

ARTFORUM

Luke Stettner

KATE WERBLE GALLERY

83 Vandam Street

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At first glance, Luke Stettner's first solo show in New York City—comprising nested plates, a white enamel grid with individually lacerated foam rectangles, framed sheets of paper—appears deliberately underwhelming. But deeper inspection uncovers narratives of intimate valence and the laborious processes that brought the artworks into being. In the past several years, Stettner has created (and exhibited in group shows) a considerable body of highly conceptual work inspired by the death of his father and the obsessive, all-consuming grief that surrounds such a loss. Such work also populates the present exhibition. Enacting the anger and futility of mourning, Stettner ground his father's funerary urn to dust, literally reducing a vessel for ashes to ashes, and placed what was left in a glass vase beneath burial layers of oil and water (*The Grey Ash Soft*, 2011). The bodily remains themselves were transferred to a receptacle made from a hollowed-out stack of candy-colored plates off of which the artist's family used to eat (*Nesting Plates [A Funerary Urn for My Father's Ashes]*, 2010), an attempt to refute death not only with nesting and birth imagery, but also with childhood memory and a touch of humor. Elsewhere, *Untitled (Absence Grows Sharper)*, 2011—a series of enamel-sheathed foam rectangles with vertical gashes down their centers—responds to a description in Roland Barthes's *Mourning Diary* of the perplexing nature of loss as a kind of laceration. But if death sharpens absence, Stettner suggests, it also dulls presence. In *Grey Area*, 2011, the twelve black-and-white photographs of a Henri Cartier-Bresson calendar have been dissolved into pulp and reconstituted into gray sheets of handmade paper. The resulting nonimages simply but elegantly reify the vague emotional fog that usurps the experience of distinct events and scenes when one is in the grip of grief: All things become indistinguishable from one another, and time itself fails to move on.



View of "Eyes That Are like Two Suns," 2011. Foreground: *Nesting Plates (A Funerary Urn for My Father's Ashes)*, 2010. Background: *The Grey Ash Soft*, 2011.

— Debora Kuan

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