



Mamiko Otsubo

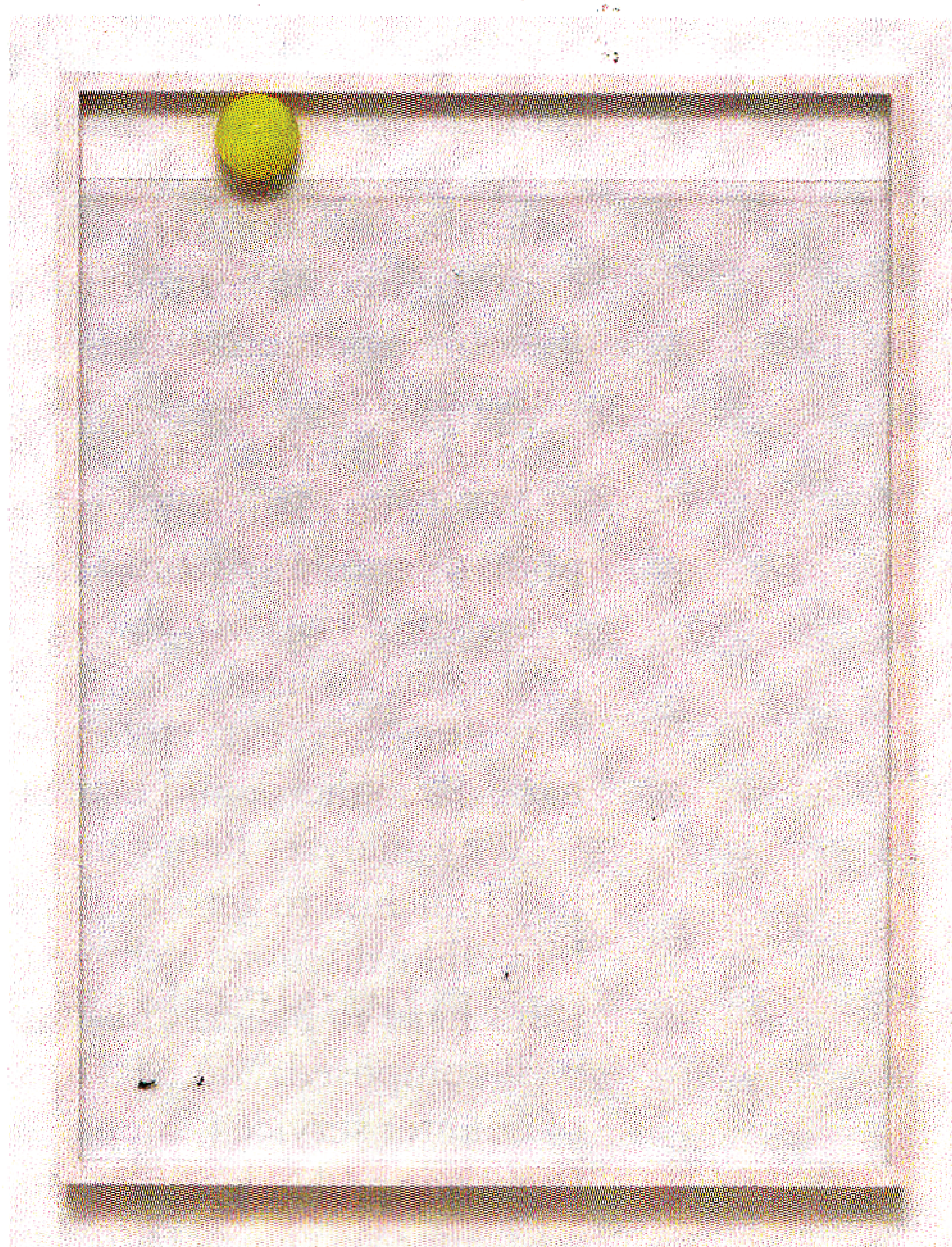
HORTON GALLERY

A sculpture called *Equivalent*, 2012, neatly sums up the premise of Mamiko Otsubo's exhibition. The work is partly composed of used copies of a mass-market edition of the 1946 book *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein*, which the artist has laid out on the floor in neat rows. Toward one end of the arrangement, cast-silicone tablets stand in for the books. A rose is a rose is a rose—or is it? What precisely constitutes an equivalent? In search of possible answers, Otsubo creates relationships between things that are approximately the same, tying them together with loose association, puns, and abstraction, through consonance and rhyme.

Although *Equivalent* maintains a rather declaratory presence, Otsubo's sculptures are understated, both elegant and economical. In *Untitled (Glass Horizon with Ball)*, 2012, a pristine white frame secures a pane of glass. The glass doesn't quite reach the frame's top, and a rubber ball has been tucked into the gap. As such, the glass serves both utilitarian and pictorial functions; it represents a horizon line, with the ball as sun, while also holding the ball in place. The severely plain cover of the 1966 book *Module Proportion Symmetry Rhythm* forms the base of the collage *p. 18 (Mondrian)*, 2011. On its surface, Otsubo has mounted a circular cutout of a page containing a black-and-white illustration of Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie*, 1943. She has added silver and gray acrylic paint to the bottom of the cutout, as well as a red rectangle, a blue rectangle, and a blue square to the image of the painting itself. The effect is a layering of art with art history, of various levels of homage and cool remove, a clever undermining of and a conspiratorial wink toward Mondrian's purist approach.

Forms, these works seem to say, will always want to be more than just forms when they are given their due: We can hardly help making meaning or looking for purpose. Two cast-concrete sculptures turn into shelves with plants plopped on them, as though needing last-minute validation as useful structures. In two concrete wall pieces, gray dots turn out to be mirrors. (In *idea*

Mamiko Otsubo, *Untitled (Glass Horizon with Ball)*, 2012, glass, rubber ball, wood, museum board, 24 x 18½ x 2½".



[*Silver Monochrome*], 2011, placed next to the polka-dot works, the dot is not mirrored but raised, like a bubble coming to the surface.) The feeling here is not of satire or deconstruction; rather, the surprises—the reflections, the plants—are gentle, almost humorous. Even the book covers, austere and imageless, are shown to be more than perfectly neutral rectangles: They are turned inside out, punctured, given dimension and (a limited amount of) color. These works create a pleasing feeling of hovering between meanings, between their tight construction and the loose associations they provoke. Another book-cover collage shows frames from Saul Bass's opening credits for *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955). Is a golden arm equivalent to an arm?

—Emily Hall