

David Schutter at Paul Kotula

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As part of a 2005-06 Humboldt Fellowship, Chicago-based artist David Schutter spent days in the Berlin Gemaldegalerie drawing from the examples of 17th-century Dutch art in the collection. Then, working from memory, he made a series of "afterpaintings" that don't simply re-present the masterpieces but completely recreate them, filtering the visual information absorbed in the act of perception through particular processes. Although Schutter has done pieces in response to works by Rubens, Vermeer, Hals and Rembrandt, this show focused solely on paintings and drawings (all 2006) related to Jacob van Ruisdael's Haarlem, from the Northwestern Dunes (1670).

The paintings are executed in the same materials and at the same scale as the Ruisdael, but Schutter reduces the palette to subdued grays. The imagery devolves into traces of brushstrokes and knife scrapings that completely cover the surface in a dense layer of opaque pigment. Hints of rolling landscape and expanses of sky are faintly discernible in the changes of tonality and undulating gestures that constitute each painting. The individual works all bear vestiges of the original imagery, but each is unique. They link Schutter to Ruisdael in an ambivalent way that evokes Rauschenberg's erasure of a de Kooning drawing. Physically they recall the allover coated or encrusted canvases of Robert Ryman and Milton Resnick, as well.

As Schutter worked on the paintings, he also created a series of graphite-on-Mylar drawings. They are not, strictly speaking, studies for the after-paintings but parallel works, made to resolve particular problems Schutter encountered in his artistic process. Some of the drawings consist of just a few gestures and smudges, whereas others contain more pictorial information.

The graphite sometimes casts shadows through the translucent Mylar onto the mat board underneath, evoking the child's drawing tablet called a Magic Slate. Consisting of a sheet of film over a thin layer of colored resin or wax, a Magic Slate permits the image to be erased with a flick of the wrist, although the impression of the mark that was made remains embedded in the malleable substrate. It's an apt analogy for Schutter's practice, a palimpsest of action overwriting perception.

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