

# Los Angeles Times

Art Review: Kevin Appel at ACME  
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In the late 1990s, shortly after emerging from UCLA, Kevin Appel made paintings involving flat, blocky, hyper-stylized representations of domestic interiors. In the early 2000s, he shifted the vantage point to make similarly geometric exterior views — pale, often ghostly depictions that resembled architectural drawings though tended to dissolve into abstract arrangements of cubes. Both were tasteful, well regarded, and to my mind rather dry.

Around 2003, something strange happened. A cartoonish tree trunk motif entered in, wreaking all kinds of havoc with Appel's geometric order.

Appearing with feverish, clone-like frequency, it threaded in and out of what might have been windows, tossing his tidy Modernist cubes into spinning

polyhedra. Planes fractured incoherently. Patterns entered in. The forms became buoyant and architecturally reckless — less Case Study House than crazy hippie tree-house. The lines were still clean and the palette still tasteful, but it looked as if Appel was beginning to have fun.

In a mostly new body of work at ACME, he takes another turn altogether, layering a largely non-architectural series of geometric shapes — in gouache, pencil and collaged paper — over images of landscapes and wildlife scanned from nature books from the 1960s and 70s.

The connection between the two elements is ambiguous, and strikes one at a glance as perhaps arbitrary.

Moving through the works, however, one begins to discern an inquisitive — if inconclusive — interrogation between the two, and a subtle, gentle sort of sort of rhythm. They're small works, for the most part, with an intimate, concentrated air that feels well-suited to the climate in which they appear: the cautiously optimistic opening of a new season, following a tumultuous year. A sort of downsized extension of the meteoric tree houses, the works — which the exhibition refers to as “drawings” — are a contemplative continuation Appel's ongoing exploration of the relationship between form and space.

--Holly Myers