

Luke Stettner

KATE WERBLE GALLERY

In Luke Stettner's almost colorless New York solo debut, one work stood out: a squat column of bright plastic plates—seven small ones stacked atop nine large. It has the look of a toy, though it turns out to be anything but; Stettner has fashioned the cheery 1970s vintage dishes, sourced from his childhood home, into an urn for his father's ashes. He ground the original funerary vessel, a traditional marble affair, into dust and displayed it here under water and oil in a straight glass vase that resembles a laboratory test tube. Both vessels sit on slender wooden—ash, get it?—pedestals, and together describe a neat set of material, ideational, and emotional switcheroos. The original vessel has been transformed into a simulacrum of its own contents, while its replacement invests mass-produced Pop-Minimalist form with a surprising emotional frisson.



Luke Stettner, *Three Identical Cubes*, 2011, three-channel color video, 5 minutes 20 seconds.

This systematic but playful and sometimes poignant approach is common to all of the work in "Eyes That Are Like Two Suns"; the show had a visual and procedural clarity of a kind that is currently rather unfashionable but still highly satisfying when done right. On this occasion, Stettner focused specifically on chance and memory as "calculable phenomena," subjecting a variety of sources to more or less drastic reframings and reorganizations aimed at identifying their uniqueness and universality. The theme was established with *An Immutable Law That No One Can Count On*, 2011, an array of seventy-two maple dice representing every combination of two numbers that it is possible to throw. The set represents a kind of totality but also underscores a limit: We can, as mathematicians and gamblers know, understand the operation of probability without coming any closer to transcending it.

Cubes crop up again in a lovely three-channel video, *Three Identical Cubes*, 2011, which shows an origami master folding three sheets of white paper into three perfect boxes. Each of three monitors follows the master as he takes a different route to what looks like the same result, in almost exactly the same amount of time (a little over five minutes). Filmed in close-up and accompanied only by the sounds of paper being scored and creased, the performance is entrancing, a mesmerizing portrait of sleight-of-hand dexterity. *Three Identical Cubes* is a study in doing a lot with a little, and hints at the significance of variation, even—or especially—when difference is an aspect of hidden intention as opposed to a readily discernible outcome. Getting there is, after all, half the fun.

More self-consciously serious, and arguably less successful for it, is *Untitled (Absence Grows Sharper)*, 2011, a grid of eighteen small slabs of high-density foam coated in glossy white enamel. A hair-thin black line that runs vertically down the center of each piece turns out not to be a painted addition but a physical cut, adding an echo of Lucio Fontana's "Spatial Concept" canvases, 1946–68, to the flavor of Piero Manzoni's "Achromes," 1967–62. Another set of almost-blank panels from 2011 consists of twelve framed sheets of handmade paper, each a mottled pale gray. The work's extended parenthetical subtitle offers a list of

dates and places, while details of its medium provide a final clue: What we are looking at is a Cartier-Bresson calendar, pulped and reconstituted into a year of mute abstractions. The discovery that *Grey Area's* raw material held sentimental value for the artist, then, only muddles things. Stettner's art is most successful when the absence it traces is both deeply felt and transparently embodied.

—Michael Wilson

Michelle Lopez

SIMON PRESTON GALLERY

Turning Minimalist form against itself is hardly a new idea—one might even consider it a genre unto itself—but it still offers room for maneuver. In "Vertical Neck," her second solo exhibition at Simon Preston, Brooklyn-based artist Michelle Lopez presented a strong, clean suite of five new sculptures that capitalize on the movement's enduring legacy but sidestep parody and polemic to arrive at a more subtly allusive language. Lopez isn't afraid of explicit critical reference—in 2009's *Portrait of Artist as Special Mission Project/Akira Revisited*, for example, she went after Takashi Murakami's objectification of Asian women—but here that impulse was reined in, and the results are the more satisfying for it. In its seeming restraint, the show exuded a bolstered confidence.

Blue Angels and *Blue Angel* (all works 2011) contain the show's most immediately identifiable art-historical references, playing on the high shine of Californian Finish Fetish sculpture and the tangle metal forms of John Chamberlain. Three roughly folded and heavily crumpled sheets of aluminum lean against the wall and tower above head height, their interiors painted blue or black, their exteriors white or colorlessly reflective. The suggestion that attempts at formal perfection are necessarily doomed to failure is clear, but in their fun-house-mirror distortions, these works direct that argument at not only artistic folly but also the viewer's own vanities and imperfections. Still, the news isn't all bad; there's an insinuation in the aluminum's shiny, paper-like surfaces of gift wrap, a hint of celebration and renewal.

In two sculptures titled *Your Board*, Lopez employs the seven-ply-maple-and-granular-grip-tape makeup of a standard skateboard, but replaces the familiar lozenge shape with a square-ended strip that droops from the wall and trails onto the floor like a length of paper. The top section of each of these (one work features a single example, the other a pair) folds over onto itself to expose a pale verso, and the dark sparkle of the grip tape that covers their outward-facing surfaces makes for a satisfying chromatic and textural contrast with the bare wood. Broad ripples running through these forms add to the illusion of their flexibility, as does the way in which their corners curl up slightly where they meet the floor.

There's an entertaining shock of misrecognition to Lopez's repurposing

