



## SAN FRANCISCO

### Elise Ferguson: "Citron" at Romer Young Gallery

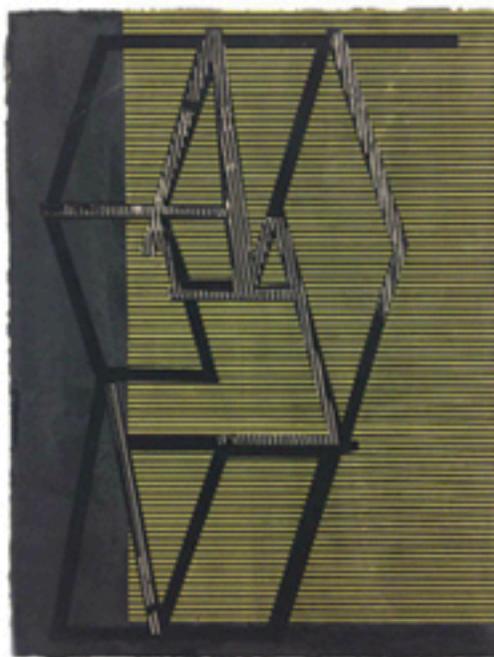
In her second solo show at Romer Young Gallery, Elise Ferguson continues her exploration of Op-esque architectural abstractions rendered in a magnetically attractive palette of soft, rich colors balanced with blacks, grays and creams. Made using a process that is as sculptural as it is painterly, these 21st century 'portable frescoes' offer very different viewing experiences from a distance and from close up. The quirky, inventive geometric figures that fill these fields seem at first glance to be precise and calculated—her designs originate in a Photoshop-generated file—but Ferguson's method of making engenders surprisingly handmade results. On a primed board, 10-15 layers of pigmented plaster are laid down; although each one is smoothed with a mason's precision, she allows the panel's edges to become irregular, suggesting the deckle of a sheet of paper. Parts of the design are masked off; more layers are added. (When the masking is removed, a subtle profile of relief is created.) Finally, Ferguson creates the parts of the composition that are rendered in delicate lines, still using a tinted plaster—squeezing it through the surface of a special silkscreen. Shimmering like a moiré pattern, subtle irregularities and blobs in the lines indicate where one printed area overlaps another, as she joins designs together to create larger forms.

Over time, Ferguson has built up a personal library of such screens, describing their visual connection in her paintings as a form of 'looping'—a term more associated with film, or sound. The most compelling works here suggest the possibility of repetition that contains infinite variation. This is accomplished either within the confines of a single

panel—*Citron's* ballet of densely packed yellow and grey ovals and rectangles is a fine example—or, in the case of *Deuce* and *King Lounge* (all works 2016), in two and three panels, respectively, conjoined into larger compositions. In both of the latter works, forms seemingly continue across the narrow gap between the adjoining panels' irregular edges, but there is no sense of containment, or the static completion of anything that could be called a pattern. *King Lounge's* elongated ovals, cropped, split or stretched, evoke nothing so much as improvised music, stopping and starting: notes held, transformed, or cut off. Like such playing—which requires a mastery achieved through long practice—Ferguson's paintings are both meticulously planned and full of random, beautiful moments.

—MARIA PORGES

"DEUCE," 2016, **Elise Ferguson**  
PIGMENTED PLASTER ON PANEL, 30" X 60" PHOTO: COURTESY ROMER YOUNG  
GALLERY



ABOVE  
**David Kennedy-Cutler**  
*Green Ledger*, 2012. Medium-density fiberboard, UV epoxy resin, and archival inkjet prints, 91 x 29 x 19 in.

LEFT  
**Elise Ferguson**  
*Zipper Zag*, 2012. Pigmented plaster and ink on medium-density fiberboard panel, 24 x 18 in.

## EAST HAMPTON, NEW YORK

### David Kennedy-Cutler, Elise Ferguson

Halsey McKay Gallery // August 31–September 30

The industrial and often toxic neighborhoods across the East River from Manhattan have given rise to a mini-movement of young artists inspired by the century-old history of sculptors who combine modern materials with geometry, from progenitors like Alexander Rodchenko to contemporary practitioners like Jim Isermann and Dike Blair. One of the more curious—and lively—pairings from this milieu is featured in this exhibition of reliefs and freestanding objects, respectively, by Elise Ferguson and David Kennedy-Cutler, both of whom exploit manufactured or waste materials they come across in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, where they live and work.

