

show strikes a balance between what is expected of pink and what unexpected idioms might be possible beyond those associations. The pink in Samantha Thomas's *Punk* bubbles up like joyful tar from underneath the weight of cliff-like passages of black paint. One black shape takes up the whole left third of the canvas and along its top edge across to the other side. Another splats and bleeds like an ink blot, resting inside a central square of hot red that is in turn bordered on the left and top by a thin edge of light pink separating the red from the surrounding black. The bottom is white, with ethereal red circles and the whole seems like a grotto or a slow-motion flood, painted with energy and movement and no shyness toward pigment; a total independence from form makes it plain that pink can hold its own with the big colors.

—Shana Nys Dambrot



Amanda Ross-Ho, *Sad Sack*, 2007, canvas dropcloth, sculpture remnants, at Cherry and Martin, Los Angeles. (Photo: Robert Wedemeyer.)

hang on these with the orderly design of a department store sale, evoking the mix-and-match sensibility of Ross-Ho's practice; pieces can be bought individually or as an installation. While this flexibility may be good news for budget-conscious buyers, it generates a lack of completion more than any critique of commerce—the possibility of which falls flat within the context of the gallery. Several works utilize the tools of art, commenting on the process of making as related to art and to craft. A paint-splattered coat is on display and the flatbed scan of a marked-up cutting board is used in several pieces, its scratches enlarged on pale blue ground. The cut-away pages of crafting manuals are filled with the surface of the board. Indeed, a fascination with art versus arts-and-crafts permeates the exhibition, resonating more profoundly in pieces that are either hung individually on the sheetrock or cut directly from its surface. In *gran-abertura #2*, rough holes produce the pattern of a macramé design, complete with tassels. The conversion in scale and medium creates a curious rift, where craft pattern evolves alternately into rug, sculpture, altar or shadow play. In *White Goddess 3* (which is actually black), another macramé pattern shape is painted in canvas and hung on the sheetrock panel.

The most successful piece does not make use of sheetrock at all but rather forms a huge Oldenburgian art sack filled with the oversized trappings of an artist: Stretcher bars and red patterned frames (apparently these latter pieces are enlarged versions of Ross-Ho's past sculptures) sit together in a bag made to emulate one the artist carries. Playful and funny, *Sad Sack* incites a reflexive commentary that supersedes itself, embracing the broader implications of value and worth in relation to the inflation of identity (or the trappings thereof) as a means of self-preservation or awareness, a possi-

bility equal parts necessary and absurd, yet achingly human. While the exhibition achieves an interesting sort of malleability, overall, it lacks the purposeful verve of more committed pieces such as *Mantle* and *Sad Sack*. But underneath the clever manipulation and self-conscious art-world commentary lurks a deeper kind of questioning with an inviting sense of humor. Bits of day-to-day detritus are placed here and there behind rough holes cut in various pieces of sheet rock throughout the exhibition. One of these, a cat's water dish, lies empty in perhaps the most wry and curious nod to questions of meaning, malleability and purposefulness of all.

—Annie Buckley

Amanda Ross-Ho: *Nothin Fuckin Matters* closed in February at Cherry and Martin, Los Angeles.

Annie Buckley is a freelance writer based in Los Angeles.

## Samantha Fields at LightBox/Kim Light Gallery

Samantha Fields's paintings at LightBox, all depicting monstrous storms, cover quite a lot of conceptual ground. They dust off old-fashioned (which is not to say obsolete) ideas of transcendentalism and the sublime—exemplified in the work of the Hudson River school painters of the mid-1800s—but suggest, too, apocalyptic visions of the future in which a compromised Earth is ravaged by hurricanes and twisters. Fields describes herself as an environmentalist; in a statement she writes that she feels a kinship with painters like Thomas Moran, who sought to preserve America's wilderness by helping to spearhead the National Parks movement.

