

ARTS MAGAZINE

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DIKE BLAIR

By Robert Mahoney

Dike Blair (Ealan Wingate, October 12+ November 2) reverses the energy field of reality/fiction artists like Guillaume Bijl, by (far from bringing real-world sites into art-world sites to render them abstract, acultural, or surreal) pushing the envelope of art site out into facsimiles of real-world sites that are more fantastic than the art. Blair has redone the gallery in deep, dark purple, lighted each of his hi-tech, glamorous panels of abstraction—so that some images reflect back on the carpet—included fronds and chaises, and in general turned this gallery into something like a lounge in an imaginary annex of the Dolphin Hotel in Disneyworld. The space has that airless glamour, that aerosol of postmodern fakeness that used to give Jameson the willies but which comes as something of a relief now, exploiting the metaphysics of carpeting and lighting to push fiction beyond itself into a metafictional antechamber to the simulacrum. Blair's work has shaken out, then; the elements of his former tableaux have separated and enlarged, to encompass real unreal space. The wallwork photography that remains in the wake of the exodus of decor and lighting to the real have a simulated ethereality that is subliminal and reifying by turns, sometimes carrying you away, sometimes making you fear the sudden slump into hotel-lobby art conventions. Blair has done installations outside galleries of late, including a theater lobby. This experience with the real world has helped enlarge the palette of his panels and edge his technique toward a type of fantastical feeling that would evolve from the mating, say, of Man Ray and Mickey Mouse. The

sense of normalized surreality that leaves these spotlighted panels nervous gives the work edge enough to ward off the leveling force of the lobbyists.

The type of self-consciousness of the material signifiers of painting that Greenburg insisted upon as the final framing element of the work is the ultimate condition of modernist painting. But if that self-consciousness feels pulses of sublimation, or reacts to other forces, such as reification, that pull at it, then it must undertake a succession of purifying reassumptions of newly expanded self-consciousness, taking over more turf, where principle slacked off, and removing to a higher level in order to do so. In some sense, then, Greenbergian self-consciousness is an infinite regress against the erosion of the purified state of rational being. Refined discourses have been elaborated along a "criticality" mainstream. If a materials-based self-consciousness slacks off, and gives into the market, market analysis attached to original self-consciousness can pull it back to higher ground—thus the commodity debate. And if culture undermines market, then self-consciousness expands and contracts again in another purge of impurities—thus political correctness. In every successive operation, "criticality," a critiquing of the structures and paradigms that support a work (in whatever state of slack it exists), is, in truth, while pretending to be radical, a neoconservative shoring up of the dominion of rational criticality over all other social forces.