

October 22—
December 3

David Lefkowitz Facilities and Grounds

Carrie Secrist Gallery is pleased to present Facilities and Grounds, our fourth solo project with David Lefkowitz. In this interview with Kristen Heitman (MS in Environmental Management and Sustainability, IIT), Lefkowitz discusses his relationship to material culture.

You seem to approach your series of works like a scientist, exploring many potentials in a well defined stream, how do you feel this affects the creative process?

I'm not sure how scientific the process is, as the hypotheses I'm testing are pretty fuzzy and subjective, but there is certainly more than a hint of a rational procedure in the way that I work. Establishing fairly strict param-

eters for a body of work provides a productive springboard for a more intuitive process. I don't see those constraints as a hindrance to creativity. On the contrary, they provide a framework, an infrastructure for creative play.

For example, in the group of new paintings, *Terrain Vague*, I set up a basic compositional structure:

1st layer- poured latex to suggest the arbitrary 'natural' topography of the landscape (using an overtly un-natural material applied 'organically'- in this case meaning with little conscious control).

2nd layer- a network of sharply defined lines that occupy the middle ground. These suggest the imposition of a rigid geometric structure over that first, relatively formless layer. They refer both to symbols for roads in a standard atlas, and the assertive framework of Constructivist design or Mondrian's utopian grids viewed from a raking angle, that birds-eye view that contextualizes and spatializes the chaos of the underlying surface.

3rd layer- deadpan, clunkily literal depictions of ancillary features, both natural and human-made, of our surroundings- hedge-rows, concrete barriers, traffic cones, utility structures- the type of elements either basic to the infrastructure we rely on but never consider as worthy of contemplation, or unassuming residual features that lack any compelling reason for being.

Within each of these parameters, there

are endless possibilities for variation. I can emphasize or de-emphasize suggestions of narrative, spatial illusionism, degrees of

formal stability or chaos.

What role do you feel recycled materials you use play in your work? Do they guide, struggle, inspire your final product?

My choices of materials all center around a fascination with how and what a given material means —but also how its meaning can shift when its altered in some way or presented in unexpected contexts.

I like working with cardboard, sheet-rock and other residual by products of our consumption-driven material culture partly because of their debased status and their ubiquity. I hope the work asserts a kind of reverie of scavenging.

The nature of our throwaway culture mandates that we reconsider how we deal with waste. There's a rich history of artists recognizing the value of reclaiming the otherwise thrown away as potential fodder for meaning, from more formal uses of trash in work by Kurt Schwitters, Robert Rauschenberg and Tony Cragg, to contemporary artists making more of a point about the economies of the waste stream like Mierle Laderman Ukeles and Dan Peterman. I see this work as participating in the same conversation.

The works on cardboard depicts architectural structures that hover between reading as abstract geometric forms and literal

renderings of stacks of cardboard boxes.

All of this work reflects my ongoing interest in the embodiment of certain contradictory ideas: the relation between object and image, the real and the ideal, earnestness and parody.

How has the use of and role of recycled materials progressed in your work?

It has been an element in my work for a long time, and looking back its hard for me to identify a 'progression.' I am especially interested in the transformation that a material can undergo when manipulated just so. The work is really doing its job when it seems to embody a tension between an object or material and a representation. For Facilities and Grounds, that relationship is most palpable in Cutaway- an architectural interior 'painted' on sheetrock scraps with joint compound- the basic components of every interior space (including this gallery!) built in the past fifty years. It creates a satisfying tautology- a feedback loop between image and object.

Your work reflects so many relationships between nature and society, is there one message you'd like viewers to walk away with?

I'm hesitant to assign too specific an agenda to the work. I'm attracted to work that poses questions more than art that provides clear answers, and so I try to make work that doesn't come off as overtly didactic either. (I know that's sounds like a cliché- a predictable contemporary artist/liberal arts enthusiast answer to that query, but its true!). I would hope that the work engenders consideration and conversation about our use of resources and the images we invoke to describe 'nature' and 'culture.'

Do you feel like you are managing this relationship or manipulating it through your work?

If I understand your terms correctly, I suppose I'm reflecting the manipulation of nature that humans have been exerting for millennia, in the hope that we can make a transition to a model that's more about 'managing' that relationship.

I think part of the problem is our cultural tendency to frame the discussion as a conflict between nature and society, rather than recognize that we are and have always been part of nature. Admittedly, we as a species do have an increasing impact on the environment—and for the last 300 years or so it's been an appreciably negative one, but we're stuck with ourselves. We are the only ones who can work to improve things, and that requires a lot of human tinkering and collaboration, not a retreat into oppositional camps.

The romantic notion that "authentic" nature is pristine, unspoiled and unchanging wilderness reinforces that sense of alienation and can get in the way of more imaginative ways to build sustainable communities that take into consideration local ecologies, but acknowledge that we do use and need certain natural resources.

