

## Art in Review

### John Gerrard

#### 'Oil Stick Work'

Simon Preston  
301 Broome Street, at Eldridge  
Street, Lower East Side  
Through March 8

#### 'Knoedler Project'

Knoedler Project Space  
19 East 70th Street  
Through March 21

One of the eeriest sights to be had in a New York art gallery right now is John Gerrard's large digital animation "Oil Stick Work (Angelo Martinez/Richfield, Kansas)," looming at the center of the Simon Preston Gallery. Visible from the sidewalk, it dominates this young Irish artist's double-gallery New York solo debut. Its view of a huge white barn next to three silvery silos on a vast empty plain is an emblematic American scene, but it is also disturbing — Charles Sheeler crossed with George Orwell.

Enter the gallery and step onto a small, lighted portion of the floor, and the image will begin to rotate majestically; if you move back and forth on this area, you can "walk" around the entire structure, in virtual space. On one side of the barn a tiny virtual figure is slowly coloring it black. This is Angelo Martinez, and he's using not paint but, absurdly, oil stick — the resistant drawing implement favored by artists like Richard Serra.

Angelo works from dawn to dusk seven days a week; he will finish his task in 2038 and leave the scene, regardless of whether the piece is up and running or in storage. "Oil Stick Work" is set up



BILL ORCUTT

"Oil Stick Work (Angelo Martinez, Richfield, Kansas)" by John Gerrard, at Simon Preston.

like a computer clock. Turn it on, and it automatically catches up to the present, which in this case is Central Standard Time. Night falls and day breaks in sync with the time that the sun sets and rises in Richfield. Apparently, you can see the stars and the moon in phase through the gallery's glass front at night.

"Grow/Finish Unit (Near Elkhart, Kansas)," a second work, compensates for its smaller size by increasing the sheer dread. Here the empty, navigable no man's land actually is under surveillance. The scene centers on an expanse of 10 shedlike feedlots,

each attached to two small silos, near a vast pond, black and shiny, like oil. This is an unmanned pig production plant, where 10,000 young animals are grown and "finished," fed for eight months on artificially derived corn feed pumped from the computer-controlled silos. The black lake is excrement.

At Knoedler, Mr. Gerrard's digital works look more modest and gimmicky. "Sentry (Kit Carson, Colorado)" shows an oil rig pumping up and down as the sun rises and sets, illustrating a more familiar exploitation of nature. "Daylight Fan (Orbital Camera)"

records an operating electric fan with an orbital camera so that its spinning blades seem almost to stand still.

All of Mr. Gerrard's images begin as photographs of existing sites. Some of their dour intensity comes from the meticulous way he rebuilds them digitally, detail by detail, surface by surface. Some more comes from the freakish interaction he allows the viewer. The rest, which is most, is what humans have wrought upon the world.

ROBERTA SMITH