

ARTSCENE™

The Monthly Digest to Art in Southern California



MICHAEL KENNA

“GUARD TOWER AND FENCE, BIRKENAU, POLAND”

**JOE GOODE • SUKI BERG • BARBARA KERWIN and
GARY EDWARD BLUM • SHAUNA PECK and MELINDA
SMITH ALTSHULER • AND MUCH MORE**

photographed previous bodies of work, then he affixed the images to sound insulation board, painted on them with oils, and proceeded to burn away portions of the sound insulation. When mounted on stretcher bars, these ragged, irregular holes cast a shadow on the wall that allowed the white of the wall to become a part of the work. He hung the nearly 40 works in his studio, where, ironically and unfortunately, a fire destroyed them in May, 2005.

Goode's camera, left on the desk in the studio, was spared. He took haunting black and white pictures of the remains of the studio which are part of this exhibit. It is disturbing to see the 40 ghostly frames still on the wall, with no paintings on them (the large scale digital diptych photograph which documents this is a stunner). The scorched walls, peeling paint, damaged canvases and debris on the floor become eloquent eulogies of loss and lamentation. Documenting the devastation became the basis for the newest body of work.

Goode makes two versions of each untitled 11" X 14" digital photograph (from a destroyed piece)--one is left untouched in black and white and one is painted over with acrylic. Sometimes the nearly transparent paint seeps like a stain over the image, at other times, the orange and yellow abstract-expressionist blobs and streaks jump around like flames devouring the photograph. This body of work is like an infinity of mirrors. By using digital reproductions of earlier work and re-purposing them like clones, Goode runs the risk of the work losing much of its initial strength. Seeing the flat digital image just makes one pine for the original thickly encrusted oil painting with all its emphatic surface manipulation and real three dimensional holes. It's like margarine instead of butter.

There is also one large scale work in the show, which is constructed by printing out sections of the whole image (a dense forest) and gluing them down. Large globs of paint (faux abstract-expressionist, as they are built up with a transparent modeling paste and then painted over) cascade and sweep over the surface, transparent enough to see through to the picture but in stark contrast to it. By dint of sheer scale and painterly gesture this and the other large scale painted photographs command attention, and invite the audience for repeated viewing.

From the early sixties to the present, Goode has often created an elegant color field surface, only to mar it or to introduce



Joe Goode, "Lost Painting, Fire," 2004-7, oil on archival digital print, 71 x 60".

random (though obviously premeditated) events, such as using fire or buckshot to alter the surface. In his "Torn Cloud Painting" series in the 1970's, he layered torn and ripped canvas over another flatter piece of canvas--again allowing the viewer to peer to another surface. These images, however, when photographed could pass as tromp l'oeil.

Ultimately, that is the problem. The most compelling works in the show are still the stark, dramatic and, yes, gorgeous black and white photographs of the burnt out studio. The small scale digital photographs of Goode's previous bodies of work (even with paint on them) are simply not magically transformed. This personal archeology of building the new on the scaffold of the old is a workable strategy, but not when there is merely reproduction instead of re-incarnation.

Nancy Kay Turner

GARY EDWARD BLUM and BARBARA KERWIN

(Ruth Bachofner Gallery, Santa Monica) Geometric abstraction is far from en vogue these days, so much so that what was once the art world's mainstream is again radical in art world echelons. Ironically, geometric abstraction has maintained that position among the middle class, whose sensibilities it both offends and up-ends, since its inception a century ago.

The work of painters Gary Edward Blum and Barbara Kerwin share similar-

ties and will complement each other. Both painters commit to the experiential and meditative nature of art without overt content. For years Barbara Kerwin has been a maverick manufacturer of the most sensuous, skin-like abstract paintings in Los Angeles. But instead of falling into a touchy-feely trap, Kerwin posits her textures in rigid geometric patterns. The effect is a soothing, cool humanism--rare in this genre still dominated by the Soviet-like sensibilities of Kasimir Malevich.

In her latest work, geometry is used to reflect on the centrifugal. The logical patterning of large-to-small takes the viewer from the edges of the piece into its center, where a darker section of the composition suggests destinations that are absolute, yet safe. Structurally echoing Mondrian through the filters of the post-modern, these pleasant paintings challenge us to mediate on the fact that we may have already arrived at our goal. A cynic might say, "Maybe this is as good as it gets," while an optimistic Kerwin seems, in this work, to promise that we will remain happy since we so enjoyed our ride.

If Kerwin manages to find the lighter side of rigidity, Gary Edward Blum implodes the pretensions to perfection inherent in the geometric. He does this without losing the forms that imply structure and embody simplicity. The approach is an unfinished, unhurried approximation of where the picture may be going, complete with paint swatches meant to match various foreground and background shades. But the work is very much finished, a complete narrative of a meditative process that is fearless in that it leaves on display much of what an artist's picture went through just to be



Barbara Kerwin, "Window A," 2008, encaustic, oil on panel, 30 x 30".

with you here in the gallery.

Blum turns the conventions of abstraction inside out. He avoids cloying, cute colors in favor of beiges and creams that imply space. He abandons the rigid, but offers little evidence of the artist's hand as a god-like gesture of certain will. The paintings seem open to so much possibility, and yet they assert a rare aesthetic position: concretizing process without resorting to pattern. The artist embraces process as an artist's narrative. To make the passage of time spent painting the very subject of the painting is bold when every cliché of the last century is forgotten, or at least untried.

These two artists share a sympathy in wanting the simple, radical gesture of inclusion without the content of agenda to be art. Their work complements each other without treading on nuanced yet definite territory that each artist stakes out. Rigorous and satisfying, yet experimental, idiosyncratic and unique, these artists make grand pushes into abstraction's great undiscovered country.

Mat Gleason



Gary Edward Blum, "Tuolumne (Morning)," 2008, acrylic on canvas, 36 x 72".