Ferguson's pigmented plaster and medium-density fiberboard wall objects comprise the most generic building materials, yet they show amazing nuance within their layered surfaces. *Green Ledger*, 2012, for instance, pieces together four screen-printed areas of charcoal pinstripes that appear gently nudged askew, belying the work's apparent symmetry. What's more, shallow craters in the plaster evade this rigid line work, leaving accidental respites of kelly green on the striated facade. In the main space, Kennedy-Cutler's three towering sculptures employ a softer geometry in the form of double-sided peaks or totem

shapes that stand at 90-degree angles. In *Total Rupture*, 2011, shards of tinted Plexiglas are layered and suspended within a glistening resin monument. The overlay of different tints creates a subtle and surprisingly luminous variety of grays as the mysterious object becomes opaque to varying degrees.

These artists cleverly blur the border between sculpture and painting, and in some cases between printmaking and photography. While both are adept at plying their craft, they each also welcome chance into their work, allowing these ordinary materials to do something extraordinary. —**Ryan E. Steadman**

# Weekend

FINE ARTS  
LEISURE

The New York Times

FRIDAY, JULY 23, 2004

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## 'Hung, Drawn and Quartered'

Team Gallery  
527 West 25th Street, Chelsea  
Through next Friday

The conventional group drawing show is sidestepped here in favor of paper itself, as material, subject or both. In "Ramblin' Man," a life-size colored-paper sculpture by Ryan Johnson, a young man operates under the influence of his Walkman, pursued by three blurry afterimages of himself. (All eyes on the checked shirt.) The action is real in "What is Happy, Baby?," a video by Nurit Bar-Shai that meditates at various speeds on the joys of paper in bulk.

Showing a woman's hands busily working among stacks of envelopes, paper and stick-on labels (gallery mailings may come to mind), it creates a transitory collage that is interrupted by bouts of solitary dancing.

Paul Lee works small, splicing and bending tiny photographs of movie stars into distorted little collages and reliefs. Jeff Grant works

tight and delicate, chiseling images of icebergs, three-masted schooners and houses shadowed by the dark silhouettes of fir trees into stinging contrasts: black and white, innocent and sinister, natural and man-made. Working big and loose on vellum, Saul Chernick paints giant images of luxurious but uninhabited moustaches and beards that have only size on their side. Elise Ferguson makes her own paper — sturdy and brightly striped — then constructs cheery but windowless, semi-abstract architectural models.

Fixated on layers, Matt Keegan slices through nine photographs to turn a construction site into a cave, and paints and incises drywall to resemble ornately Rymanesque wallpaper, while signaling vulnerability with a bowling-pin sculpture of a penguin. Similarly touching creatures populate Dasha Shishkin's Dargeresque etchings, works that celebrate the pleasures of traditional drawing that most of the other artists here seem determined to avoid.

ROBERTA SMITH

# The New York Times

NEW YORK, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 2005

## Talk to the Land

Andrew Kreps

558 West 21st Street, Chelsea

Through tomorrow

On the third floor, "Talk to the Land," the second part of Matt Keegan's "Etc." exhibitions, introduces several young artists, with the ever-thoughtful John Miller in attendance and Walker Evans presiding in absentia. Social space, urban detritus, the tension between hand and machine are tackled in psychologically and perceptually nuanced works. Especially noteworthy are the contrasting browns and hand-cast geometries of Elise Ferguson's tile-covered folding screen; the distilled coming-of-age longing of Leslie Hewitt's photo-collage; the pristine folk-modernism of Michael Sailstorfer's refurbished roadside shelters (visible in beautiful slides); and Jakob Kolding's free-for-the-taking posters, whose adversarial density expands on modernist photomontage. Sara Greenberger, Shannon Ebner, Michael Vahrenwald and Rachel Foulon also contribute to a selection that has no low points.

ROBERTA SMITH

# Weekend **FINE ARTS LEISURE**

The New York Times

## For Hikers Seeking Art, Brooklyn Is a Left Bank

By HOLLAND COTTER

The multidisciplinary, nonprofit **GALE GATES**, in a former cardboard factory around the corner, has been in especially good form lately with its Emerging Curators Series. Christine Y. Kim's "Light Show" in the early fall was a winner, and the new exhibition, "Mental Wilderness," organized by Richard Harrod, Nicholas Muellner and David Wickland, is good, too.

