

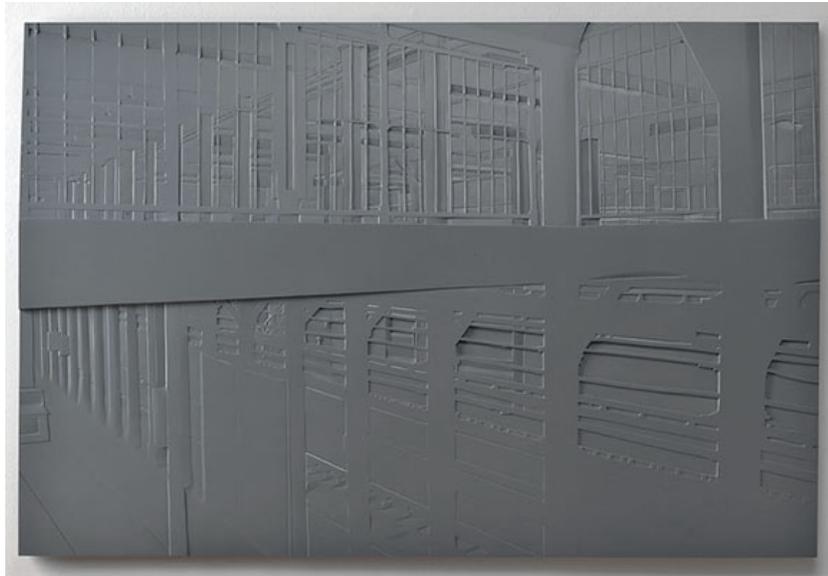
## [Sarah Bostwick @ Gregory Lind](#)

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In a time when digital processes are fast supplanting the way architecture is conceptualized, Sarah Bostwick's cast-relief sculptures evoke a sense of nostalgia for the pristine, visual language of architectural drawing and the structures that arose from them.

Bostwick, who is unique in her exploration of

materials, considers her works to be three-dimensional drawings. They are generally cast in Hydrocal, a hard plaster-like material, and then carved or incised. For this exhibition, *Grey Area*, Bostwick introduces physical gestures which, when impressed onto clay before casting, suggest elements of landscape.



The resin and enamel relief *Union Square 4 5 6*, pits the viewer between the lower and upper levels of the well-traveled New York subway station. Unlike George Tooker's equally claustrophobic painting [Subway](#) (1950), with its alienated and dehumanized individuals, Bostwick's battleship-grey wall-hung sculpture eerily omits any human presence. Delicately carved vertical columns in low relief weave in and out of horizontal architectural elements that crisscross the ceiling in the pedestrian walkway. This reiteration of elements casts linear shadows and builds rhythm in pictorial space, pushing the limits of low relief, an uncommon form in contemporary art. Though the sculptures appear to be plaques, they are everything but flat. Bostwick balances negative and positive space with repeating forms that effectively model light. It's a technique with a long history, best seen in ancient sculptures like [Eagle-Headed Deity](#) (833-858 BC) from Assyria. Though the sculptures appear to be plaques, they are everything but flat. A view from the side makes clear that the lower portion of Union Square slants back toward the wall in order to make palpable a dark, cavernous subway track buried below the concourse, like a level in Hades.



Bostwick cites night photography as an inspiration, and like a photographer, she amplifies the impact of forms by placing them in deep shadows of varying gradations, a technique that adds mystique without compromising the identity of those forms. Her architectural subjects, such as *Brussels Monument*,

generally appear as fragments. In this one, crisply carved elements rivet the foreground, while nearly imperceptible, painted details meld into the wintry sky, forming a perfect visual analog for how once-celebrated monuments slip beneath the radar of public consciousness. Throughout, temporality is a consistent theme. While incised branches are poised to encroach on the structure pictured in *Brussels Monument*, dense vegetation engulfs a New England home in *Katonah*; and in *The Woods*, it almost overtakes the entire picture plane—signaling that nature and man-made structures are both transient.

Part of the appeal of Bostwick's work lies in its capacity to describe pictorial space and formal abstraction. *The Woods*, which is the color of blue slate and dimensionally gestural, at first appears entirely abstract. Only from a distance do we recognize that the subject is a dimly lit primeval forest. Similarly, *Fluorescents* has such a strong abstract character – it resembles a minimalist, marble relief — that its representation of an urban architectural fragment is illusive. In contrast to its restrained geometric character, a corroding corner, minutely quarried by the artist, suggests future decay. It pictures a fragment of time, when urban lights illuminate a city, before the sky turns dark.

Light is also a protagonist in the intimately scaled *Cellar Floor Right*. It was created as part of [Life: a User's Manual](#), an exhibition named after Georges Perec's book, about a fictitious Parisian apartment block that is frozen in time at June 23, 1975. Bostwick depicts a backroom where art was to be exhibited. In the scene, she plays with light



spilling out onto a patterned floor from an unseen doorway. Again, the illusion comes from molding the shape of the relief during casting. But it's the crisply articulated wall radiator that stands out, on the right side of the piece, as a three-dimensional drawing. It is a stellar ready-made. The simplicity of this pure white relief, which evokes silence, mood, and atmosphere, belies the fact that Bostwick's meticulously crafted works are exceedingly time consuming. Their shapes, reminiscent of commemorative plaques, ironically draw our attention to uninhabited rooms and buildings — places that would almost certainly escape notice in a fast-changing environment such as ours.

–SIGNE MAYFIELD

*Sarah Bostwick: "Grey Area" @ Gregory Lind through November 26, 2011.*

**About the author:**

Independent curator Signe Mayfield served as curator at the Palo Alto Art Center from 1989 to 2011. There, she mounted exhibitions featuring the art and collections of the San Francisco Bay Area, ranging from *Nathan Oliveira: The Painter's Bronzes* to *Windows to the Mind: Selected Books from Stanford Special Collections*.

Photos in order of appearance:

"Union Square 4 5 6", 2011, resin, enamel, 30 x 44.5 x 2"

"Brussels Monument", 2011, Hydrocal, pigment 9.25 x 15.25 x 1.5"

"Cellar Floor Right", 2011, Hydrocal, 6 x 10.75 x 1.25 in.