

# ARTFORUM

December 2001  
James Yood

CHICAGO

## HELEN MIRRA RENAISSANCE SOCIETY

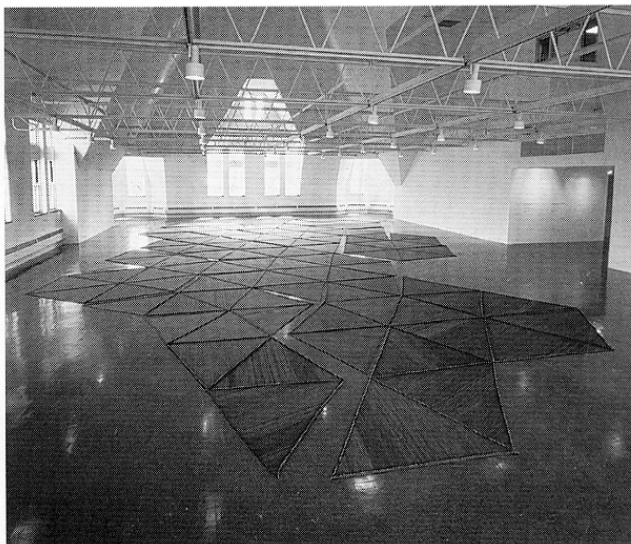
Spread out on the malt brown floor of the Renaissance Society this summer were 110 equilateral triangles of indigo cloth partially sewn together in a segmented field: Helen Mirra's *Sky-Wreck*, 2001. Responding to the architecture of the space, with its vaulted ceilings, metal bracings, and polyhedral floor plan, the triangles were interwoven as interdependent hexagons, pyramids, and parallelograms—something like a complicated chemical notation. The cloth panels were linked in a winding chain; Mirra stitched along one, two, or three edges of each triangle, rendering the whole assemblage a continuous meander of triangle groups in various configura-

tions, with interstices of floor showing.

The unassuming nature of Mirra's homespun textiles and the methodical schematization of the installation itself set up a curious encounter, a meeting that suggests, if not the sacred and the profane, then the physical and the metaphysical. Indeed, the piece was accompanied by wall text that cites the source of the title (a poem by Paul Celan) and signage indicating that the work is essentially a flattened scale model of the sky, part of a geodesy that could be constructed as an icosahedral dome of 1,210 triangles. According to the artist's measurements, if the arrangement of triangles were multiplied by eleven, elevated, and increased in scale by 333 times, this installation could line the heavens. Mirra does not so much sculpt the sky as provide a kind of imaginative mapping of it: The fabric at our feet transports us to the immensity above. (It is a kind of anti-magic carpet, however, since in its current profile we experience the piece from the "wrong" side, from outside the sky.)

*Sky-Wreck* is a confluence of a kind of blue-collar minimalist conceptualism, a working-class meeting of Dorothea Rockburne and Buckminster Fuller. It systematically employs a core geometric form, abstract and machine made—but the machine is a loom, a prototechnology close to handicraft, rooted in labor and traditionally tied to "women's work." The occasional open spaces within the triangular grid and the inconsistencies in the dyeing and weave of the cloth make this more relaxed than rigorous. It is serious, perhaps even dour, this universe laid out to dry, something impalpable made concrete, a firmament constructed somewhat wistfully around the human desire for reason and control. Its geometry is poetic, as is its intent, and it offers less a call to order than a vehicle for dreaming.

—James Yood



Helen Mirra, *Sky-Wreck*, 2001, indigo cloth, dimensions variable. Installation view.