Landscape is the theme, but of the psychological variety, which can be pretty prickly terrain. It takes on a distinctly Goth cast in a watercolor piece by Alessandro Pessoli, which is the best thing here and is shrewdly complemented by Elise Ferguson's nocturnal video pans of castle walls. Other standouts, in what is clearly a carefully thought-out lineup, include Matt Franks's atom bomb cloud carved from Styrofoam, labyrinthine felt-tip pen drawings by Frank Bramblett and Joy Feasley's pictures of adolescent girls transformed into trees.



## BUNCH ALLIANCE AND DISSOLVE CINCINNATI

The project *Bunch Alliance and Dissolve* features work by twenty-seven artists working primarily in New York and Los Angeles: Ann Craven, Amy Granat, Xylor Jane, Liz Deschenes, Richard Aldrich, Nancy de Holl, Elise Ferguson, Martha Friedman, James Yamada, Ei Arakawa c/o Grand Openings, Maaïke Gottschal, Aleksandra Mir, Paul Shambroom, Siobhan Liddell, Molly Smith, Erika Vogt, Becket Bowes, Mika Tajima, Ronnie Bass, Iris Bernblum, Carter Mull, Morgan Fisher, Heather Row, Anna Craycroft, Stephen Hilger, Pablo Bronstein, and David Dempewolf (Contemporary Arts Center (CAC): November 17, 2006—January 14, 2007). Organized by Public-Holiday Projects (PHP)—Rachel Foulton, Matt Keegan, and Laura Kleger—*Bunch Alliance and Dissolve* includes work by many artists who are exhibiting in a museum for the first time. Spatially, the exhibition comprises seven groupings developed on the basis of conceptual, aesthetic, and intuitive affinities between the works. The title's four-word compound translates the exhibition's rather idiosyncratic approach, its aim to engender a new dialogue between artists, works and viewers, as well as its impending dissolution, at the end of its time allotment.

*Bunch Alliance and Dissolve* is PHP's fourth exhibition. The first three projects, which took place in Los Angeles and Utrecht, Holland, were all entitled *Annotations*. Each incarnation produced a new configuration. Each *Annotations* was also realized on a much smaller scale—approximately eight artists and a small publication focusing on the work's production. For *Bunch Alliance and Dissolve*, PHP was given two floors of Zaha Hadid's deconstructed industrial galleries. As such, their roster of artists had to be greatly expanded. They decided to configure the exhibition into seven chapters. The "annotation" from the first three exhibitions—documentation provided by the artists in order to annotate or elucidate their working process—was expanded into a resource room staffed by a librarian and a handsome color publication was produced.

PHP is committed to an open dialogue about art and the process of its making, collective labor, and the opportunity for artists to exhibit on their own terms. In spite of the scale of the exhibition, PHP deliberately eschewed curatorial control. A panel discussion took place in conjunction with the exhibition. In this discussion, a rather antagonistic attitude toward curators and the curatorial process prevailed. In her essay for the *Bunch Alliance and Dissolve* publication, Sara Greenberger Rafferty juxtaposes the curatorial use of source material, which she finds very problematic, with the ethos of PHP, "who are attempting to re-case the group exhibition as a location of dialogue, rough edges, and literature." Nevertheless, with so many artists and so much work, a more unified curatorial vision would have aided this exhibition immensely.

*Bunch Alliance and Dissolve* includes some absolutely terrific art, some of which gets lost in the shuffle. Paul Shambroom's deadpan photographs of small, local government meetings manage to be simultaneously poignant and humorous. Here, juxtaposed in the exhibition's "Red Group" with Maaïke Gottschal's exploration of the semiotics of stripes in *BVBFANSHIRT SKETCHES*, 2005, they seem out of place.

The groupings were much more successful when guided by a clear relationship between the work, be it aesthetic or conceptual. The "Gray Group," for example, consistently referenced astral bodies. Liz Deschenes' austere *Photographs*, photographic paper treated to resemble a daguerreotype, was hung opposite Ann Craven's four hundred paintings of the moon, copied from her earlier series of one hundred and one moon images. Around the corner was Xylor Jane's *Blue Moons From 30Nov63-31March99*, 2006, a graph of the occurrences of Blue Moons in this period. Richard Aldrich's posters for Ufo, a sixties psychedelic music club in London, and Amy Granat's *Stars Way Out*, a manipulated film made on a road trip to the California desert, completed this particular grouping.

