

Steven Naifeh – Found in Translation

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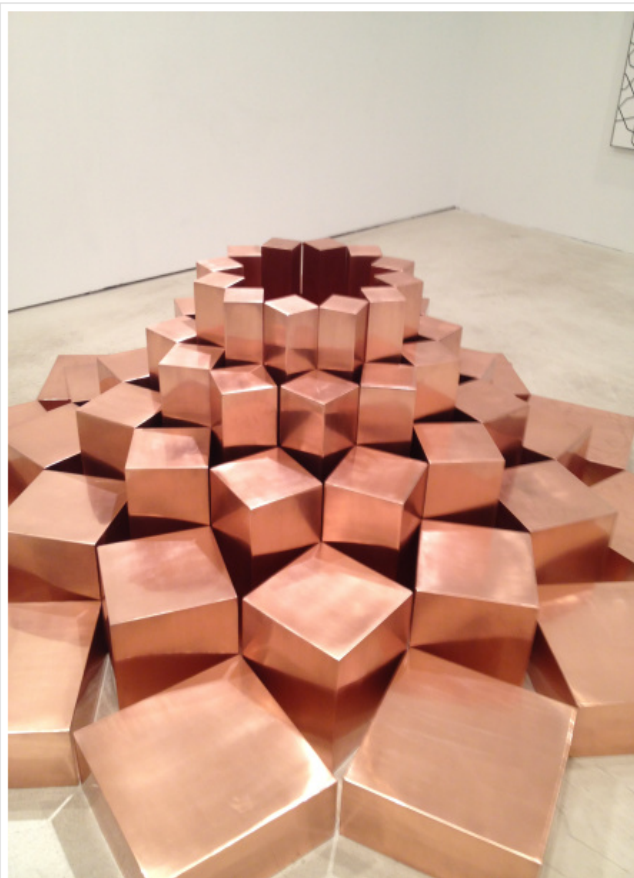
The **Leila Heller Gallery** is currently exhibiting painting and sculpture by **Steven Naifeh**. Many people will recognize the name Steven Naifeh. He is a world renowned art historian and academic who has published biographies on Jackson Pollock and Vincent Van Gogh. He is also an accomplished artist whose work is inspired by historic Middle Eastern architecture. Growing up in a diplomatic family, Naifeh was raised both in the USA and the Middle East. Building patterns with basic geometric shapes in repetition, Naifeh assembles complicated images. Using a computer to calculate the specifics, the shaped canvases and copper plated steel elements fit together with precision. The paint on the canvases has been applied using tape and a sprayer. This is a technique popular with Minimalist artists. To me these works however are a step away from Minimalism with their emphasis on pattern as it relates to architecture.

In "Cyrene IX:Shimmering Sky" four identical kite-shaped quadrilaterals, each with two 90 degree angles make up each square. There is a smaller square opening within each large square. This puzzle-like painting is quite complex and visually satisfying. This is an artistic accomplishment considering that all of the pieces have the same shape and size, they have just been just repeated and rotated.



Steven Naifeh – Cyrene IX:Shimmering Sky – 2010
Picture courtesy of the artist and the gallery

"Saida XXXVI" is a large scale copper-plated steel sculpture. It is composed of individual prisms with square top faces. The prisms in the outermost ring have the largest square top faces, but are the shortest. Each consecutive ring of prisms have smaller top faces but are taller, in the 5th and center ring the prisms have the smallest square top faces and are the tallest. This sculpture takes up most of the floor space in one of the gallery rooms. Gallery patrons interact with this structure by walking around the circle of prisms. "Saida XXXVI" for me was the piece in the show that most closely aligns itself mathematically with Middle Eastern architectural elements. Naifeh has created an elegant blossom using only a collection of simple square faced prisms. Many artists cite historic buildings and decoration as their inspiration, but very few have been as successful as Naifeh in making these connections seem contemporary. His process of fabrication and his choice of materials bring the beauty and essence of Middle Eastern architecture into the aesthetics of the 21st Century.



Steven Naifeh - Saida XXXVI - 2014
Picture courtesy of the artist and the gallery