

# ACUMEN

## Lucy Williams: Radiant Cities

27 November 2025 | By Eve Kaplan



*The Collector's House #1*, 2025, Paper, Perspex (Plexiglas), Engineered wood, Cotton embroidery thread, Piano wire and Acrylic paint on Birch plywood panel, 29 1/2 x 48 1/2 inches,  
Photo courtesy of the artist.

Modernism was thought to be relegated to museums, frozen in the concrete facades of our suburbs or the dusty pages of architectural manifestos. But Lucy Williams is resurrecting it, in her own way: in miniature, with delicacy and poetry. At the Berggruen Gallery in San Francisco, the British artist presents “Radiant City” from November 6, 2025. Her third solo exhibition at this venue, she transposes Le Corbusier’s grandiose dreams into a universe that is both obsessive and intimate, where every fragment becomes a subject for contemplation.

Williams works like a goldsmith. Her works begin with a precise drawing, which becomes a digital matrix. From this base, she laser-cuts the structural framework, then cuts colored paper to form the various elements, subsequently applying ascending layers of diverse materials such as paper, plexiglass, wood veneer, fabric, or metal. Curtains, bookcases, lamps, vases, lampshades, and tiles gradually emerge, frozen in a bas-relief where the eye hesitates: painting or sculpture? Everything is flat, yet everything seems to possess a certain depth. Her compositions belong to this ambiguous territory, suspended between image and object, where the viewer oscillates between fascination and doubt.

Modernism, as we know, aimed to be rational, functional, and austere. Williams, however, breathes unexpected warmth into it. Her embroidered threads meander like poetic scars. Her colors—aubergine, slate, and powder pink—soften the rigidity of the concrete. She introduces ornamentation where Le Corbusier had banished it.

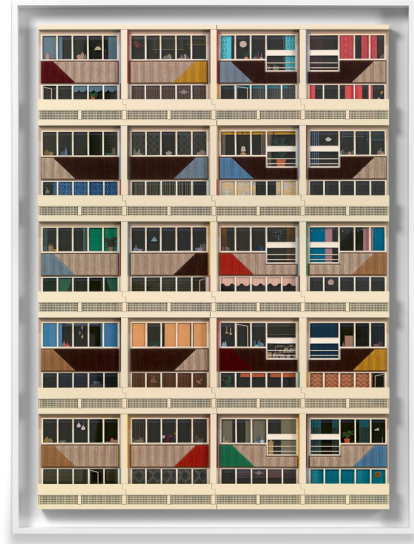
Her works evoke Anni Albers for their textiles, Ruth Asawa for the lightness of her threads, and the geometries of Jean Arp and Alexander Calder. Like them, Williams explores tension, structure, and vibration. Joseph Becker, associate curator at SFMOMA, also emphasizes the “energy, dedication, and intentionality” she brings to her work. But in her case, all of this is coupled with a handcrafted intimacy, a patient gesture that humanizes modernist coldness.

By choosing the title “Radiant City,” Williams doesn’t simply reference Le Corbusier’s unrealized architectural project; she explores its contradictions: an egalitarian ambition that veers toward uniformity, a collective utopia that ultimately crushes the individual. The designer’s works are beautiful, seductive, but empty. No figures appear in them. And yet, faced with these deserted interiors, one feels the urge to enter, to inhabit them. It is this paradox that gives her work its narrative power: the coldness of the architectural lines transforms into an appeal to the viewer.

During the pandemic, Williams ventured into abstraction to explore the rhythmic and repetitive visual qualities of form: colored triangles floating above vertical wires, lyrical motifs, and a control of space reminiscent of modernists like Naum Gabo or Barbara Hepworth. These non-figurative compositions are now being reintroduced into her architectural scenes. Ornament, proscribed by modernism, thus reappears in suspended touches, as if geometric rigor needed to be fractured by poetry.

“Radiant City” is also a matter of memory. Collective memory: that of an era when architecture sought to transform society. Intimate memory: the interiors the artist depicts—swimming pools, living rooms, libraries—resonate with our own memories. By reducing these spaces to the size of a painting, Williams transforms them into objects of contemplation. We look at them like voyeurs, fascinated by the detail, yet kept at a distance. From this tension between attraction and frustration arises the full intensity of the experience.

Lucy Williams doesn’t naively celebrate modernism; she recomposes it, revealing its contradictions while also extracting an unexpected beauty. Her “radiant cities” are utopias in pieces, transformed into poetic fragments. In a world saturated with megalopolises, she reminds us that it is sometimes on a smaller scale, in miniature, that the desire to inhabit a space is reborn.



*Radiant City #4*, 2025, Paper, Perspex (Plexiglas), Engineered wood, Cotton embroidery thread, Cotton crochet thread and Acrylic paint on Birch plywood panel, 43 3/4 x 29 7/8 inches, Photo courtesy of the artist.