

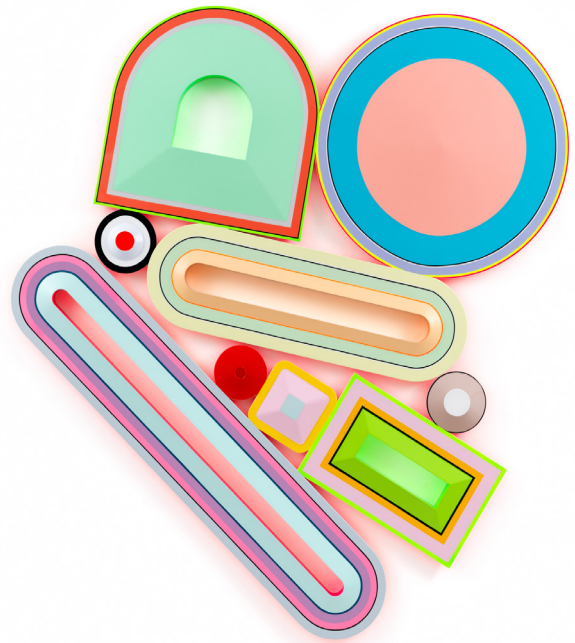
ARTSEEN; *Beverly Fishman: Geometries of Hope (and Fear)*

8 July 2025 | By Nadja Rottner

Beverly Fishman’s visual vocabulary operates through a calculated seduction of pharmaceutical form, translating the quotidian aesthetics of pill culture into monumentally scaled geometric abstractions. Her recent solo exhibition *Geometries of Hope (and Fear)* at Miles McEnery Gallery presents fifteen irregularly shaped wood canvases from 2024–25 that deploy a distinctly synthetic palette—acidic greens, pharmaceutical blues, and flesh-toned pinks—evoking the color-coded logic of prescription medication.

Fishman’s six new “Equilibrium” works, alongside nine from the “Polypharmacy” series, transform hard-edge geometries into carriers for desired and undesired psychological states. The multi-compartment reliefs abandon flat surfaces for undulating, dimensional forms—irregular convex and concave shapes about two inches thick mounted on supports that shift dramatically from different vantage points. The resulting chromatic interplay creates delicate luminous pink, yellow, and green aureoles around perimeters and within hollows, generating alluring optical effects that compel viewers to reposition themselves continuously. The work’s dimensional and durational complexity stands in pointed contrast to the instantaneity of consuming a small pill, as Fishman often works with medications for anxiety, attention-deficit disorder, opioid addiction, and depression.

The flawless pictorial surfaces, spray-painted in automotive urethane enamel, reject muted earth tones of organic wellness culture for the hyperreal chromas of laboratory-engineered compounds. Works like *Polypharmacy: Relief, Clarity, Composure, Liberation, Choice, Freedom* (2025) function as both formal abstraction and conceptual proposition, their monumental scale (44 by 89 inches) suggesting ambitious hopes projected onto chemical intervention. The “Polypharmacy” titles catalog an expansive range of desired emotional states: agency, confidence, calm, joy, contentment, ease, serenity, clarity, solace, self-determination, relief, composure, liberation, choice, freedom, sexual freedom, stability, strength, energy, tranquility, equilibrium, relaxation, peace, and focus. This utopian lexicon reveals both our deepest anxieties about mental suffering and our faith in pharmaceutical solutions to existential problems. It stands in marked contrast to the practice of polypharmacy—the simultaneous use of multiple medications by a single patient—and the significant medical risks including dangerous drug interactions and medication errors. The “Equilibrium” series operates through a different register of anxiety, employing cryptic nomenclature—(B.O.C.C.), (J.S.C.), (L.W.6)—that transforms the gallery into a coded dispensary.



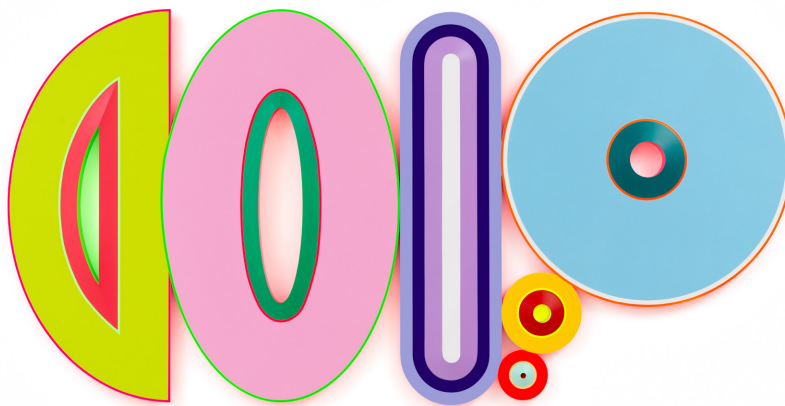
Beverly Fishman, *Equilibrium* (C.B.M.P.), 2025, Urethane paint on wood,
72 x 66 3/8 inches, 182.9 x 168.6 cm.
Courtesy the artist and Miles McEnery Gallery.

