

MATEW CERLETTY

Mathew Cerletty
OFFICE BAROQUE GALLERY

Walking through the huge new space of Office Baroque, one became aware of something familiar in the overwhelming European solo debut of Mathew Cerletty's paintings and drawings. More specifically, it was *Roses*, 2008, a brilliantly painted depiction of flowers—so beautiful that they seemed to be artificial, giving a feeling of déjà vu. One thinks of the seductive quality of the artist's earlier works, such as *Fagaroo*, 2002; *Le Saucier*, 2003; and the impressively melancholic *Trying to Live Beside the Point*, 2003. In these pages in 2004, Christopher Bollen acutely noted the impact of such images: "To view Cerletty as a painterly Bret Easton Ellis, depicting twentysomethings adrift in their own nihilistic pathos, is to appreciate the glamour but fail to feel the punch." Indeed, the figures Cerletty portrayed—young people in an overdesigned world, drenched in contemporary ennui and stylish nihilism—could have stepped out of a novel by the author of *Less Than Zero*. The difference is that Ellis plunged his characters into hard-core reality while Cerletty placed his protagonists, himself among them, in an unreal dream world.

In the intervening years, Cerletty has made a dramatic shift, retaining the virtuoso technique but otherwise radically stripping down his work. He is still reflecting on a world we all know far too well—if not firsthand, then by having seen it portrayed again and again in contemporary American cinema; yet no more lost or searching souls haunt this new series, "Hotpoints," 2007–2008. Cerletty's attention has moved from the figure to its environment. His motifs are now logos, consumer goods, or images appropriated from record sleeves. The title of the show itself was borrowed from "Cindy Tells Me," a 1973 Brian Eno song: "And she tells me they're selling up their maisonnettes / Left



Mathew Cerletty, *Thank You*, 2008, pencil on paper, 15 x 15". From the series "Hotpoints," 2007–2008.

their Hotpoints to rust in the kitchenettes." As *hotpoints* is the term used for the bonus points one gets for paying with a credit card, as well as a brand of kitchen appliances, it couldn't be a more appropriate title for this show.

Take *The North Face*, 2008, in which Cerletty used the well-known logo of the clothing label to articulate his ambivalence toward the branding of our daily environment. The logo is painted in such a way that it becomes a meaningless word, even an abstract image. This isn't the enthusiastic, Warholian embrace of consumerism, but rather a far more disenchanted look. By

contrast, Cerletty translates the THANK YOU design printed on plastic bags from grocery stores into a handmade drawing, *Thank You*, 2008, thus rendering it a message from artist to viewer.

In other recent works, Cerletty has adopted near total abstraction. Without knowing his sources, *Mint Chip*, *Yellow Chip*, and *Purple Chip*, (all 2008), would seem to lack any representational reference whatsoever—but in fact they are works of scrupulous realism. Depictions of ice-cream chips or the flecks in linoleum tiles, these works announce another new direction in the artist's search for a more oblique engagement with pop culture. We'll have to wait and see where the search will lead: a new interpretation of pop or a way out of it?

—Jos Van den Bergh