*Bunch Alliance and Dissolve* raises questions about the position of the institution in relation to this type of exhibition. During the panel, an artist in attendance pointed out that projects of this kind are more commonly found in small, alternative spaces with equally minuscule budgets. From an institution such as the CAC, we expect exhibitions that conform to the discourse of art history, full of work by well-known artists who have made their reputation elsewhere. It is to the credit of Linda Shearer, who recently resigned as Executive Director of the CAC, that this institution has eschewed blockbuster exhibitions of famous contemporary artists to embrace the experimental, the unknown, and the unfinished.

—Jennie Klein

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: partial view of *Bunch Alliance & Dissolve*, foreground: Elise Ferguson, *Brown Bays Lectern with Room*, 2006, plywood, hand-cast urethane tiles and hinges, approx. 14 x 8 x 8 feet [courtesy of the artist]; background: Nancy de Holl, *Heirloom*, 2005, archival pigmented photograph, print: 27 x 33 inches, framed: 28 x 34 inches [courtesy of the artist and Taxter & Spengemann Gallery, New York]; Siobhan Liddell, detail of *Abandon*, 2006, paper on canvas, 50 x 78 x 3 inches [courtesy of the artist]

## REVIEWS

## NEW YORK: SOCRATES SCULPTURE PARK

## Yard

11 May – 3 August 2003

[www.socratessculpturepark.org](http://www.socratessculpturepark.org)

In a packed metropolis of eight million people, New Yorkers are eager to claim bits of the outdoors – whether a section of sequestered terrace or a window box – amidst the urban frenzy. The summer exhibition at Socrates Sculpture Park, Yard, explores this conflation of domestic and public outdoor space that is indigenous to the city. Socrates is ideally sited in Long Island City, with a generous view of the impressive Manhattan skyline just across the East River. The site of a former landfill and dump, the park now functions as a welcoming public oasis within Long Island City's industrial sprawl, serving as a collective backyard for the community. Taking as its title a quintessentially American icon, Yard offers provocative riffs on such customary home features as the picket fence and the backyard swimming pool, underlining the complexity of the personal domestic landscape that is made visible to the public eye.

Yard consists primarily of sculpture (created in 2003) by 14 artists, peppered throughout the grounds. A wall of cast resin tiles by Elise Ferguson appears to buttress a shelf of earth as it snakes along its face. Evocative of mid-twentieth-century linoleum, the wall employs a homey decorative language usually reserved for more private domestic spaces such as the kitchen floor. A pair of kidney-shaped pools, devised by the team of Lisa Hein and Bob Seng, smartly engage the park's waterfront location. The first, on a patch of grass close to river's edge, is a raised slab of concrete with a blue tile surface, a hard abstraction of water. The second pool floats atop the river nearby and encloses within its boundary dozens of buoyant bottles. Recalling the bottle as message bearer, this more literal pool might allude to the furtive messages implicit in domestic architecture.



Several of the works address the delineation of personal space. Among the most successful sculptures is Alyson Sholtz's mirrored picket fence, which acts as a glittery divide between brush and trees. Rather than an impenetrable residential boundary, this reflective partition is an expansive visual liaison with its surroundings, evoking Robert Smithson's use of mirrored surfaces. The compulsion behind the stereotypical manicured suburban lot is highlighted by the sculpture of Venske and Spänle, whose surreal front yard of pristine plastic grass and concrete sidewalk angles 30 degrees upwards; one imagines a front porch lying just beyond this odd wedge. Scheduled for daily delivery to the grassy slope during the course of the exhibition, The New York Times lies neatly wrapped in plastic, awaiting its imagined homeowner – undoubtedly a different one to that conjured by Jason Middlebrook's nearby lawn populated by gnomes and other wacky garden kitsch.

