

GOINGS ON

NANCY SHAVER IS THE REAL DEAL



"The Wall Project," from 2022-25. Art work by Nancy Shaver / Courtesy Derek Eller gallery; Photograph by Adam Reich

For a time, I lived in a little town in upstate New York. The point was to "get away," even though I didn't know what I was getting away from. Sometimes, to relieve myself from the boredom of my own words—I was trying to write—I'd take a walk in the village; I especially liked to stop at a store where I once bought a beautiful big light bulb. The store was like an old curiosity shop, and I liked being enveloped by its warmth. Later, I learned that it was operated by the artist Nancy Shaver, and suddenly everything made sense: the small space was curated with a discerning eye. It's that eye—the uniqueness of it—that you'll see in Shaver's jewel of a show, "Bus Stop" (at the Derek Eller gallery, through Jan. 10). It's a show about squares—how, when they are assembled in

interesting ways, they can yield different emotional landscapes. But Shaver's squares, composed of wooden blocks and fabric, or paper and acrylic, have a rigor that doesn't invite comparison with anything but themselves. She's no Mondrian, she's a Shaver, and, as such, has her own idea about form, which, despite her interest in the grid, isn't tight: her colors and ideas jump out at you with the force of the best abstraction. One witty piece, "Fruit Box," for instance, encases blocks in various shades of blue and orange in a looser but no less intentional display—it's Shaver taking Joseph Cornell for a spin, and coming out on the other side as less romantic, certainly, but no less joyful about how form itself tells its own story.

Earlier in her career, Shaver made different work and, over at the elegant American Art Catalogues gallery and publisher, a three-part show will display some examples of Shaver's pictures made in the nineteen-seventies that are a very nice complement to the work at Derek Eller. (Some block pieces are at the American Art Catalogues as well). Curated with sensitivity and finesse by the artist Jared Buckhiester and the gallerist Grant Schofield, the gelatin-silver prints—one nicely cropped picture is from a Sears catalogue—belong in spirit to the Pictures Generation, a group of artists, including Cindy Sherman and Robert Longo, who were responding to Watergate fatigue and a world defined by image-making. (MTV was just around the corner.) But Shaver's images are more inward, and so delicate in their evocation of themselves—the picture's the thing—that they gather like beautiful vapors in your head and stay there, like a weather front you can't forget.

Hilton Als, "Nancy Shaver is the Real Deal." *The New Yorker* (December 12, 2025), accessed online.