

CONNER CONTEMPORARY ART

Dean Kessmann : *Cover to Cover*

February 19 – March 27, 2004

Conner Contemporary Art is pleased to announce the first Washington, D.C. solo exhibition by Dean Kessmann, Director of the George Washington University's photography program. For *Cover to Cover* Kessmann combines the visual appeal of color-field painting with the conceptual foundations of appropriation and typology in a breathtaking installation. The artist attributes the inspiration for this new work to his habit of thumbing through art magazines, such as ArtForum and Art in America, rolling them into cylinders, and musing over the colorful patterns formed by the overlapping edges of their pages.

Kessmann identifies as an antecedent Sherrie Levine's photographic appropriation in 1979 of photographs made in 1925 by Edward Weston. Because art is reproduced in the magazines he images, Kessmann designates his works as "appropriations of reproductions of reproductions." He elaborates, "The digital mutation - dots of ink placed on magazine stock, scanned, manipulated and saved, then output with ink sprayed onto fine art paper - is as referential as it is abstract." Departing from Levine's direct reproductions, Kessmann distances his images formally from their objective sources. Selectively manipulating proximity, format, and scale, he reduces magazine pages to thin streams of color in what appear at first sight as nonrepresentational compositions.

Varying colors and linear rhythms distinguish Kessmann's images from one another. *Tema Celeste, November/December 2003 (front)* has a warm palette of yellows, reds, and oranges, for example, but *Art Journal, Winter 2003 (front)* has a much paler and cooler range of hues. Working in the tradition of Bernd and Hilla Becher's typologies of the early 1970s, Kessmann conceived his serial compositions as a study in variation among like structures. Whereas the Bechers avoided the intrusion of personal presence in their documentation of industrial artifacts, Kessmann's scanned images bespeak his handling of raw materials. The action of the artist's hand is evident in the slight crimping of the edges of the magazine pages. These irregularities create gently undulating ribbons of pigment in Kessmann's prints, which give them a pictorial affinity with the works of Washington Color painter Morris Louis.

For the installation Kessmann adopts a horizontal format which is for him both reminiscent of American landscape painting and evocative of contemporary streams of digital code. Arranging prints in rows that wrap frieze-like around the gallery, the artist varies the scale of his prints to create the appearance of intermittently faster and slower flowing passages of digital data. With this technological conceit Kessmann prompts reflection on the impact of digital technology in the discourse on originality and appropriation in art, a cultural exchange which will be meaningfully advanced by this much anticipated exhibition.

There will be a reception for the artist Thursday, February 19, 6-8pm.

Conner Contemporary Art is located in Dupont Circle @ 1730 Connecticut Ave., NW - 2nd Floor, Washington, DC 20009. Hours: Tues - Sat: 11am-6pm. For further information and visuals contact the gallery @ 202-588-8750 or via email @ info@connercontemporary.com.