

Artists Space

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PICTURES (Artist's Space): This was a deeply interesting group show, conceived and organized by critic and teacher Douglas Crimp. The show's title, "Pictures," refers directly to Crimp's contention in his catalogue statement: that contemporary American art is entering a post-abstract phase, with young artists again evidencing a concern with the image, not as a representational end in itself, but as a means of perceiving reality. To varying degrees, the five artists exhibited in the show have appropriated images from popular culture to carry out their explorations of how symbols "mean." Jack Goldstein's short films, in Hollywood color, took the cinematic image out of the realm of narrative, with a perched dove fluttering away as two hands rose to enfold it and M-G-M's Leo the Lion roaring repeatedly, and unnervingly, for two minutes. Tony Brauntuch removed the photograph from its everyday association and gave it, and the object it pictures, the nature of a fetish; in *Golden Distance*, for instance, a pair of prints, one black and one gold, had a black and white photo of the back of a woman's head inscribed on each, with gold print script bearing the cryptic caption: "Whispers around a woman."

Sherrie Levine showed a series of 36 drawings on graph paper. Silhouetted profiles of Washington, Lincoln, John F. Kennedy, a woman and a couple appeared again and again in each of the drawings, in varying scales and differently juxtaposed each

time, all seemingly engaged in some meaningless whisper campaign. Philip Smith showed wall-sized friezes of figures—a little girl with a parakeet, a man at his office desk, a Japanese puppeteer, a parachutist—that had the narrative format of an Egyptian pictograph but denied the viewer literal comprehension. Robert Longo, perhaps the most accessible of the five artists, showed enameled cast aluminum wall plaques. His images, like Goldstein's, are drawn from the movies—*The American Soldier* and *the Quiet Schoolboy*, of a man being shot from behind, his body arching forward and his left hand grasping his back, was taken from a still from a Werner Fassbinder movie. Here, violence is transmuted into esthetic stasis, the actor's dance of death frozen forever in aluminum and enamel relief.

In drawing on popular art, writes Crimp, these artists are "free of references to the conventions of modernist art, and [free] to turn to those of other art forms more directly concerned with representation." What he seems to be proposing is not a "new realism," but a new conceptualism, a plastic rather than linguistic or act-oriented investigation into the nature of art-making. This exhibition was a good start in that direction and, in itself, a strong display of art-critical intelligence and innovation.

—Gerrit Henry