved the suspension

of identically shaped solid graphite columns. At one massive and seemingly weightless the totemic trilogy redefined ceiling and floor. Two of the pillars are 6 feet tall, and floated several inches above the floor in opposite corners of the gallery. Suspended from a steel buttress on the building's roof, the third, a monumental 800-pound stack of graphite blocks 14 feet high in all, descended majestically from the ceiling to hover just above the ground. In addition to their subtly skewed geometry (each column has only two right angles, as one side is fractionally narrower than the others), their placement is asymmetrical: the largest column's off-center position in the room disrupts their balance. Adding to this disorienting effect were interactions between ambient light and the graphite's alternatively reflective/matte, impalpable/tactile surfaces. Carving out light and vibrating against the white walls, the

dark columns created a contemplative sanctuary. *3 Columns* was accompanied by several other sculptures and by a striking series of drawings, including images of the columns' footprints in the foundation's halls and conference room. At first glance, the seriality and rigor of York's work evoke Minimalist forebears: Robert Morris, Carl Andre, Donald Judd. Yet as Lucy Lippard points out in the exhibition's catalogue essay, York wittily subverts minimalism's commitment to systemic composition and impersonal facture. We learn that the sculptures' perfectly smooth surfaces, which suggest industrial fabrication, are achieved in the artist's studio through a long and repetitive process of sawing, grinding and polishing by hand. The process supports the range of subtle perceptual experiences that *3 Columns* synthesizes so masterfully.

-- Sarah S. King

