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Style

Galleries

'Fragmented Image' at NAS

With their first cubist paintings circa 1910, Picasso and Braque got the ball rolling for artists, but the earliest efforts to dissect and transform the natural world were made by the ancient Greeks who originated the idea of the atom. The point is appropriately made at the National Academy of Sciences in connection with its gallery exhibition "The Fragmented Image," which features the work of five contemporary artists.

For both artists and scientists, as Joelle Bentley writes in the exhibition brochure, there's a fascination in taking matter apart, fragmenting it and reassembling it. The artists selected for this show each deal with fragmentation in different ways, and with varying degrees of success.

The best work is by two New York artists, Sumiye Okoshi and Elizabeth Ginsberg. Okoshi glues carefully ordered rows of small multicolored ovals of rice paper to a canvas first covered with oil paint, but there's nothing rigid about the artist's poetic evocations of the structural complexity of the natural world. Ginsberg's fragmented images forsake poetry for the vitality and dissonance of modern life, drawing on a vast array of objects ranging from bicycle tires to microchip circuitry. She has a fine sense of color, but the acrylics on paper are more pleasing than the larger and less cohesive works on canvas.

The strength of New Yorker Robert Kirschbaum's architectonic compositions—clearly evident in several works on paper—is undermined by the cotton-candy colors of his three large paintings. Kentucky artist Jim Cantrell's paintings explore the disorienting effects created when ornate 19th-century architecture is reflected and refracted in the glass grid of a modernist building. The pitfalls of abstraction are all too apparent in the work of Florida artist Geoffrey Lardiere, who shifts from one discordant fragment and wild splash of color to another in the name of spontaneity.

The Fragmented Image, at the National Academy of Sciences, 2101 Constitution Ave. NW, through Jan. 3. Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. For weekend viewing, call 202-334-2436.