The menacing skies depicted in *This Land*, Fields's first major solo exhibition, aren't imagined. She spent the summer of 2006 chasing storms in Nebraska, coming away with thousands of digital photographs. One painting might represent a composite of several different photos—she notes, for instance, that several of her Nebraska skies are paired with landscapes lifted from the Mojave Desert (most works in *This Land* include only a thin, darkened strip of earth). Global warming of course, threatens a similar type of transposition, introducing foreign weather to established ecosystems.

Fields's project seems straightforward enough—and in fact it might be a bit *too* straightforward if there were not something strikingly odd about these paintings. While you can imagine many painters approaching the subject of a violent storm with agitated brushwork, the surfaces of Fields's paintings are entirely without texture. Betraying not even a hint of a brushstroke, they reveal nothing of their process. A paper-thin layer of paint uniformly covers each canvas. Areas of color—gray, orange, blue, yellow, black—blend seamlessly, not overlapping so much as fusing together. Scrutinizing a painting at close range feels like gazing into fog: Your eye finds nothing definite to latch onto. But while the works in *This Land* lack a rich quality of surface, they are still seductive—luminous, evasive and atmospheric. As painted skies, they're extraordinarily convincing.

It turns out that Fields makes her paintings using a process she adapted from Japanese airbrushing techniques, meticulously layering mists of color in a way that leaves no trace of her hand. The end result is a matte, photo-like surface. While others have painted photo-realistic or photo-derived images as a means of commenting on the relationship between painting and photography, Fields's project seems less concerned with aesthetic theory and more concerned, in a way, with human psychology. After all, both painting and photography have been used as a means to capture what we see in the world and to re-present it on our own terms. But of course, replicating the way something looks, however faithfully, doesn't amount to comprehending it. Weather, for example, remains a chaotic system, impossible to predict very far in advance despite the use of high-tech instruments.

Viewed as a whole, Fields's process



Samantha Fields, *To Rain Upon the Earth (Colorado Plain)*, 2006, acrylic on canvas on panel, 48" x 72", at LightBox/Kim Light Gallery, Los Angeles.

embraces two extremes of human nature. On the one hand, her direct experience of these colossal storms (an act she describes as "essential" to her work) indulges a universal desire to peer over the brink of knowledge, to test the limits of our capabilities. On the other, her highly controlled method of translating

*Pink III* closed in March at Arena 1, Santa Monica Fine Art Studios. Other artists in the exhibition were: Robert Acuña, Wendy Adest, Daniele Albright and Stefan Lawrence, Jimi Gleason, Carrie Jenkins, Katy Stone, Peter Wu, Rosha Yaghmai, and Almond Zigmund.

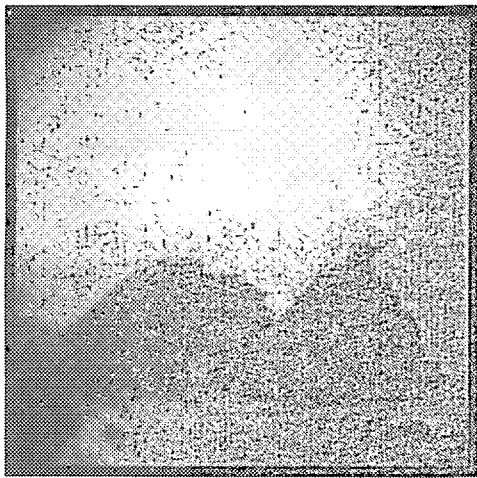
Shana Nys Dambrot is a contributing editor to *Artweek*.

