



Erin Shirreff, "Landscapes, Heads, Drapery and Devils"

★★★★★

Lisa Cooley, through Sun 20
(see Lower East Side)

By exploiting the difference between what the eyes see and what the camera sees, and by playing two dimensions against three, Erin Shirreff coaxes animated life from still photographs, sculptures from shadows, and an air of purpose from equivocal objects. Her New York solo debut (titled after the things that people most often say they make out in ink blots or clouds) is a smart, coherent show that examines the role projection plays in our reading of the world.

Two videos of a moonlike sphere lit from the side play on side-by-side monitors, conjuring a sense of celestial remoteness and mystery. Black-and-white photographs, reminiscent of both James Welling's velvet-and-pastry-dough landscapes and Richard Barnes's documentary pictures, feature forms that could be fossils, primitive tools, or potsherds but are actually tiny pieces of worked clay. Planar sculptures made of ash and plaster, inspired by the work of Tony Smith, have a visual heft disproportionate



to their insubstantiality. A color picture of the Roden Crater in Arizona, rephotographed hundreds of times, is transformed into a stop-action film. Changes in the lighting of each shot—as well as blooms of red and flares of white from the camera's flash—create what pass for spectacular atmospheric effects and, with them, the illusion of reality, if not of depth.

Shirreff's art can at times be dry and difficult to access, and her most engaging works are still her videos. Conceptually, however, this show couldn't be more timely. As our world becomes ever more absorbed by images, her efforts remind us how urgent it is to understand what's real.—*Anne Doran*