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ERIN SHIRREFF

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By Alex Gartenfeld

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 artifactlike objects in clay and porcelain, photographs them and blows up the prints to human scale. The artist's fingerprints on the objects are often visible; the texture of the photographs is meant to contrast with typical archival photographs by introducing a distinctly human quality. There is something of Mapplethorpe's work in Shirreff's focus on the sculptures' details and their anatomical references, and in the images' crisp composition and lighting. But her photographs are so greatly enlarged that they, like the video, become almost grainy. And there's no sexuality to them—only fetishism.