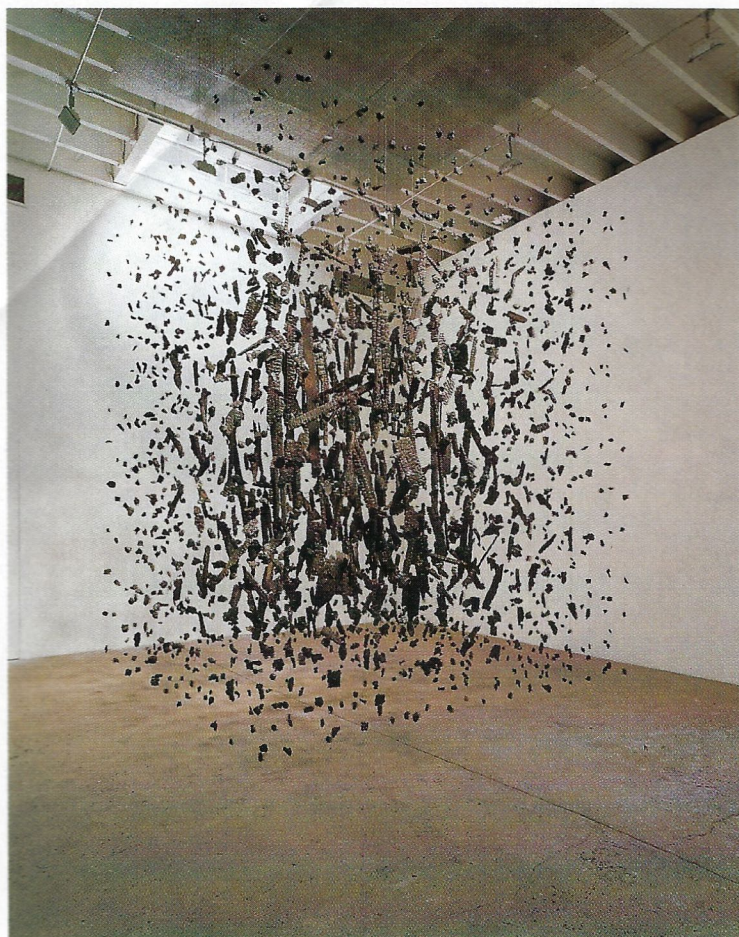


REVIEW OF EXHIBITIONS



Cornelia Parker: *Mass (Colder Darker Matter)*, 1997, charcoal retrieved from a church struck by lightning, thread, mixed mediums; at Deitch Projects.

NEW YORK

Cornelia Parker at Deitch Projects

Cornelia Parker's works are succinct, surprising fusions of the physical and the conceptual. This was the first New York solo for Parker, an English sculptor who last year was shortlisted for the Turner Prize. The major piece on view, an installation titled *Mass (Colder Darker Matter)*, is a result of a spring 1997 residency in Texas with San Antonio's ArtPace. There she collected pieces of charred wood from a church that had been struck by lightning. The title takes off from what may be her best-known work, *Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View*, an installation made of pieces of a garden shed that she arranged to have blown up.

This new work was neither an attempt to reconstitute the appearance of the church nor an effort to evoke the action that transformed it. The blackened lumps were

attached by T-pins to slender black threads that hung from a square of hardware cloth on the gallery's ceiling. The largest chunks were at the center and the smallest at the edges; together they defined an open cube. A cube is orderly, rational and stable—everything that debris is not. The strings were minimally visible, so the fragments seemed to hover, either in some magical stillness appropriate to the cube's stasis, or as if frozen for a fraction of a second by a photographic strobe or a flash of lightning. The darkness of the wood was set off by carefully considered light, some pouring down from the gallery's two skylights as if from heaven, the rest from floodlights aimed at the walls beside and behind the piece (which could be circumambulated) to create an aura.

Up close you could get visually lost in the overall field of individual shapes. The pieces moved slightly in the air currents. Some of the wood was not completely black. Many of the larger chunks incor-

porated nails. Big pieces hung at angles, as if caught in mid-tumble.

