

Cinderbox



Cara Despain & Mary Toscano

September 10 - October 1, 2010

Cinderbox: Ashes to Ashes; Paint to Paint.

The CCA Gallery at CUAC seems empty except for a polar bear rug flatly painted on the floor in a flat white. Outside, the cabin that contains the gallery is surrounded by sculptures escaping “Cinderbox,” an exhibition by Mary Toscano and Cara Despain. The sculptures, all painted white, made variously of aluminum, rubber, and plaster, are birds fleeing the rafters and connecting the cabin to the main CUAC building. The sculptures are also rats escaping under the bottom logs or from under the door of the cabin and a small bear that seems to be emerging from the logs themselves. All seem to be in flight, escaping the cabin, fleeing some mysterious, eminent danger.

The vacated space isn't empty, however. The walls have been painted Ad Reinhart-style: white on white. The paintings and drawings that actually cover the walls are in shades and tones of white that make them only visible when the light catches them just so. They are the images of birds in flight. They are images of empty chairs and other furniture. And the furniture is smoldering—not quite on fire—but the fire will start soon. Most of the animals seem to be fleeing this fire, though some remain. A cat sits comfortably, aloof, in the rafters.

Prior the opening of the exhibition, Despain and Toscano spent a week in the gallery—artists' hours—painting and drawing on the walls. The installation of the exhibition became an absurd performance broadcast in real-time over the

internet. Under constant surveillance, never knowing if anyone was watching, or whom, the artists created subtle marks on the walls that were impossible to translate via low-fidelity video. Viewers like me observed them remotely (I was in New York City during the installation). We watched them pantomime artist-like gestures for days and nights on end without a mark to show for it. This ghost-art performance is but one of

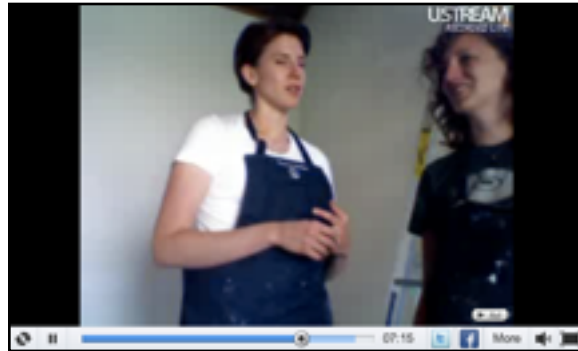
the suggestions of the beginning of a narrative: perhaps it was the artists themselves that set fire to the space before they left.

White on white painting has its roots in Modern abstraction. Despain and Toscano handle the Modern vernacular expertly while at the same time subverting it with the introduction of

narrative and then by suggesting the act of burning it down—the cabin, the gallery, and their art—and the suggestion of the fire itself becomes like a performance or an art making (destroying) process. They also find ways to engage with the space itself, both architecturally and

conceptually. On one wall is a drawing of a mirror reflecting the image of the window across the room, one of the rafters, and the cat, which seems to be looking back at me in the reflection. The animals that are fleeing the space, connecting the CCA Gallery with the main CUAC building, all painted white,

seem to be the white cube incarnate. It's like the gallery itself has become animated and has morphed into animals and is fleeing the fire caused by the art or caused by the action of



making the art, the aerobics of painting—the aerobics of live performance.

Finally, the animals seem to be the ghosts of the residents of the cabin—those inhabitants that shared the space during the decades in which the cabin was in ruin after CCA Christensen stopped making art there and after he died there, but before it was moved eight miles to its current location and before it assumed its current role as gallery space instead of studio space. While Toscano and Despain engage with historical issues related to painting that often seem at odds with one another (abstraction, narrative, sculpture, installation, performance), each element in their act of art making and exhibition engage as well with the spiritual life of the cabin. They conjure the ghosts of local history only to vanquish them with fire and ultimately paint over it all, again leaving the cabin to be the white cube. Ashes to ashes; paint to paint.

Adam Bateman

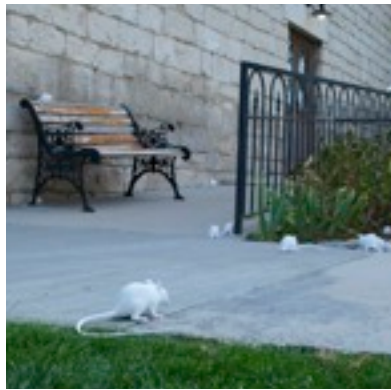


Cinderbox Bear Skin Rug
Acrylic paint 2010

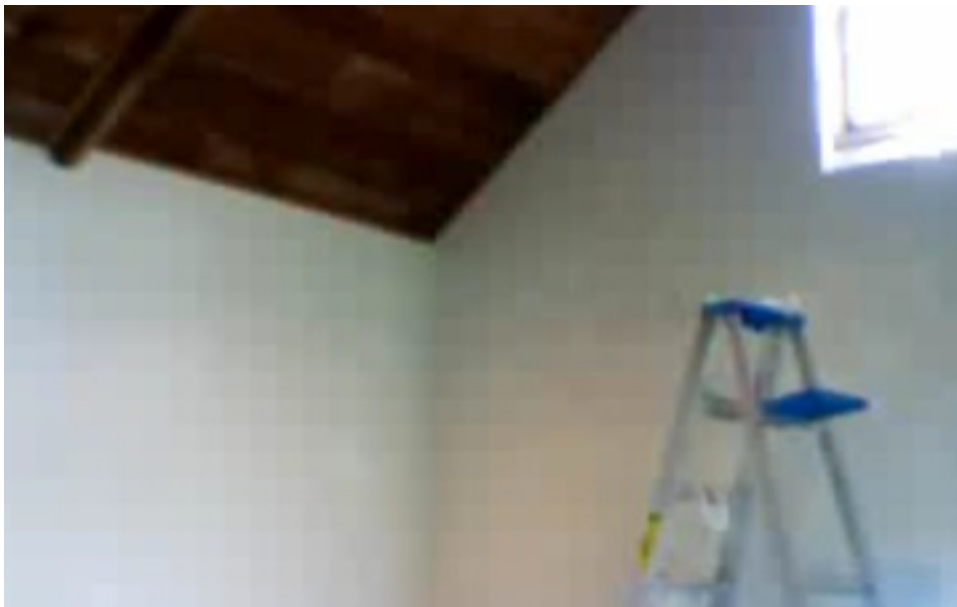


Cinderbox Bear
Foam, Plaster, Paint, 2010





Cinderbox Installation
Screen Grabs from Live Feed, 2010



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