

M+B

photograph

Jessica Eaton, Polytopes. M+B Gallery, Los Angeles



Montreal-based photographer Jessica Eaton titled her last series *Cubes for Albers and Lewitt*. Consequently, if you saw the words before the work, you thought of the angles and boxes of Bauhaus or the cubes and grids of the Minimalists as you looked at her psychedelically colored, geometric exposures. Her photographs seemed like paeans to artists (Albers, Lewitt and company) who came before. But her new show at M+B's boxy West Hollywood space through December 22 is called *Polytopes*, and that conjures a very different legacy.

The term "polytope" refers to a flat-sided geometric shape that can exist in any number of dimensions. A polygon, for instance, is a polytope in two dimensions; a polyhedron is a polytope in three dimensions, and the idea is that you can keep going into "higher dimensions" like four and five by piecing the flat-sides together. The hypothetical fourth dimension where space and time meet most interested Alicia Boole Stott. An Irish mathematician, she was untrained because women didn't train to become bona fide scientists in the late 1800s, but she was too well-informed and well-parented to be amateur. Her mother,

Mary Everett Boole, wrote about toddlers and geometry and her father, George Boole, wrote about differential equations. She introduced English mathematicians to the polytope, its nuances and its potentials. To do this, she made weird, sometimes exquisite, often colorful drawings of multiple, multisided shapes converging on each other. You'd have a cluster of tilting triangles or rainbow-colored tetrahedra breaking apart. In one rendering, she had four squares flush against each other.

A fair number of Eaton's *Polytopes* look like squares stacked against or inside each other. *cfaal 65*, for instance, shows a gray box with strangely transparent sides that allow you to see the four pastel-colored boxes inside it. You know it's an optical illusion – you can't see through boxes with the naked eye – but you also know the objects of Eaton's images feel tangible, dimensional. She creates them, "in camera," using analog techniques: layers of exposures of different lengths made with different colored lenses. The "in camera" renderings of images are not unlike Boole Stott's drawings, hypothetical renderings of what geometric shapes might look like. Some become too hypothetical — *cfaal 78*, for example, where the background switches half way down from white to blue and abstract strips of light cut through the sides of the three boxes at the photo's center. It announces itself as an illusion too loudly. But others, like *cfaal 271*, with six gray-on-gray squares that look two-dimensional at times but also cast shadows on each other, are best. They straddle that line between imaginary and real so nonchalantly you don't notice it's there.

By Catherine Wagley