## Amanda Ross-Ho at Cherry and Martin

Amanda Ross-Ho's newest exhibition, *Nothin Fuckin Matters*, has a depressingly apt title. In the artist's third solo show since graduation from University of Southern California in 2006, and the second at Cherry and Martin, Ross-Ho shows pieces from several bodies of work to varied effect. Ostensibly, the works are characterized by an obtuse, laissez-faire sensibility (appropriately so, given the title), but this malaise is punctuated by shades of something deeper and more resonant. *Mantle*, hidden away in the gallery's smaller back room, includes a black-and-white photograph of the world hung above a rectangle cut out from the wall. Flat ovals and a rough square are cut from sheetrock and arranged carefully across the top in a sort of blank plea, maybe for meaning. The cut-away rectangle in the wall forms an exposed wood dais that contrasts luminously with the neat, white rectangle of the photograph. With this oblique altar to modernism, Ross-Ho begins to complicate the subject of meaninglessness, provoking questions rather than complicity.

Large rectangles of white sheetrock lean against equally white walls like industrial monoliths. Photos and prints

the storms into paint—a mute, still version of a formidable and uncontrollable event—fulfills an equally powerful human need to feel in control of whatever surrounds us.



Sean Higgins, *Last Island*, 2007, ink-jet print transfer, acrylic on Plexiglas, at sixspace, Los Angeles.

Shutting between these two poles, her process actually parallels Kant's notion of how we experience sublime events: First comes the stage of overwhelming awe, then comes the stage of rational recuperation. We take a naïve but necessary comfort in our mind's ability to assimilate such phenomena as catastrophic storms—then we manage, once again, to assert the superiority of our consciousness over our fundamentally incomprehensible environment.

—Katherine Satorius

*Samantha Fields: This Land* closed April 7 at LightBox/Kim Light Gallery, Los Angeles.

Katherine Satorius is a freelance writer based in Santa Monica.

## Sean Higgins at sixspace

Sean Higgins's new work on view at sixspace is, in a word, transcendent. Impossible to categorize definitively as photography, painting or sculpture, the pieces draw both from photographs made by the artist and found images, likely appropriated from magazines. Higgins is resolutely vague when asked to identify his sources, as his work concentrates on a reevaluation of place, conjuring up new and purposefully unidentifiable topographies that exist outside of time.

Digitally printed images are transferred onto the back of hand-sanded Plexiglas sheets that range in size from 24-by-24 inches to 60-by-60 inches. The even, buffed surfaces devour the bright gallery lights with the intensity of black velvet, though the images and backgrounds themselves are predominantly pearlescent white. Like the impenetrable depths of clean, hard ice, Higgins's images are dangerously alluring. The gauzy effect of the sanded Plexiglas coupled with the indistinct print transfer process dares one to look closer, to attempt to discern the blurry details. *Valhalla*, an aerial perspective of a spring-green island in a sea of white, places these details perpetually out of reach. One can almost make out a rocky cliff or a grove of trees. But as quickly as it is

conjured, the image dissolves, making it more memory than reality. The viewer risks falling into these images: Attempts to bring them into focus draws one into a state of sublime vertigo.

Higgins enforces the mediated distance between the viewer's focal plane and the image surface by mounting the prints on the verso side of the glass. The recognition of this remove nonetheless provokes a widening of the eyes, an effort to sharpen what can never be brought into focus. Like the difficulty of remembering a face, these images are delicately balanced on the edge of perception, like fragments of visual memories which can only be partially resurrected.

Though the technique is certainly stunning and unique, Higgins's work is much more than a simple exploration of creative media. The exhibition includes at least three distinct series within this larger body of work, including horizonless images of ocean waves, aerial views of unknown landmasses and angular icebergs. Though they are brought together by their representation in similar media, the images—from the actual subject matter depicted to its photographic representation—are all quite different. The show's title, *Island of Relative Stability*, refers to a group of physical elements that possess significantly longer half-lives than the surrounding elements on the periodic table. A comparison can be made between nuclear physics' reliance on geographic metaphor to visualize the movements of atomic particles points and a similar structuring principle in Higgins's *Island of Relative Stability*. He employs the metaphor in reverse, using images of monumental land formations to summon that most invisible aspect of the human psyche, the memory.

