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What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

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Bernard Kirschenbaum

Through Oct 20. Postmasters, 54 Franklin Street, Manhattan; 212-727-3323; postmastersart.com.



Bernard Kirschenbaum's "Monument to the Earth" (1981).
Lishan Liu/Postmasters Gallery

Bernard Kirschenbaum (1924-2016) is sometimes called a Minimalist sculptor, but in this exhibition he comes across more as an architect/designer with a visionary streak. Mr. Kirschenbaum thought mainly in geometric patterns that might have been devised by computer but until late in his life usually were not.

The initial stimulus for his imagination included the flexible grid of triangles that make up the geodesic dome, which he knew intimately from collaborating with the inventor and theorist R. Buckminster Fuller in the mid-1950s. After that Mr. Kirschenbaum became one of the art world's inveterate free spirits. In 1966, he exhibited two domes at Park Place Gallery, then a hotbed of sculptural experimentation. That year he also built what may have been the country's first residential dome, in Connecticut, for the artist Susan Weil, whom he later married.

The works at Postmasters make Mr. Kirschenbaum's thinking tangible. "Monument to the Earth" is a large seemingly flat-floor piece whose blue-dappled wood tiles slope gradually upward, breaking out at center in a tall thin, sci-fi obelisk. Even larger is the blazing white-orange-yellow "Two Element City," a painted steel work exhibited, with "Three Element City," at the Paula Cooper Gallery in 1969.

Spreading from floor to wall in two infinitely expandable patterns, "Two Element City" repeats diamond-and-pentagon schemes, a pairing that would become known as Penrose Tiles, after the British physicist who published a description of them in 1974. Mr. Kirschenbaum discovered them while trying to devise a floor cover for a geodesic dome, a large 1966 model of which is the show's centerpiece. Just watching its white surface of mutating triangles curving toward the center is mesmerizing. Domes are among the first human-built architecture; they remain among the most mystical.

ROBERTA SMITH