

September 2010



Eric Tillinghast: Rain Machine, 2010, water, pump system and mixed mediums, 81 feet long; at the Center for Contemporary Arts.

SANTA FE

ERIC TILLINGHAST LAUNCHPROJECTS AND CCA

Initially conceived in 2008 as a web-only enterprise, LAUNCHPROJECTS has been augmented by a private exhibition space dedicated to emerging artists. Last spring the gallery presented work by California-based Eric Tillinghast in a two-venue exhibition in conjunction with Santa Fe's Center for Contemporary Arts.

The art on view at LAUNCHPROJECTS occupied a clutch of small, elegant, daylight-filled rooms in a historic Victorian-style bungalow. Titled "Water," this segment featured several photography series, plus two steel sculptures topped by shallow basins of water. To create "Pools," a group of 24 pigment prints done in 2009 (all 8½ by 11 inches), Tillinghast started with photographs of swimming pools, some taken by him, most appropriated. Using Photoshop to delete the surrounding environments, he restricted the images to discrete containers in a variety of shapes and shades of blue, though they still call to mind David Hockney's vibrant L.A. pool paintings. Also Hockney-esque,

Tillinghast's prints hung in a grid, presented like a collection of glittering tourmalines. He used the same approach to create a pair of related series (neither on view in their entirety): "Puddles" and "The Deepest Lakes in the World."

The two sculptures, Water Series #71 and Water Series #72 (both 2010 and measuring approximately 25 by 20 by 12 inches), demonstrated an extreme reduction of watery presence to the point of deliquescence. The shallow puddles, quivering in the matte-black steel cubes, were topped off daily so that the liquid would maintain a tremulous surface tension. Tillinghast's "Water Series" sculptures recall Bernard Berenson's musing, "I wonder whether art has a higher function than to make me feel, appreciate and enjoy natural objects for their art value?"

At the CCA, Tillinghast devised a site-specific, monumental installation titled Rain Machine, wherein water was pumped from a 25-by-81-foot containment pool (constructed of wood and black plastic pond liner) up to an irrigation grid suspended from the ceiling. The water then dripped constantly back down into the pool, which rested on the

gallery floor and was roughly 6 inches deep. Most startling and evocative was how the artist manipulated the waters into a kind of Euclidian shower: the nearly invisible trickles of rain were made to fall in a precise grid of ping-pong, splashing points across the entire rectangular basin. Reminiscent of Andy Warhol's 1971 installation Rain Machine (Daisy Waterfall), the concept here might well be seen as a present day rethinking of the impluvia (courtyard rainwater catchments) in the villas of Pompeii and Herculaneum. Crucial to the viewer's apprehension of the work was the faintly audible plashing of the piece, which lulled us to the verge of reverie.

—Jan Ernst Adlmann