

JOHN GERRARD KNOEDLER PROJECT SPACE AND SIMON PRESTON

In a pair of solo appearances, his first in New York, John Gerrard showed three visually stunning, thematically related digital works (all 2008). One, at Knoedler, centers on an oil pump in a vast Colorado landscape. It appeared on a white-framed, wide-screen monitor affixed to a matching table. Two more pieces, seen at Simon Preston, offer architectural subjects found in empty stretches of Kansas: the sheds and feed tanks of an automated pig farm, shown on a smaller monitor/table set-up; and an enormous barn flanked by silos, seen in a wall projection. There is no sound.

Each subject has a monumental glamour, and each, in its careful framing, high resolution, suppression of incidental detail and vivid two-dimensionality, resembles a backlit Precisionist painting. It takes a moment to realize that the images move. The oil pump bobs gently up and down, and—disconcertingly—each scene slowly rotates. The images were made in a process associated with computer gaming called Real-Time 3D, using a composite of still photos to build an animated continuum based on but not exactly replicating a real scene. The pieces are governed by a computer's clock, and are synchronized with the time zones where their subjects are situated. They have specific and often lengthy durations. The sun rises, traverses the sky, sets, and the stars come out, the constellations occupying their correct seasonal positions. As the year progresses the length of the days adjusts accordingly. When I first saw the works at Simon Preston in February, it was already dark on Broome Street. In Kansas, the low metal structures reflected the setting sun.

The Dublin-born artist splits his time between that city and Vienna, where he has a studio and access to advanced computer technology. He holds an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. His theme in these works is the American landscape and, more specifically, oil—a substance expected to disappear in 30 years. That hypothetical 30 years establishes the time span of the barn piece. The other two works will run for shorter periods.

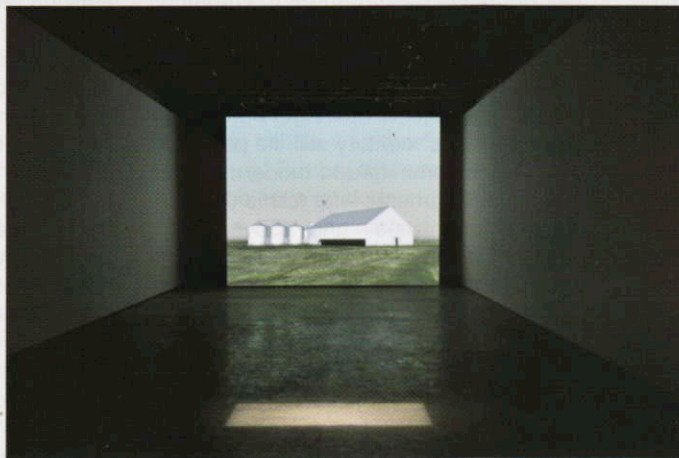
The pump piece (to run for one year) addresses its subject directly. Its power lies in subtle visual discrepancies: as the image revolves, the distant landscape seems to whip past, while digital effects cause a slight ripple in the foreground turf suggestive of quicksand. The other two works deal more broadly with petroleum and U.S. agribusiness. The computer-controlled and oil-powered pig production complex, its 10 identical structures aligned, Judd-like, next to a large rectangular pond, highlights pollution and intimates cruel practices. The facility houses 10,000 pigs (1,000 per shed). The "pond" contains their excrement. One flinches from imagining

conditions inside these handsome sheet-metal buildings in the midday summer sun. (Sue Coe, move over.) The work's title is *Grow/Finish Unit (near Elkhart, Kansas)*.

In the wall projection, *Oil Stick Work (Angelo Martinez, Richfield, Kansas)*, agriculture references give way to *ars longa*, as American Regionalism meets Richard Serra. On one side of the barn, a rectangular black strip extends to the arm-reach height of a tiny figure carefully applying oilstick. He is an animation based on a real person. Working six days a week from dawn to dusk, at the end of 30 years he will have completely blackened the barn, its silos and connecting parts. The black zone visible in March, when the show ended at Preston, was the product of nine months' virtual labor. The piece began running last June. In 2038, oilstick may be as valuable as gold leaf, and Minimalist abstraction as outdated as American Regionalism today.

An interactive capability is built into these works: the table-mounted monitors can be gently shifted to arrest or reverse the images' rotation, and for the wall projection, rotation starts when a viewer enters a beam of light cast on the floor from above. When the rotation is stopped, other activity—the work of the pumps, the labor of the barn painter, day becoming night—goes inexorably forward. —Elizabeth C. Baker

Gerrard will show wall projections as part of a collateral project organized by RHA (Royal Hibernian Academy) Projects, Dublin, that opens next month at the Venice Biennale.



Above, John Gerrard: *Sentry (Kit Carson, Colorado)*, at Knoedler Project Space.

Left, *Oil Stick Work (Angelo Martinez, Richfield, Kansas)*, at Simon Preston.

Both works 2008, Real-Time 3D projections.