The exhibition also included a number of recent small works, most described as drawings. Paired works on paper featured snake venom combined with ink to form a Rorschach blot, and antivenom combined with correction fluid, dotted here and there. What visual qualities venom or antivenom might have I wouldn't know, but labels specifying their presence give the work a weight that the marks alone wouldn't convey. *Pornographic Drawing* is a blot made from the dissolved remains of a videotape seized by British customs agents. Three others consist of small metal objects melted and drawn out into fine wire of a specified and socially meaningful length (a silver dollar stretched to the height of the Statue of Liberty, for example), then looped, mounted on paper, and framed. In all Parker's works, the wall caption is essential, because they are not merely what they appear to be. Her reliance on verbal information is oddly appropriate coming from a country as literary as Britain. Yet the titles provide an intellectual overlay that comes after a usually violent physical transformation that produces work of an inescapably resonant material identity.

—Janet Koplos

Joan Witek at Wynn Kramarsky

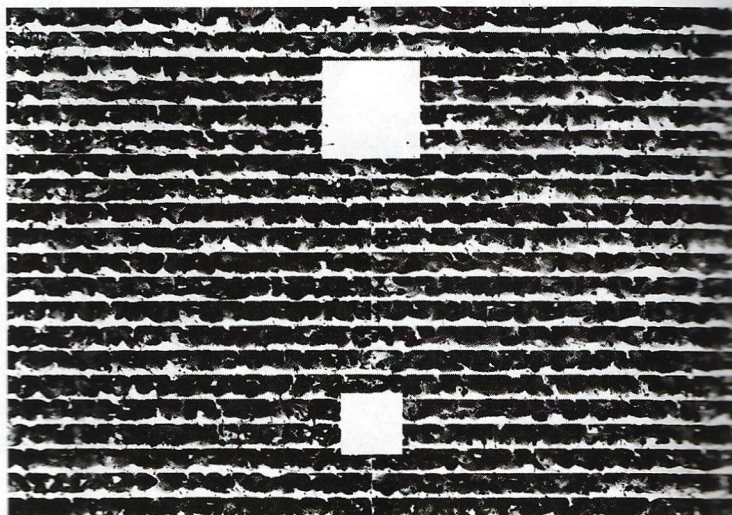
This comprehensive overview of the past three years of Joan Witek's drawings revealed both how restricted her lexicon of means is and, within those self-imposed limitations, how utterly

variable. Using exclusively black and white, a color scheme she adopted in 1974 and has never abandoned, Witek's visual world, like Chinese and Japanese ink paintings, is so rich in tonalities, subtle markings and textures that it appears as vivid, multiplicitous and motley as polychromatic reality. The reductiveness of her paintings and drawings traverses the domain established by Ad Reinhardt, Robert Ryman, Frank Stella in his black paintings, and Richard Serra; Serra's paintstick drawings were of particular importance to her.

Witek's figurations are geometric and usually symmetrical: squares, rectangles, lines implying grids or forming grids, the interplay of the horizontal and vertical. However, she opposes her rationalized formats with the vagaries of handmade marks and a pronounced sensuality of materials. Witek's art, in its nuanced physicality, is altogether more intimate, expressive, revelatory, even autobiographical than that of her models. In the past, she has referred to her drawings as self-portraits.

Many of the works here were made on vellum and film, non-absorbent grounds that float the pigments, pastels, watercolors and other mediums on the surface, distinguishing the drawing from the support and making us acutely conscious of process as well as materiality. A good example of this is *Ghost Pictures*; in it, the repeated motif—a Mayan glyph—is slotted into a checkerboard pattern, a wet-looking impression that rests on the impermeable sur-

Joan Witek: *Untitled*, 1996, mixed mediums on film, 42 by 60 inches; at Wynn Kramarsky.





Peter Campus: View of "By Degrees," 1998; at Paula Cooper.

face. The edges are faint, resembling the "ghosts" that come from reprinting a plate.

Flecked, splattered, smeared, dripped or stroked, Witek's surfaces can be densely velvety or diaphanous; regardless of process and of scale, their presence is always authoritative, due in part to the tension between the simplicity of composition and the complexities of execution. Although you think of these works as beautiful at first, in the end, they are not; instead, they refer to beauty, which may be more compelling. While this is not new territory for either art or the artist, Witek has staked her own very singular place within it.

—Lilly Wei

Peter Campus at Paula Cooper

Nature can be a daunting subject for artists, particularly if their aim is to replicate its beauty. Peter Campus's new videos, each presented on a sleek black monitor in front of its own custom-built chair, come about as close as you can get to a walk in the woods without actually being there.

