

Art in America

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EXHIBITION REVIEWS

ERIN SHIRREFF

Lisa Cooley

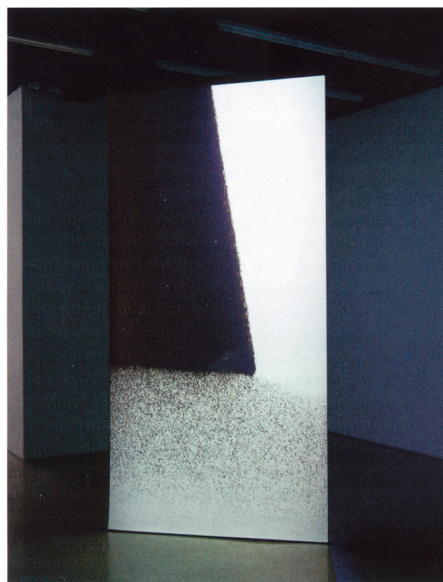
For “Day Is Long,” Erin Shirreff’s recent show at Lisa Cooley, the artist created polished, deceptively abstract sculptures, videos and photographs primarily from lowly ephemera around her studio—scraps of paper, plaster residue and the like. Directing her attention to the excess and rubbish produced by the daily labors of a studio practice, Shirreff demonstrated an auratic touch, magicking humble objects into a mysterious body of artworks (all 2013).

“Day Is Long” opened with a series of photographs. Shirreff lowered her camera into used buckets in her studio to take these shots, which are high-definition close-ups of dried plaster and grime left over from her artistic processes. The images dissociate the bucket’s interior from its recognizable form, however, presenting weathered, subtly toned, intricately detailed moons of gray. The lunar orbs display Shirreff’s transformative abilities, their unremarkable provenance as mixing pails nearly impossible to ascertain.

The large sculpture *Catalogue* consists of an assortment of finlike blocks of graphite-pigmented plaster, arranged on a long gray shelf. The products of another one of Shirreff’s methods of transposition, the objects take their curving shapes from her line drawings. Lacking the photographs’ complexity of detail, they’re comparatively mute and a bit more pedestrian, resembling bookends or architecture-school exercises in shape-making.

The two sculptures from the “Drop” series are more successful. Playing with size conversions, Shirreff based the large-scale pieces of raw, hot-rolled steel on small scraps of hand-cut paper. A hole drilled into each of the jagged, swooping shapes, they hang several inches from the wall on a peg. The layering of the steel sheets creates a minimal, almost painterly composition when viewed head-on; from the sides, with the gaps between layers visible, the sculptures look like the DIY amassings of scrap metal that they are—which is to say, nothing like the bits of paper that gave them their form.

Additionally, Shirreff offered two video works. *Strip* was the nimbler of the two; projected onto a floor-to-ceiling screen, it features a shot that runs quickly along what appears to be a road, its pavement-esque grain distinguishable when the camera suddenly stops moving. Instead of actually filming a



Erin Shirreff:
Strip, 2013,
video loop; at
Lisa Cooley.

road, Shirreff tracked the edge of a photograph, splicing the cuts together afterward to create a distorted sense of length and scale. The second video was partitioned off in the rear room. Starting in a shroud of darkness, an object comes in and out of focus under varying light conditions. Titled *Medardo Rosso, Madame X, 1896*, the video was an outlier in “Day Is Long,” deriving not from studio remnants but from a catalogue reproduction of the titular sculpture (not one of Rosso’s own photographs of the famous work, but postmortem documentation). Shirreff printed the image on various types of paper, which she then photographed again, this time altering the lighting and contrast with analog special effects. The sequence of these photos composes the looped video, enlivening the static stills by continually morphing the statue. After seeing Shirreff enact transformations on bits and pieces from her studio again and again, I found *Medardo Rosso* an interesting contrast and a fitting end to the exhibition: Shirreff is able to transfigure not only appearance but duration, her attendant focus invigorating both scraps of paper and an esteemed work of art.

—Matthew Shen Goodman

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