

# SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

Modern Painters  
September, 2011

## MODERN PAINTERS



**Erin Shirreff**

"Still, Flat, and Far,"  
2010. Installation  
view at the Institute  
of Contemporary  
Art, University of  
Pennsylvania.

### NORTH AMERICA

#### PHILADELPHIA

### Erin Shirreff

ICA Philadelphia //

September 15–December 5

ERIN SHIRREFF'S first solo museum exhibition, "Still, Flat, and Far," revolves around *Moon*, 2010. Shirreff produced the 32-minute video of the heavenly sphere bathed in an artificial *clair de lune* by rephotographing a series of shots, illuminated from various angles, of its waxing and waning phases. She then digitally stitched the new images together. The result is a brilliant exposition of the exhibition's title: In her treatment the moon is still and flat, but she animates the image in a way that endows the far subject with an unnatural proximity to the viewer.

The moon, whose current orbital distance is approximately 30 times the diameter of the earth, is not the only "far" object in this tightly edited show. The Yale-trained artist has confronted a classical problem in the history of sculpture: the viewers' perception of their distance from a specific object. Found documentary photos are pinned into shadow-box frames, each an enigmatic element in an unstructured narrative. The most resonant, from a Tony Smith monograph, depicts a man and a woman standing next to the hulking, distended cube of the American sculptor's *New Piece*, 1966. In the severely cropped image, the couple seems oblivious to the menacing black form. The photo reeks of

the faux naïveté of nuclear-test-site images.

Shirreff's own sculptures, brittle geometric forms made of compressed ash and Hydrocal, a white gypsum cement, recall the marmoreal coolness of travertine, the stone of choice of Mies van der Rohe, the fascist architects of Italy, and numerous other 20th-century practitioners. The architectural connotations of the works' form and material are perhaps not accidental. After all Smith, Shirreff's chief influence, had an early career as an architect. Both of their bodies of work seem to operate within a subset of Minimalist discourse. Shirreff's propped sculptures, however, in their hollow fragility, eschew Smith-like monumentality in favor of a human scale.

Modern sculpture is too often conceived of outside the context of architecture and landscape, which defamiliarizes the beheld form. The muteness of Shirreff's sculptures—the surface of the moon is strangely evoked by the compressed ash—and their angular shapes make them phantoms of high Minimalism. Shirreff previously sculpted pieces to be photographed and then destroyed. Those early works, modeled from clay and worked by hand, resembled Neolithic tools, although without definite purpose. The precepts raised by Shirreff's work—the role of the manmade versus the natural, the relevance of landscape and architecture—have made her the most exciting artist exploring our existential plight with sculpture.

—Steve Pulimood

2021 S WABASH AVE  
CHICAGO IL 60616  
+1 (312) 226 2223