These alphanumeric codes in the titles evoke pharmaceutical research systems: early-stage compound identifiers,

clinical trial designations, or internal company codes used before drugs receive brand names. The codes' clinical anonymity contrasts sharply with the aspirational language of the "Polypharmacy" works, suggesting that true psychological balance remains trapped in experimental promise rather than marketed reality. The series also crystallizes the artist's ongoing interrogation of pharmaceutical aesthetics with an ironic edge. The scatter-and-spill composition of multiple pills formally rejects the very equilibrium that pill consumption promises.

Fishman's nuanced compositional strategies reveal a sophisticated engagement with pharmaceutical morphology. Elongated ovals nestle within larger circular forms, creating nested relationships that mirror time-release mechanisms of extended-action drugs. The repeated presence of circular, semicircular, and triangular shapes creates pseudo-motion effects evoking intoxication and vertigo. Assigning symbolic value to the hollow, Fishman explains that "the open centers of some forms are my interpretation of the power flowing from the medicines' interior," transforming traditional figure-ground relationships into spiritual visualization—the geometric sublime relocated to chemical intervention sites.

The programmatic use of spray paint produces surfaces of unsettling perfection—simultaneously inviting touch and repelling it through industrial impenetrability. This material choice suggests both the promise of smooth psychological transitions and the artificial nature of chemical intervention. Just as the exhibition's "Polypharmacy" works catalog combinations of desired emotional states—such as *Polypharmacy: Agency, Confidence, Calm, Joy, Contentment* (2025)—the visual compositions in the "Equilibrium" series present multiple geometric "doses" that interact, sometimes harmoniously, sometimes creating visual tension through chromatic clash or formal discord.



Beverly Fishman, *Polypharmacy: Relief, Clarity, Composure, Liberation, Choice, Freedom*, 2025, Urethane paint on wood, 44 x 89 inches, 111.8 x 226.1 cm.
Courtesy the artist and Miles McEnery Gallery.

Fishman's pharmaceutical geometries occupy a crucial position within postwar abstraction's trajectory, functioning as both inheritor and subverter of modernist paradigms of painting. The works descend from hard-edge minimalism established by Ellsworth Kelly and Kenneth Noland, yet where Kelly's forms emerged from architectural observations and Noland's targets pursued pure optical experience, Fishman's shapes carry an unmistakably corporeal—and corporate—DNA. Her minimalist work simultaneously functions as Pop art's conceptual offspring, translating Andy Warhol's silk-screened commodity culture into psychoactive consumption realms.

Most significantly, these artworks contribute to contemporary practice using geometric language to interrogate how bodies and minds are systematically managed under late capitalism. Evoking Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics, Fishman's work introduces a form of biopolitical abstraction suggesting that abstraction has never existed in pure states divorced from social conditions. In our psychopharmacological era, even the most reduced formal elements carry traces of their historical moment—geometric forms cannot escape entanglement with corporate consciousness management.

The works function as both prescriptive diagrams and cautionary maps, their hard-edge precision suggesting pharmaceutical efficacy while their synthetic beauty masks more complex questions about the commodification of psychological well-being. In this way, Fishman's geometries become both seductive and sinister, embodying the dual nature of our pharmaceutical hopes and fears. What emerges is a body of work that refuses easy Big Pharma critique, instead locating real pathos in our collective investment in the idea that suffering can be geometrically organized and transcended through chemical combinations. Fishman's geometries become maps of a larger psychological architecture, revealing how thoroughly we have internalized the pharmaceutical imaginary as both salvation and trap—geometry as biopolitical symptom and cure.



Installation view: Beverly Fishman, "Geometry of Hope (and Fear)," Miles McEnery Gallery, New York, 2025. Courtesy the artist and Miles McEnery Gallery.