Even the worn edges, the grid of creases made by folding and re-folding a magazine page, are celebrated in Higgins's *Over the Essex and Winter Version*. In the former, a wall of stormy, deep cerulean blue water is divided into equal panes, thin white lines tracing the folds. Like a favorite travel brochure, weathered from months of admiring the coveted landscape, the image here—despite its ominous nature—is soft and care-worn. In *Winter Version*, which depicts a craggy island of rock and ice in black and white, the creases are most prominent at the bottom of the image and fade into the luminous white sky at the top, suggesting a favorite picture that has gradually supplanted the memory it represents.

Invoking the aura of singular works that have accumulated a history independent of their creators, Higgins's series

relays a belief that such physical histories are equally valuable in contributing to the power of art. Pictures may not only represent their makers' memories; indeed, pictures may have memories of their own.

—Kim Beil

*Sean Higgins: Island of Relative Stability* closed in March at sixspace, Los Angeles.

Kim Beil is a freelance writer based in Los Angeles.

## 'The Trans-Aestheticization of Daily Life' at the Sweeney Art Gallery

Once upon a time, people escaped to Disneyland, an environment so obviously artificial that, by juxtaposition, it made the world outside seem real. Amusement park-goers traveled from all parts of the country—or globe for that matter—to wander through the utopian setting of Disneyland's Main Street, U.S.A. By way of repetition, branding, television campaigns and taking full advantage of American culture's cultivated romantic longing for a Mayberry-like reality, Disneyland—if only for a moment—became not only a destination but also a collective state of mind or a sort of cul-



Installation view, *Trans-aestheticization of Daily Life*, at the Sweeney Gallery, UC Riverside. (Photo: Jonathon Green.)

tural mask for the actual Main Streets beyond the "Happiest Place On Earth's" meticulously decorated walls. In the second half of the twentieth century, Disney's strategy was vigorously applied to other facets of culture, mainly malls and planned communities, and the underlying motivation was generally the

same: to reflect culture's perception of itself in order to attract a consumer base to a hyperreal environment in which subjectivity would become enmeshed with prescribed cultural consciousness driven by commerce. Universal City Walk, for example, is an amalgam of various bits of Americana in the form of shops and restaurants, and the open-air mall makes use of synthetic familiarity developed by the entertainment industry as a major draw. There is actually a chain of malls called City Place that can be found from coast to coast and these too have adopted the Main Street motif and generally house similar stores (Circuit City, Best Buy, Borders, etc). In Southern California, particularly in the Inland Empire, there are dozens of planned communities (often gated) that are developed around mall-like commercial zones disguised as "town centers." Unlike town centers of the past, which evolved naturally as communities grew, these new commercial centers either come first or are planned into the communities. Mom-and-Pop shops or corner coffee houses have been supplanted by Quizno's and Starbucks. Spontaneity, discovery and choice have been sacrificed as a result. In one way or another we all are familiar with—and relatively complicit in—this trend. What remains elusive in this urban condition is the role of art and subjectivity in developing cultural identity.

*The Trans-Aestheticization of Daily Life*, curated by Peter Zellner, brings together eight artists who examine the status, or condition, of art in an American society which seems increasingly devoid of a subjective cultural consciousness and has

fallen victim to the *commercial effect* in which all aspects of personal life are mediated.

Unexpectedly, the exhibition does not convey a doomsday attitude that anticipates the death of individual expression in the face of the commercial juggernaut. Instead, this collection of work demonstrates a generally optimistic view that suggests art is, and

will always be, a necessity in developing and maintaining cultural identity.

Several artists present video installations, and this is fitting, given that the major driving force of commercial systems is television and film. Justin Beal's *Videotron* manipulates time and public space while re-appropriating commercial



## COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

TITLE: Samantha Fields at LightBox/Kim Light Gallery  
SOURCE: Artweek 38 no4 My 2007  
PAGE(S): 18-19

The magazine publisher is the copyright holder of this article and it is reproduced with permission. Further reproduction of this article in violation of the copyright is prohibited. To contact the publisher:  
<http://www.artweek.com/>