

ARTFORUM

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I N T E R N A T I O N A L



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paper that combine their individual techniques and artistic cultures—miniature painting for Sharma, primarily abstract painting for Evans. The eight works on view here—rendered in, among other materials, acrylic, gouache, and pencil—hover on the indefinite edge between abstraction and ornamentation, depicting minute iconographic forms on bulbous backgrounds of fluid and frayed color. *GreenMisstep* (all works 2010), for instance, delineates cloudy sky in the upper portion of a dark green oval with blurred edges; at the lower right of the oval, a sitting deck and little red women's slippers suggest human presence, while a configuration of small circles in the foreground lends the composition the rhythm of a nocturnal raga for hidden lovers.

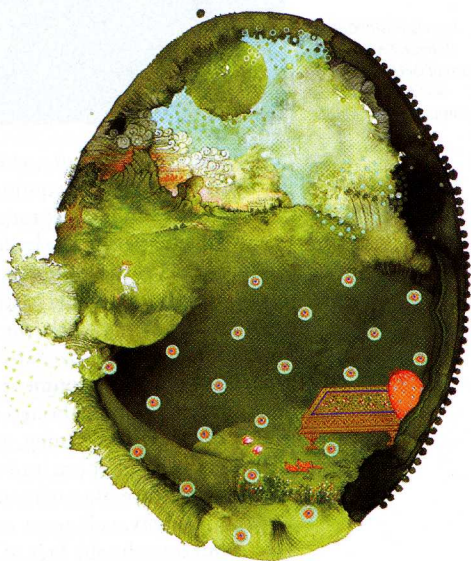
The works include multiple references to Indian culture, as well as to the country's ecology. Peacocks, herons, tigers, and lotus flowers—fleeting elements of representation—insinuate themselves into compositions that remain predominantly nonnarrative, while small phallic and vaginal details suggest sensuality. In *DragonSprout*, a pyrotechnic fountain of rosy bubbles gushes forth from a central umbilicus, perhaps representing the central moment of creation of the world in the Hindu cosmogony, a burst of pure energy here embraced by delicate blue-green leaves. The artists allude to Hindu deities again in *CowDustHour*: Floating weightlessly in midair, Ananta Shesha, the five-headed serpent, represents the presence of Vishnu; Krishna's strings of pearls hang against ethereal dark bubbles; and a sacred cow stands placidly above a pink cloud. Although small-scale, these paintings evoke both microcosm and macrocosm, terrestrial landscapes and celestial maps, in a timeless poetic and spiritual synthesis.

Other Western artists have used artists and artisans from south Asia to execute their works (Alighiero Boetti and Luigi Ontani, for example), but those assistants were mere executors whose identities remained anonymous. Evans and Sharma, by contrast, devise a collaboration marked by parity. To render these detailed dreamscapes, both artists intervened numerous times, erasing or modifying the work already done, inserting new details, or making small adjustments to elaborate on the themes or celebrate the work of the other. It is as if the ego of each were dissolved, their individual personalities fused to the point of becoming almost indistinguishable. In this sense, the collaboration represents an unusual experiment: It highlights the potential for real transcultural exchange between East and West, while stimulating a reflection on diversity (social, sexual, and religious) and on dichotomies (female/male, chaos/order, abstraction/representation) in paintings suffused with poetry and grace.

—Ida Panicelli

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.

Julie Evans and
Ajay Sharma,
GreenMisstep, 2010,
acrylic, gouache,
colored pencil,
mineral, and lac
pigments on
paper, 14 x 11".

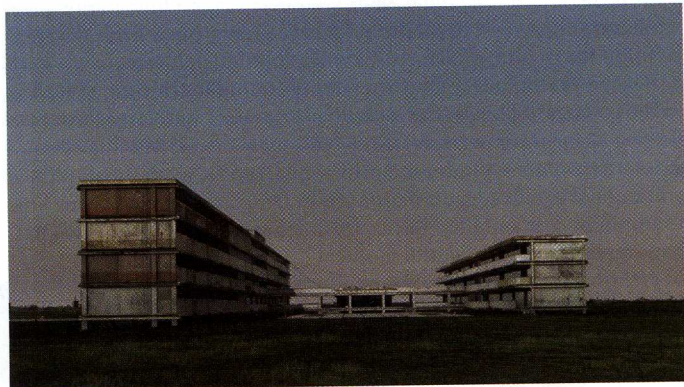


John Gerrard

SIMON PRESTON GALLERY

John Gerrard's *Cuban School (Community 5th of October) 2010* is a projection of a slow pan around a very large building that is whitish, filthy, and decaying, with two long parallel rectangular structures and

a shorter one in between, all joined by a breezeway. The view of the building along one side is close enough to allow audiences to see the patterns in the window screens and the busted-out shutters; at the short side of the building and then all the rest of the way around, the view becomes more expansive, with yards and yards of lush grass, a rickety fence punctuated with skimpy trees, and wires leading away from the building toward—well, toward nowhere, it seems. The whole thing has a slight air of the unreal.



