

## WEIGHTLESS

Jill Downen

January 17 - March 15, 2025

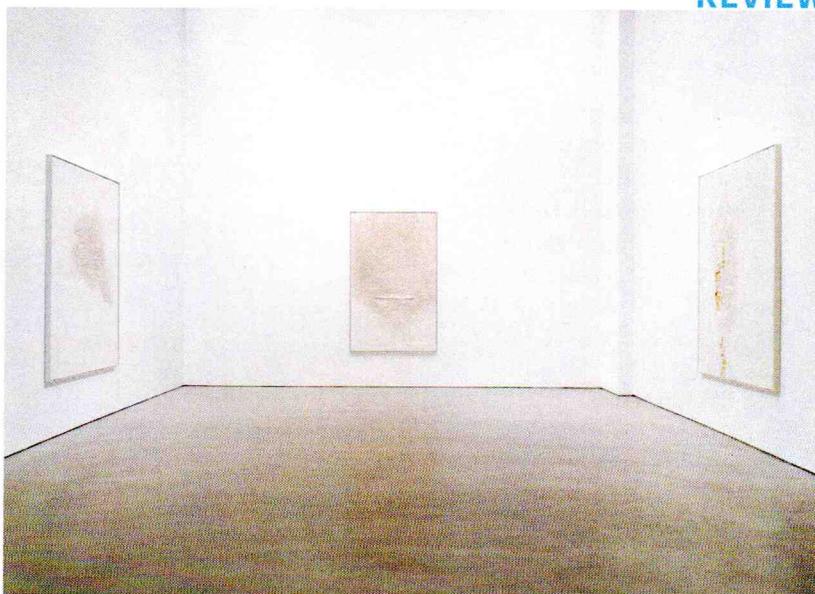
Nunu Fine Art in New York City, NY

Reviewed by Christina Albu

*Weightless*, the exhibition of Kansas-City based artist Jill Downen, gathers plaster and concrete drawings with varying scales and textures. They elicit a sense of spatial and temporal suspension much sought after in our age of distraction. Light bounces off the smooth surface of some of them and infiltrates in the crevices of others, partnering with the artist's meticulously crafted lapis lazuli marks and golden shapes to make room for reflection on the ceaseless transformation of matter.

Stepping into the exhibition space after a snowstorm, I felt absorbed into a luminous atmosphere, insulated from the cold and the noise of New York traffic. It is challenging to write about Downen's works in *Weightless* individually because they orchestrate vibratory patterns in tandem. Stratified surfaces resulting from the accumulation of plaster sharply contrast with deep fissures revealing a golden substratum. Similarly haptic in quality, hazy fields of lapis lazuli powder make one reconsider the smooth and reflective surface of the same material embedded in concrete. Downen masterfully organizes the works in smaller or larger groupings to create oscillating rhythms. The space between them is as important as the space within them. The works may pull in your attention or let it meander across a series of markings evocative of geological formations, Morse code notations, architectural elements, or gently swaying mental states.

To highlight their connection with open-ended processes, Downen calls these works "reimagined drawings." This is an apt strategy for overshadowing their sculptural mass and emphasizing the feeling of weightlessness they powerfully spark in conjunction with the diffuse light emanating from their surfaces. It is also a savvy way of diverting their strict alignment with the Minimalist



Above: Installation image of Jill Downen: *Weightless* at Nunu Fine Art, New York, 2025  
Photo: Martin Seck

sculpture tradition. Downen resists this through choosing to design both small-scale works, which resemble tablets from ancient times with mysterious glyphs, and astoundingly large works, which resemble walls or portals into another world. In the exhibition, the former gradually guide the viewer to the luminous space framed by the latter, like markings on a meditative trail leading one to transcendence.

Three astounding plaster drawings on custom fabricated wood laths mark the culminating point of the exhibition. To the left, *Weightless* resembles a floating arctic land seen from above or an imprint in the snow. At the center of the back wall, the textured surface of *Grounding* recalls a calcareous cave wall. Visually pierced by a thin lapis lazuli band, it offers momentary respite to the viewer's searching gaze across the white-on-white plaster. To the right, closing the exhibition with a discharge of energy, *Weeping Wall* exposes a gilded wood lath underlayer resembling a house wall. This work makes an explicit reference to a lightning strike which hit Downen's childhood home. The artist recalls observing their father mending this fractured space. The use of gold and Downen's memory of their father's repairs in *Weeping Wall* call to mind kintsugi, the Japanese technique of mending pottery with this material.

Downen's works underscore the importance of acts of reparation – whether they have to do with mending architectural spaces, bridging social divisions, or restoring the balance of the embodied mind. Far from decorative, their attentive and sparing use of precious materials corresponds to lines of energy transmission, mystical communication, and healing. Via the luminous atmosphere and perceptual inquiries they generate, these plaster and concrete drawings bear affinities with Light and Space art. Yet through their intricate transformations and allusions to alchemical transmutations, Downen emphasizes the imbrication of the visual and the material, underscoring the interdependence of even the most ethereal particles of matter.

Caught in the sway of accelerating changes and ever-deepening layers of information, will we be able to maintain our sense of presence and ponder their implications? Downen calls our attention to this question through their emphasis on both lightness and grounding. They state that this is "slow art for fast times" and hopes that viewers will be lured into the meditative space of their works – to be immersed but not lost, relaxed yet alert to both drastic and subtle changes of one's surroundings.