Adam Cvijanovic takes on the fiction of the American dream with a large-scale print depicting a bucolic home development under construction. Affixed to two perpendicular ten-foot high panels, the work seamlessly blends with the surrounding grass and sky and is positioned to momentarily obstruct the view of the cityscape across the river. The illusion is no more real than a stage set, however, as the supporting beams for each giant panel are easily visible. Similarly, Gregory Crewdson's billboard photograph underscores the eeriness of these ever-proliferating planned communities, as the lights curiously blaze from within one unfinished house.

Kara Vander Weg

## New York

### "New Slang: Emerging Voices in Sculpture"

Luhning Augustine

This group show included works by Elise Ferguson, Matt King, Diana Puntar, Jason Reppert, Justin Adian, and Matthew Ronay. The press release indicates that these artists are "re-examining the sculptural issues that have arisen from the conflict between Postmodernism and formal abstraction."

Jason Reppert's sculptures are self-consciously ugly. The colors he uses—candy apple green, Pepto-Bismol pink, and McDonald's yellow—reveal a contemptuous attitude toward color that is ubiquitous in the art world. The sculptures mate whimsical pop art and dispassionate process. *Whiskey Dick*, a steel and fiberglass squigly shape with a near-empty bottle of Jim Beam stuck in its "stubble"-covered "mouth," is a sadsack anthropomorph. *Sunday Afternoon*, two connected cylindrical fiberglass segments standing on uneven legs and covered with gobs of fecal brown and Pepto-Bismol pink silicon, with a pile of wood chips and refuse spotted with lumps of brown silicon beneath, is essentially an arty mess. Playfulness abounds, but it would be nice if the final forms stimulated the imagination and produced reactions and thoughts that were not ephemeral.

Diana Puntar's *The Cat People of Maryland* has a flat wood base with colored and mirrored pieces of laminate embedded in it. A spool-like form, with imitative wood grain patterns on one side (ironic reference to the natural world) and mirrors on the other, and a geometric branch-form stand on the base. *Fleeting Discomfort and Mild Paranoia* reminds me of a DNA chain in the way the form

branches out from its squarish wood base. Again, the natural world is ironically referred to, this time through the use of laminate covered in Art Nouveau leaf patterns. Puntar uses color in subtle ways (yellow, orange, and various shades of green) and avoids the garish. In these works, the separate elements harmonize and resonate, but the details hold more interest than the overall forms.

The artist's relative seriousness is a pleasant surprise in this setting, and the objects remain mysterious. They generate thoughts and feelings in the viewer rather than diminishing them.

Matt King's *Smoke/Break* (Where would the Postmodernists be without their hyphens and slashes?) consists of a mop head covered with white plaster, a modified mop handle, and two bundles of local newspapers. The white plaster resembles a mushroom cloud. The artist is a Surrealist; he transforms the ordinary. These modified utilitarian objects suggest a human presence in an eerie way, and we could consider them as relics predating humanity's final "smoke break." *Lets Split* consists of a free-standing abstract cupcake shape, painted white with atomic fireballs stuck in the top—to add color I suppose or to play off the theme of sweets. The main form has a smooth side, which is mirrored. A miniature wooden horse (not the animal) is wedged through the center of the main form (hence the title) and another one juts out of its mirrored side. The mirror and placement of the horses help confuse the viewer's perception of the object, which seems to change every time you look at it.

Matthew Ronay's *Ill Athlete* plays with narrative and the viewer's voyeuristic urges. It consists of various objects carved from wood and a jockstrap cup. A miniature window with Venetian blinds, a small waterfall falling down a green slope, an abstract row of grass with a small white fence stuck in it and the protective cup placed beneath, a pool of vomit made from colored paper, and a toothbrush with a cookie jammed in its bristles are placed directly on the floor. We are provided with a suggestive title, as well as props or plot elements that tenuously relate to the title, and we can make up our own stories as we move around the objects. Ronay is less concerned with formal issues and is good at manipulating our mental habit of linking signifiers.

In Elise Ferguson's *Floorscape With Full Moon and Dust Balls*, various cylinders and cubes, in different colors and textures, lie on the gallery floor, with a cross-hatched moon-shape on a piece of paper hanging on the wall behind them. From a distance, the placement of the objects didn't appear haphazard. I felt as if I were looking at a strange skyline. The artist plays with scale and forces us to ask ourselves why we see things in a certain way.