The projection is not a video; it is a digitally generated simulation that exists in real time, continually recalculated so that the qualities of light, shadow, and landscape are based on the time of day and prevailing weather patterns. The building depicted is a school outside Havana, built in the 1960s in the Brutalist Soviet style. Although in terrible disrepair, the real school is still attended by children, who in fact live there. In Gerrard's work, the decay of the bunkerlike architecture is evident, suggesting (perhaps) that the ideology it represents is mismatched to this environment; at other times the structure achieves a kind of grandness, as though it were a large ship plowing through an empty ocean. In the evening, as the sky grows dark, the building's fluorescent lights flicker on, and in the morning they go off, both events effected by a caretaker who makes otherwise very infrequent appearances. (You may well never see her.) It is easy to be too impressed by the technology, by the fact of the building's ongoing existence in the projection and the constant changes it undergoes as day turns to night and clouds gather on the horizon, as well as by the work's reduction, conversely, of an actual structure to a series of complex algorithms. But to some extent, the metaphoric qualities bestowed by the technology help to clarify the point of the piece.

Other of Gerrard's works are digital simulations of similarly isolated structures—pig sheds and corn silos in Kansas, and, in *Universal (near Iron Spring, Alberta) 2010*, on view here in the gallery's office, an oil field in Canada. His fine balance of concept, content, and material suggest a theme and variations on the idea of the virtual. The computer-generated landscapes bring to mind, of course, virtual worlds, video games, special effects—that is, ways of producing unrealities. Here the format manifests something quite real, albeit at the periphery of most of our worlds—the discomfort of this admission is part of the work's impact—since for many of us, the arrival of food in our markets and the availability of oil are things we take on faith, if we think about them at all. Their existence remains provisional—more or less virtual—whether in life, on a gallery wall, or on a computer chip. (The artist Jon Haddock has done something similar for cultural history with his series of drawings from 2000 that render iconic historical and cinematic moments as computer games.)

Technology is the vehicle for the work, but it is not only the vehicle. Through it Gerrard manages to invoke the history of landscape painting, photography, and Earth art, and situates his work somewhere

between documentary and fiction—between images that bring us news of places and situations that are foreign to us, and the kinds of invention (ideological, narrative, moral) that we undertake in order to comprehend them.

—Emily Hall

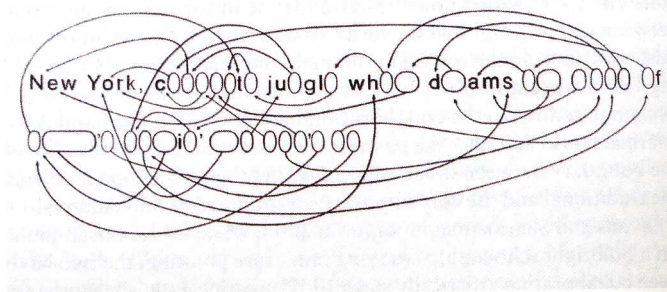
Antek Walczak

REAL FINE ARTS

For his first New York solo show this past fall, artist, writer, and Bernadette Corporation member Antek Walczak made four paintings. Like *Wheel of Fortune* boards in midplay, the works comprise lines of incomplete text, the missing letters and words denoted by graphic blanks. Linking the characters and spaces, networks of Picabian lines and arrows explain how the already present letters could be recycled to reconstitute the unfinished words—as if such decoding were even necessary. Few would require help parsing what these paintings say: When taken together, they spell out the refrain of Jay-Z's "Empire State of Mind"—New York's unofficial anthem, released almost exactly a year before Walczak's opening.

The show's title was "Empire State of Machine Mind"; in the press release, the artist cited futurologist and inventor of optical character recognition Ray Kurzweil and talked about "hard drives attached to bodies" taking over the world. But there was nothing high-tech about this show. If anything, these four paintings (all works 2010) are anti-tech, their analog surfaces appearing like crashed Flash sites perpetually loading on frozen HD monitors. And while this pictorial content was developed on a computer, it was notably not screened, but painstakingly hand-rendered in acrylic on canvas. These works are paintings. And they took hours and hours to complete. To finish on time, the artist had to call in his friends, the gallerist, paid assistants—his *network*—to help. If surplus labor equals value production, these works could be said to be worth a lot. Of course this is funny, because even as "finished" works, the painted message is full of gaps. Walczak's crew put in weeks of labor, but the viewer is still asked to complete the job—to literally read the painting's code, its *sign value*—and then to what end? To materialize the completely generic lyrics of a pop single that everyone knows already anyway? Why does the prize sound not unlike the unspoken upshot of so much critical painting?

Or, to borrow from "Painting Beside Itself," the popular essay that David Joselit published in *October* around the same time Jay-Z dropped his hit single, does it just sound "transitive"—that is, like painting that "actualizes" the circulation of an idea from an object to its network? After all, these diagram-paintings are based on Lempel-Ziv-Welch data-compression models and thereby prefigure live-bodied links for transmitting information through social mainframes, as



Antek Walczak, *New York, c t ju g d ams f, 2010*, on canvas, 6 x 1. From the series "Empire State of Machine Mind," 2