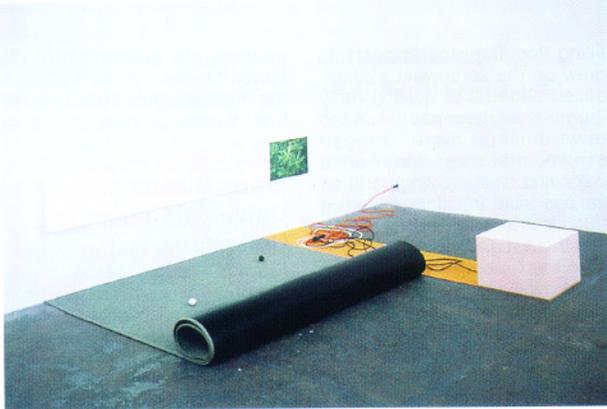


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DIKE BLAIR AT FEATURE

By Nancy Princenthal



Dike Blair: *Some Of*, 2001, mixed mediums, 33 by 100 by 9½ inches; at Feature.

Dike Blair at Feature

Sleek, crafty and flawlessly composed, Dike Blair's immensely appealing work mixes up sculpture, design, painting and photography. As artfully arranged as ikebana, this show began with two sets of hyperrealist gouache paintings on paper, the first a quartet of floral images, the second a trio of windows. All the subjects are tightly cropped, and close attention is paid to surface details. This is particularly true of the window paintings. Here the slight inclination of a car's window away from the surface of the image; the misting, beading and streaking of water down a slightly dirty train window; and the difference between shadows cast on and seen through that variably wet pane of glass are all minutely calculated. (It seems calculated, too, that we see these framed images under glass.) The visual punning on painting as a window onto nature, implicit throughout, is given Magritte-like clarity in an isolated image of blue sky with a slender margin of springtime treetops at the very bottom, where there is also just a bit of metal window screen.

Beautifully executed and perfectly anodyne, these paintings are hung at conventional height; in the context of this show, it doesn't seem wrong to consider them as something between realism, conceptualism and home decor. The two sculptures they accompanied play with some of the same boundaries, but from a different angle. Using layered and partly flipped-back industrial carpeting as underfoot Color Field painting, and L-shaped, hard-edged geometric forms fitted with interior lights as a kind of low-slung Minimalist

sculpture/furniture hybrid, Blair creates a species of domestic tableaux; additional elements include lavishly redundant tangles of colored, heavy-duty electrical cords and wall-mounted light boxes hung close to the ground and partly covered with applied imagery. *And When* includes a blurry photo of what looks at first like a nearly abstract seascape, though close inspection reveals that the unsteady horizon is actually a line of wooded hills, and what looks like ocean spray in the foreground is smoke or vapor. The photo on one of the paired light boxes in *Some Of* shows rhododendron leaves, evidently the source for one of the floral paintings. In both sculptures, the relationships between imagery and abstraction, between two- and three-dimensional form, between surface color and cast light, between tactility and depicted texture—in short, between illusion and fact—are kept in a state of balance so exact it seems nearly weightless.

A writer and curator as well as a painter, photographer and sculptor, Blair has been negotiating the terms of art and commercial design for 20 years. His current visual interests range from Hiroshige to the video game *Myst*; his sensibility can be arch, even tart. Asked (in a Q&A sheet prepared by the gallery) about the "recent blurring of distinctions between art and design," Blair says, "I'd like to imagine that [art] touches places that design can't." Sometimes that touch feels a little cold, but it is always dazzlingly deft. —Nancy Princenthal