—Eric Gelber

# art on paper

September/October 2004

## Hung, Drawn and Quartered at Team Gallery

With its intimations of medieval torture and erotic intrigue, "Hung, Drawn and Quartered" set the stage for a scintillating group exhibition. Curated by Miriam Katzeff, the show includes eight emerging artists, all of whom are working on or with paper. The show as a whole dealt with various distortions and permutations of reality, but somehow it falls short of its snappy title's promise and ends up in a gray zone between amiable summer ensemble and eccentric craft fair. Individually, however, much of the work presents a compelling take on the possibilities of paper.

Ryan Johnson's attention-grabbing *Rambling Man* is a life-size sculptural portrait of a man in motion, replete with groovy haircut, sneakers, and Walkman. Made out of colored paper, the sculpture progresses sequentially into blurrier, more abstract versions of the moving figure, until its features become simple blocks of cut paper. In the vein of Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*, it's a visually compelling configuration of movement through space. However, in its futuristic fracturing of reality, it lacks that movement's boldness and energy, evoking instead a latter-day lassitude.

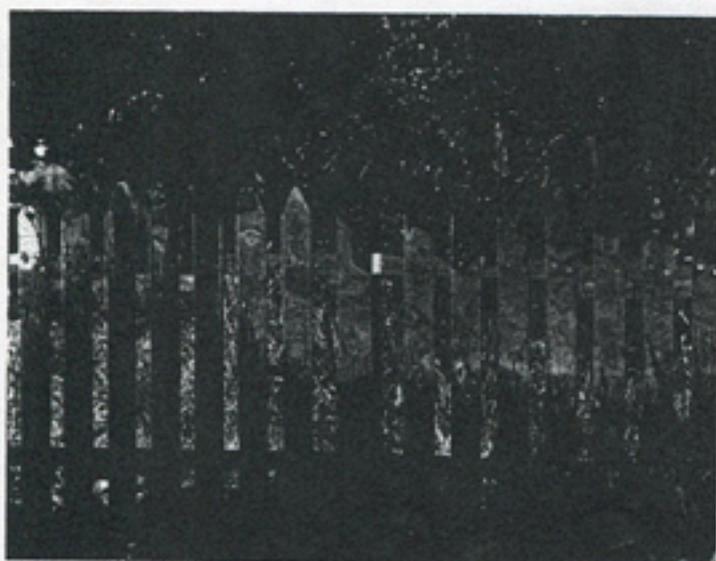
Also dealing with perceptual distor-

tions, British artist Paul Lee made his twelve small mixed-media collages by folding, cutting, and otherwise altering photographic images so as to blur their original content. His alterations mimic various natural phenomena such as light and shadow, but ultimately artifice prevails. Jeff Grant's icy works on vellum and Mylar use silhouettes of white icebergs and dark, tall trees to purvey an eerie, understated perspective on existence, in which absence functions as presence, and muteness as a kind of voice. Facial hair is the focus of Saul Chernick's two large drawings on vellum; in broad, feathery strokes, he renders beard and moustache, leaving a strangely intimate empty space in each where the mouth should be.

Even in a show as loosely organized as "Hung, Drawn and Quartered," it's hard to place Dasha Shishkin's three etchings in context. With their folk art-influenced, Brueghel-esque depictions of tumbling figures, uprooted trees, and various animals, these works seem more firmly rooted in tradition than most of the other works on view. The jaunty colored stripes of Elise Ferguson's freestanding handmade paper sculpture *Multistorey II* give it a post-modern, vaguely claustrophobic feel, while her drawings on vellum configure different fragments of architecture, including aborted stairways and parquet floors. Matt Keegan goes a different architectural route with his four drywall panels etched with decorative patterns and stacked against the wall, and with his photographic collages.

Finally, in Nurit Bar-Shai's video *What Is Happy, Baby*, repetitive office tasks involving envelopes and colored circular stickers are interspersed with bits of isolated, free-form dancing, featuring an alluring pair of red shoes. As the title suggests, neither activity is ultimately satisfying, and both are pervaded by apathy and meaninglessness. The piece itself is one of the high points of this somewhat inert show.

—Amanda Church



Alyson Shotz, *Mirror Fence*, 2003, acrylic, mirror acrylic, and wood, 36" x 130" x 3 1/2". From "Yard."

