



Paola Ferrario:
Three Eights and Stag,
2009, digital prints,
7½ by 21 inches
overall; at Sue Scott.

PAOLA FERRARIO

SUE SCOTT

In her first New York solo exhibition, “Imprevisti/Unforeseen,” Italian-born photographer Paola Ferrario, fascinated by details of commonplace surfaces (walls, pavements) and humble objects (a bush strung with Christmas lights, a lost mitten, sunbathers’ legs), revealed a spare style of considerable flexibility. This comes in part from her command of color, the lens’s draftsmanship, shallow and deep space, light as atmosphere (noonday sun) and atmosphere as light (mist), and also from her virtuoso handling of ink on paper. In these digital prints, solid, variegated, motley and pied colors on wood, cloth, shadow-laced snow, curtains, snow-dotted fallen leaves and torn-poster palimpsests have the crisp verisimilitude of documentary photography yet look as if they have been laid on in sure, subtly modulated, fluid strokes.

Ferrario gathers her prints into diptychs, triptychs, and four-, 12-, and 16-panel grids measuring 7 by 21 to 51 by 68 inches. The individual pictures continue a tradition that began with Henry Fox Talbot’s near-abstract 1841 composition of an unprepossessing detail of a wall and window, and includes Walker Evans’s 1930s fragments of torn posters and hand-painted signs. As Ferrario creates a single image compounded of objects, forms and moments sometimes shot seas and years apart, her documentary style approaches fiction, or poetry: all things are present at once. In one triptych, three tattoos on different people—“Tony” on

one arm, Caravaggio’s *Medusa* on another and abstract symbols on a leg—are brought together. The totality is imaginary, a single time and place.

Throughout Ferrario’s constructions, imagery and forms seem to partake of each other’s properties. In *Castle* (2009), the left panel’s fog, considered as both substance and a compositional plane, is a variation on the right panel’s concrete wall. Thanks in part to Ferrario’s ability with ink, the wall takes on the fog’s translucence, the fog the wall’s opacity.

In *Grid 1* (2008), a spray-painted female nude grafitto, the American flag, Jesus on an LP record’s label, a piece of trash stuck in a wall, a hand-painted necktie, a reproduction of Botticelli’s *Primavera* and more come to intimate what must be called the world’s will to form. Thus Ferrario revises Evans’s vision of America—as itself an anonymous modernist artist—according to new esthetic terms, and adds Italy to the mix, a combination as unforeseeable as the imagery and compositions that justify the exhibition’s title.

—Ben Lifson

ERIN SHIRREFF

LISA COOLEY

It’s a truism that most art shows are experienced primarily via gallery websites, the effect of which is a strange hegemony of secondary—or tertiary—imagery derived from exhibition photography. Working in the broader realm of reproduction and mediated experience, New York-based Erin Shirreff addresses the problematic of translating any three-dimensional object into a flat picture.

In “Landscapes, Heads, Drapery, and Devils,” Shirreff presented a very tidy group of elegant works that account for their own making, and whose real beauty is in their mistakes. The exhibition’s centerpiece was the 15-minute video loop *Roden Crater* (all works 2009), which is assembled from rather grainy stills and was projected on a drywall screen built into the gallery’s back corner. Shirreff began by printing out a photograph she found online of James Turrell’s *Roden Crater*, the near-mythical, unfinished monument that neither she nor, presumably, most of her viewers have visited. After repeatedly rephotographing the printout in her studio under various lighting conditions, she ran the sequence through software that creates smooth transitions between the images. The result is a montage of the crater that about half the time looks like a stock wallpaper graphic for a PC desktop. At other moments, the light on the crater becomes dramatic, even fiery, affecting a kind of digital sublime. The flash of Shirreff’s camera often doubles as a figure for the sun, which eerily moves in and out of the foreground and brings out the materiality of the print; at one point the flash overwhelms the image, creating a nuclear winter and vaporizing the surface entirely.

Shirreff is interested in controlling the image both before and after it begins to circulate, ending with the careful framing and presentation of her objects. In the first stages of producing her black-and-white photographs, six of which were on display, this interest is articulated by an emphasis on craft. For these images, Shirreff makes