



reviews: new york

Robert Ryman

Pace

These paintings, all from 2010-11, were mostly white, as might be expected from Robert Ryman, although he often uses color as part of his pared-down vocabulary. In this body of work, the color is in the painted grounds—dark gray, lime green, or red-brown—with the canvas wrapped tautly around the edges of the six small, oil-on-canvas squares in this show that ranged in size from 18 to 24 inches, and 2½ inches deep.

The surfaces are addressed in various ways, with textured, crunchy, or softened white brushstrokes meticulously applied, coalescing into nearly square cloud formations. The strokes advance and retreat toward the edges, obliquely slipping away from them and leave a sliver or more around the whiteness that seems to levitate in front of the colored ground, creating a variant of the push-pull of classic figure-ground relationships.

The other work in the exhibition was *No Title Required 3* (2010), ten large wood panels painted in acrylic and enamel, the sheen of each smooth surface glimmering and shifting slightly. No panel is the same size. The differences in dimension are sometimes barely visible—except in juxtaposition—increasing to more than four inches. The progression is subtly syncopated (Ryman once considered a career as a jazz musician).

Precision matters because it is a large part of the content of Ryman's work—a more than 50-year study of what

constitutes his chosen medium: paint, brushwork, support, scale, and their possibilities. In his hands, the possibilities become immense. Ryman, as obsessed in his own way as any Cézanne or Ahab, has transfigured literalness into rare beauty, urged on by the gods of detail and attentiveness. —Lilly Wei

'Murdered Out'

Skarstedt

It's not what it looks like. "Murdered Out" is a slang term in the urban car culture that signifies "a roguish car covered in matte-black paint from roof to rim."

The works by the four in-transigent artists in this two-floor show—Christopher Wool, Mike Kelley, Cady Noland, and Richard Prince—came out of the '80s and early '90s and examined the dark underbelly of American culture through the use of manipulated objects and stealthy metaphors.

Kelley's crumpled blue-and-red Afghan security blanket, a floor piece titled *Sculpted by a Mouse* (1991/98), greeted viewers. His set of eight Cibachrome portraits of worn-out stuffed animals plus one disgruntled-looking year-book photo of himself, sardonically titled *Ahh... Youth* (1991)—which Kelley referred to at the time as "a kind of black nostalgia"—hung on the wall. His two naughty black-and-white photos of a naked couple, smeared with disgusting fluids, doing explicit things with large plush rabbits, along with his chilling *Torture Table* (1992) upstairs, offered unnerving affinities with Paul McCarthy's latest work. Prince's celebrated biker-chick photo piece was also here, along with his tropical island photo-work featuring marooned cartoon castaways

making dumb sex jokes. Up on the landing there was a fabulous rubber planter made from an actual truck tire, while a wordy red-and-maroon painting told another crude joke. This was Prince at his best.

It was also great to see Noland's iconic *Untitled (Walker)*, 1989: a wire basket, an orthopedic walker, and a forlorn flag. Her *Dead Space*, whose steel scaffolding pipes closed off part of the gallery to any art, and her jokey *Chicken in a Basket* (both 1989), consisting of a wire basket filled with beer cans topped with a deflated rubber chicken strangled by a bungee cord, in this installation were



Robert Ryman, *Untitled*, 2010. oil on stretched-cotton canvas, 18" x 18" x 2½". Pace.



Cady Noland, *Untitled (Walker)*, 1989, walker, basket, American flag, pole with wheel, 48½" x 30½" x 31". Skarstedt.

quite perfect. Wool, too, appeared at his best in two large, gorgeously obliterated silk screen abstractions and one smaller, stenciled, more legible work that reads: "ANDIFYOUCANTTAKEAJOKEYOUCANGETTHEFUCKOUTOFMYHOUSE."

The political content of these light-hearted, subversive, sardonic, and semi-tragic works may not have been apparent when they were made but now it comes across like a stealth bomber: they were uncanny predictions of the not-so-distant future. —Kim Levin