## "YARD"

### SOCRATES SCULPTURE PARK

Robert Smithson was one of the first artists to think about suburbia in geological terms. His insight that the structure of the suburban landscape is inherently crystalline—the result of mineral processes unfolding at the limits of human perception—remains a relevant counterpoint to the sociohistorical narrative that's much more often used to understand the sprawl that surrounds our cities. Defining suburbia as a synthesis of the urban and the pastoral—as a kind of intermediary condition dependent on antecedent forms of man-made landscape—leads artists into familiar postmodern terrain, where they deploy historical references and ironic juxtapositions in an attempt to reveal unrecognized or underlying meanings. But while this methodology has gotten a workout over

the last three decades—Sculpture in the Environment (S.I.T.E.) started skinning suburban clichés back in the '70s—it skirts Smithson's essential question: What is this place we call "suburbia," and why have its particular physical qualities proven both inevitable and alienating?

In "Yard," a group show of outdoor sculpture at the Socrates Sculpture Park in Queens, artists (with perhaps a few exceptions) preferred the sociohistorical framework as a means to express their ambivalence toward the suburban experience. Jason Middlebrook installed garden gnomes sprouting out of an irregular tumulus, inviting us to wonder just what might be buried underneath. Elise Ferguson mined a similar vein with a long retaining wall covered in handmade urethane tiles that aped the linoleum that covers far too many suburban kitchen floors. While the deft material inversion drove home the installation's artificiality, the work produced only a flurry of connotative impressions that failed to coalesce into any kind of distinctive effect. Adam Cvijanovic's *New City*, 2001–2003, wore its intentions on its sleeve: Mounted on a wooden armature was a giant ink-jet print of a typical suburban development under construction. Behind the backdroplike panels, actual urban housing projects were visible in the distance. Point taken. Other artists in the show re-created pools, sandboxes (for dogs only), and a cedar deck.

The most striking piece in "Yard" was Alyson Shotz's mirror-acrylic picket fence. It slipped through a thin copse of cottonwood trees and tall grasses, neatly dividing a portion of the park. While clearly visible from a distance or when observed obliquely, the slats disintegrated as one approached, melting into doubled foliage. Although it relied, like many of the other works, on the easy subversion of a common suburban trope, the fence had material (or perhaps immaterial) presence enough to generate a distinctive sculptural energy, becoming all the more real as it slid away from optical certainty.

If Shotz's polished surfaces hinted at mineral underpinnings, the German artists Venske & Spänle made the association explicit. Having re-created a patch of suburban lawn and driveway, they—in a simple chthonic gesture—tilted a chunk of it a few degrees along a horizontal axis, revealing it as a massive concrete slab with a bit of plastic green stuff glued to its surface. This brings us back to Smithson and the notion that despite its organic veneer, suburbia remains a hard, impenetrable lattice-work, the product of forces moving in

unfamiliar time. For while the yard—in the context of this particular show and throughout American culture—often serves as a proxy for the mnemonic space of middle-class childhood, it remains a real space bounded by rock, metal, and asphalt. Smithson and Earth artists like Michael Heizer often managed to exploit the inherent impenetrability of geological form and scale to define a sort of limit function of human understanding. None of the artists in "Yard" have used the suburban topos to achieve anything quite so profound—hardly a failing but still an opportunity missed.

—Kevin Pratt

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—Eric Gelber

# Art

## MONTHLY

SEPTEMBER 2003 / No 269 / UK £3.50 US\$6.50

### ■ East International

Norwich Gallery July 5 to August 23

What is surprising about this year's East International is not the assertive status of sculpture nor the polychromatic, colourful demeanour and tendency towards post-pop sensibilities; the presence as selectors of artist Eva Rothschild and Toby Webster, director of The Modern Institute in Glasgow, already announce the likelihood of such a show. What is surprising is that overall it feels so substantially rewarding. Whereas Beck's Futures, 'Days Like These' and last year's New Contemporaries all felt somewhat misjudged at the level of selection and presentation, the selection and curating of this year's East International emphasises judgement and prejudice with unapologetic eloquence.