Campus has returned to video after a hiatus of almost 20 years, during which time he experimented with digitally altered photographs. His interest was revived by the introduction of new technologies which make it easier to manipulate video footage, such as the dissolves, superimpositions and color reversals seen here. However, as in Campus's digital photographs, complex techniques do not draw attention to themselves. Instead they blend together to create a series of languid meditations on man in nature.

Each of the six videos has an individual character, though after

viewing them in succession, one becomes aware of repeated motifs. They were shot in Maine, upstate New York and on Long Island—landscapes of pounding surf, sun-dappled birch stands, mountain vistas and quiet sea shores. These are revealed by a handheld camera which advances along forest paths and deserted beaches, accompanied by the sound of feet rhythmically crunching the earth. As a result, we are always aware of the out-of-sight cameraman.

In one video, a small dog trots ahead, pausing periodically to assess the artist's, and therefore our, slower progress. In other videos, we watch Campus's shadow keep pace just ahead of us, or we focus on a stick that he drags through the dirt. Camera angles change abruptly—sometimes we are given a dog's eye view, sometimes we trace a hawk's flight through the sky or cast our eyes between near and distant vistas.

The video with the most insistent human presence leads us into an old farmhouse with flowered wallpaper and lace curtains. Another opens with the embers of a smoldering fire and then takes us out to sea. At one point the camera lingers along a beach where waves wipe out animal and human tracks.

These works bring to mind Richard Long's lonely forays through unpeopled nature. But Long keeps his audience at a distance—giving us only tantalizing hints of his experiences through austere photographs of the ephemeral markers he has set up to chronicle his progress. Campus takes us along for the excursion. The videos are dominated by a sense of restless movement as we press ever for-

ward. The result is a shared journey which is mesmerizing and exhilarating.

—Eleanor Heartney

Rebecca Quaytman at Spencer Brownstone

Rebecca Quaytman wrote a smart little statement to accompany this show, but she needn't have. What distinguishes the ambitions expressed in her writing—and they're considerable—is their perfect visibility in the work itself. Even more unusual, Quaytman's paintings, which encompass handmade abstraction and photo-silkscreened figuration, show not a trace of arid calculation. They are as visually absorbing as they are conceptually engaging.

One of Quaytman's main concerns is how paintings are viewed. That is, she is interested in the mostly unconscious motor and perceptual habits and the slightly more deliberated cognitive maps that propel a typical gallery-goer. The paintings in this show are all individually titled, but clearly they cohere into several related groups. For instance, one long wall is framed by a pair of color photo-silkscreens of Quaytman's mother, the poet Susan Howe (her father is the Minimalist painter Harvey Quaytman). These two *Hinge Paintings* are based on a single photograph flipped and computer-massaged into horizontally stretched trapezoids. Eyes closed, mouth pursed, hair ruffled, face wrinkled, Howe is in no traditional sense camera-ready. But her expression, its distortion and the orientation of her head powerfully direct our visual comprehension of the three small abstractions that lie between the two paintings in which she appears. The first abstraction, *Slo*, presents a simple white arrow on a vivid green field. Like all of Quaytman's work here, it is tenderly painted on laminated wood, which is beveled so the image seems to float free of the wall. The striped profile of the laminate's edge is simulated in a painted strip that cuts diagonally across *Falling to the Ground and*, punningly,

runs along the left edge of *Left Behind*. As an ensemble, these five paintings issue visual directives clear as a marching band, though Quaytman's music is nuanced and quiet.

Further cross-referencing from one painting to another is occasioned by a pair of portraits of the artist Dan Graham. Alternately computer-squashed and elongated, he is shown looking at a wall of ornately framed, unidentifiable landscape paintings; the digital distortions alter his expression from pleased to grim. Again, the portraits are bookends for abstractions, this time two small canvases with more trompe-l'oeil laminate strips. Another basic theme in the show is scale, explored most fully in two big grayish photo-silkscreens of a small model of the Spencer Brownstone gallery. The model is in one case fitted out with a painting that looks huge but—as is easily judged, since the actual object hangs beside the silkscreen—appears in reality quite small.

Completing the exhibition were more lovingly painted arrows as well as other geometric and biomorphic figures. Taken together, these paintings form a family of connections—perceptual, art-historical, personal and intellectual—as unusual for its harmony as for the liveliness of its exchange.

—Nancy Princenthal

Rebecca Quaytman: *Early Paintings; Portrait of Dan Graham*, 1998, silkscreen on wood, 36 by 24 inches; at Spencer Brownstone.

