

ARTnews

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Artists to Watch

Artists Take Center Stage at the Opera
Bronzino: Sketches of a Perfectionist
Mafia Canary Sings about Caravaggio



Fisher is a sly commentator on our dashed hopes. For the large painting *Ape Soup* (2008), he scattered digitized images of monkeys and clown heads atop a colonial-era map of Africa. Two out-of-date large ships, painted with such technical precision that they seem ripped out of an encyclopedia from the 1950s, also float on the surface. And the lines and typeface on the map are distorted, as if the image had been made on a broken photocopier. Together, all these elements and modes of depiction make a cynical statement about the certain doom of most human endeavors.

Nearly always concerned with the notion of death in some tangential way, Fisher's art muses about insufficiency and failure as inevitable by-products of our efforts to fill the void. *Dead* (2005), one of the most striking and absurdly funny works here, encapsulated the entire show. The painting riffs on death in a list of words and phrases: "extinguished, numb, not operating, croaked, shot, stabbed, strangled, 'Mistah Kurtz—he dead,' Bambi's Mom is dead . . . bang."

—Matthew Bourbon

Kim Cadmus Owens

Holly Johnson

Kim Cadmus Owens's paintings of dilapidated structures and neglected cityscapes have a melancholy air. These moody scenes might seem at odds with the artist's real esthetic goal of renewing painting by investigating how digital technology has transformed the way we perceive the world around us. But Owens's concern with a sense of place and her evocation of a quiet ambience are what set her apart from most other painters who replicate digital effects and channel imagery lifted from the media.

This show, titled "Reading Between the Lines," homed in on a vernacular landscape of old theaters, warehouses, and gas stations, nearly always emblazoned with signage. But these landmarks were cropped, observed at extreme angles, and, it often seems, shot with a wide angle of telephoto lens, rather than seen plainly. Frequently a single work included passages in color butting against sections rendered in a hazy charcoal. In *Mission* (2009), a bright red sign with

yellow lettering shoots upward, standing out against a grisaille background of sky and building. The sign is slightly foreshortened, placing the viewer just at its base. While most of Owens's pictures seem to be reminiscences of her hometown of Dallas, *Mission* features the New



Kim Cadmus Owens, *Cheap*, 2009, oil and acrylic on canvas, 48" x 48". Holly Johnson.

Mission theater in San Francisco, another town where she once lived.

Owens tempers the nostalgia inherent to renderings of abandoned old American landmarks by highlighting the artificiality of digital color schemes and display techniques. *Cheap* (2009), depicting the parking lot in front of a boarded motel or truck stop, is a clean, tight, and hard-edge play of signage, tumbledown buildings, and rich color. An array of vertical stripes does not so much sit atop the sky as suggest the sky is breaking up into digital bits. We know these stripes are the fruit of the painter's imagination rather than the work of a faulty printer by the way the bright colorful stripes reflected in a puddle on the ground contrast with those above. Such subtle disconnects tell of the latest ruptures, not in reality but in the way we have learned to look at it.

—Charissa Terranova

'Paintings, Prints, and Presents'

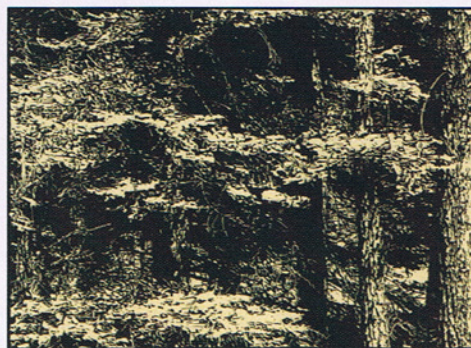
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This end-of-the-year show was conceived as a response to the struggling economy, with the gallery inviting more than two dozen artists to downsize their

works or switch mediums in order to create affordable art.

Several artists worked in smaller formats. Nancy Lamb, known for painting party scenes from the chandelier's perspective, eliminated the people for a series of square-format *giclée* prints. In keeping with the holiday spirit, she pulled the focus in tightly on fancy table settings, but those familiar with her paintings knew that her matrons' liver-spotted, arthritic hands were just out of view. Daniel Blagg, whose watercolors feature suburban blight, and Jim Malone, who reduces rugged rocky terrain to pencil or ink abstractions, used smaller paper than usual for their landscapes. But their themes prevented the works from becoming precious.

Others worked in unexpected mediums. Dennis Blagg turned from painting to his formative medium, pencil, and dominated the room with photorealistic views of West Texas landscapes. Instead of romanticizing the dramatic desolation of this extreme topography, as so many artists do, he depicts the brutality of the arid land without a trace of sentimentality. David Conn produced linocuts, a



David Conn, *Still Pines/Pecos Wilderness*, 2009, linocut, 19" x 27". Artspace111.

medium seldom seen today in galleries. His rich lightly dappled forest scenes elevate this pedestrian printing technique.

In oil studies for larger, more complex endeavors, Patrick Gabriel offered skies dissected by telephone poles and power lines. These often overlooked representatives of the grid became objectionable lead players, relegating the artist's usually transfixing skyscapes to supporting roles as backgrounds of blue.

The artists did not devalue the works for which they are best known; rather, they found ways to express themselves more economically. —Gaile Robinson