However, there's more to this qualitative sense of surprise. In part, this might be found in Ruth Claxton's installation *I thought I was the audience and then I looked at you*, 2003. Set within a landscape of modified pieces of furniture, dozens of cheap 18th-century-style ceramic figurines have been subjected to an obsessive and lovingly crafted series of mutilations. Their heads are abused in cute and endlessly inventive ways carried out with an array of brightly coloured craft shop materials. This take on tack could easily have felt like a dull cliché. The logic of the work's success is described in Umberto

Eco's account of the film *Casablanca* in his *Travels in Hyperreality*: 'Two clichés make us laugh but a hundred clichés move us because we sense dimly that the clichés are talking among themselves, celebrating a reunion'. The sense of things talking among themselves is also present in Colin Lowe & Roddy Thomson's conversion of a gallery space into a small sub-curated show in the form of a pub-like environment. Unfortunately, this is one of those overhead conversations that only occasionally emerges above a level of drunken banality and tedium.

Down in the basement is Nike Savvas's *Anthem*, 2003, which as a themed environment is the perfect place to visit after Lowe & Thomson's grimy bar. The blacked-out space is clouded by dry ice and illuminated by a pre-programmed display of lights as used in night clubs, complete with a huge glitter ball. The silent visual drama played out yields so much more than it might suggest as a proposition. It is also intriguing to identify morphologies and chromatic registers at play in these dancing circles and waves of light that recur throughout the show at a variety of depths. Much of the painting in the show can to some extent be read in terms of such a resonance: from the shapes of Lawrence Corby's casual and inoffensive abstractions to Caroline De Lannoy's small canvases derived from colour wheels. Throughout there is an attention to vibrant opticality which veers sharply throughout between slackness and excessive refinement: Richard Hughes paints the walls of a corridor with casual-looking smudges of paint, which simulate the appearance of hundreds of brightly coloured notices which have been torn off, leaving only the staple and a small piece of fluorescent paper, while Toby Ziegler's huge triptych on the main staircase is a flawless rendering of an elaborate digitally produced space. Painted on a reflective material usually employed in the production of workwear, the effect is one of an unstable and shifting impression of depth.

While the selection of painting is diverse, there is no sense of antagonism between what might constitute painting and any other form of work, in particular sculpture. The show appears more like a programmatic attempt to erode any essential distinctions. Presented in terms of their limitless compatibility, they appear as mere variations of the same thing. To what degree this is a problematic illusion remains ambiguous, but within the boundaries of EAST, the effect is convincing, perhaps even healthy. Martin Poyner's 'Bad Painting' series is a wall-based assemblage of recycled pieces of previous paintings, simultaneously historical and humorous, while playing with such distinctions between painting and sculpture. Camilla Low's sculptures might hang from the ceiling or sit on the floor, but *Moody*, 2003, a flat wood triangle with

a surface made from concentric shapes, which resembles parquet flooring or marquetry, hangs on the wall and communicates a sense of pictorial space. Elise Ferguson also suggests pictorial space with her delicate gouache paintings of parquet flooring, while extending the theme into a sculpture of a house of cards. One of Christopher Landoni's paintings, which is actually a drawing, expands its spatial limitations in the form of a large free-standing screen, while on the wall, his *Mount Pleasant*, 2003, depicts the head of Dürer's rhinoceros as a trophy alongside monstrous fauna. This kind of gothic botany reappears in the sculpture *Borderline Log*, 2003, a black tree trunk with a furry surface, infested with disgustingly fleshy cobra lilies and carnivorous pitcher plants.

The pronounced lack of photography and video is unusual by comparison with what have come to be normative expectations of a large show such as this. But the general absence does not feel like an omission; rather it suggests a degree of attention to the idea of the form of the show as a whole, in terms of how the work of these 30 artists might relate spatially and temporally, through memory and architecture. There are no obligatory banks of monitors or rows of black cubicles in which to witness a succession of videos reduced to a seamless homogeneity. There's a monitor somewhere in among the chaos of Michael Stumpf's *Treehouse of Horror: die Auferstehung*, 2003, but the overall lack of video works only serves to heighten the emphasis of the singular example. Francis Lamb's *Gaillo*, 2001. A close-up of what looks like a cut-glass

lamp moves erratically, like the flickering movement of an eye that cannot keep pace with the rate of optical stimuli – not an inappropriate metaphor. Photography's almost total absence is hard to account for, but there seems to be little place for it in this constellation that prioritises an obsessive indulgence in an immediacy of making, visual inventiveness and materiality. That photography is no less concerned with these things than any other form is beside the point. Its scarcity demonstrates a generative prejudice that enables more than it excludes. ■

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