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MARSHA COTTRELL

Eleven Rivington

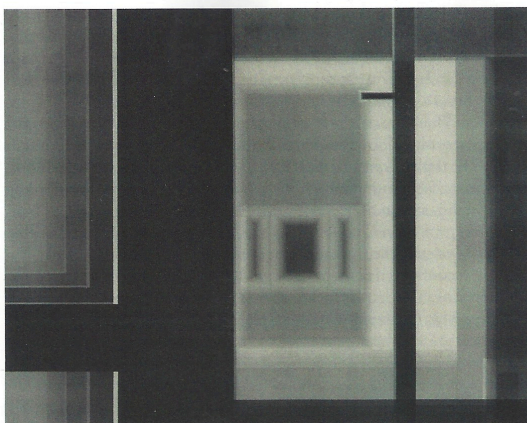
By Prudence Peiffer

Marsha Cottrell

ELEVEN RIVINGTON

A *polestar* is something that's the main attraction. And ancient technology: Visible to the naked eye, it aligns with the vertical axes of the earth's rotation, burning at due north to guide you home if your compass (or GPS) conks out. Because stars drift and die, and the planet spins and spins, the polestar's identity changes over time.

Astronomy came to my mind at Marsha Cottrell's strong exhibition, and not just because her works, with their gauzy orbs and crepuscular rays, invoke what's beautiful and abstract about the field, from early-nineteenth-century celestial diagrams to a view of the moon through



Marsha Cottrell, *Old Museum (Interior_7)*, 2015, laser toner on paper, 9¼ × 11½".

a space helmet. Transient fixity as a guiding principle seems an apt description of Cottrell's inventive process.

I first saw the artist's work in an elegant group exhibition at the gallery this past winter. She was shown in the company of a number of distinct photographers, including Sara Cwynar and Miranda Lichtenstein, so I associated her work's effects with both the soft manipulations of Pictorialism and the experimental geometries of Bauhaus photography. (She has, in fact, described her picture creation as "the idea of turning the camera inward.") Cottrell's medium is hard to pin down. Using the computer quite literally as a processor and the keyboard as the source of mark-making, Cottrell creates and then alters images on-screen, publishing them via an electrostatic laser printer, through which she feeds different paper (typewriter, Arches watercolor, collaged mulberry) and even polyester, often in multiple passes. Each work, like a monotype, is both a unique palimpsest left to carefully controlled chance and a reproduction. (This process of repeated digital printing has been made famous by Wade Guyton in the past decade; Cottrell, who until recently worked as a production freelancer at *Vanity Fair*, has been experimenting with it since 1997.)

Cottrell's first solo show at Eleven Rivington was split between its two galleries. On Chrystie Street, three clean, silver-framed clusters delineated separate series, with plenty of white wall in between, that captured the minimalist tone of the works themselves. "Aperture," 2014, appeared to depict a portal into a lunar landscape under six different conditions of gray dilation; my favorite series, "Interior," 2014–15, showcased the uncanny familiarity of invented black-and-white museum spaces—*cum*—De Stijl abstractions; closely wrought radiating lines emerged from an orb of bare page that seemed to glow in the seven works of "Spectral Sun," 2014.

Over on Rivington, the hanging was busier. Dominating the room at three by eleven feet, *The Deliciousness of Staying Still* comprises 142 sheets of paper glued together to create a black square surrounding the negative space of a circle. Across from this hung *Index 1 (Presence of Nature)*, 3., a work composed of a grouping of drawings made between 1998 and 2013. These ranged from *Nature of Math.2*, 2005, a kind of exploding skyscraper of computing vectors, to an untitled piece that resembled a Brice Marden tangle within its own ghost-line shadow. Astronomical scenes prevailed here, too; I imagined time-lapse cosmic exposures, the ashen hues of craters and schist, a place without gravity.

If, in describing Cottrell's art, I keep reaching for metaphors from nature—bolstered by the artist's own promise that it was present—the

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work's digital basis gave me pause. Maybe the horizon of light in *Aperture Series (15)*, 2014, is that of a cathode or monitor shutting down, and not a breaking dawn. Indeed, the "virtual rubble" that the artist cites in her process associates the cybersphere with as much dust as is found in a physical room (and certainly in deep space). This begins on screen: There are works with syntax bits, math equations, and score notations broken loose from docx files, coding windows, and music staves to be dragged and "tossed" (the artist's word) into compositions. And then, in the printing stage, different densities of ink, overlap glitches, and scratches accumulate. Finally, the paper might be manipulated fresh out of the printer. In *Untitled*, 2010, a black-toner-on-Mylar piece that is part of *Index 1*, the smeared image seems in the midst of being wiped clean or reconfigured elsewhere, in another frame. Every form is altered at every pass. This lets us locate some wistful giddiness in the title *The Deliciousness of Staying Still*—no such thing is possible, but in these works we can find a bright center of attention to move toward.

—Prudence Peiffer