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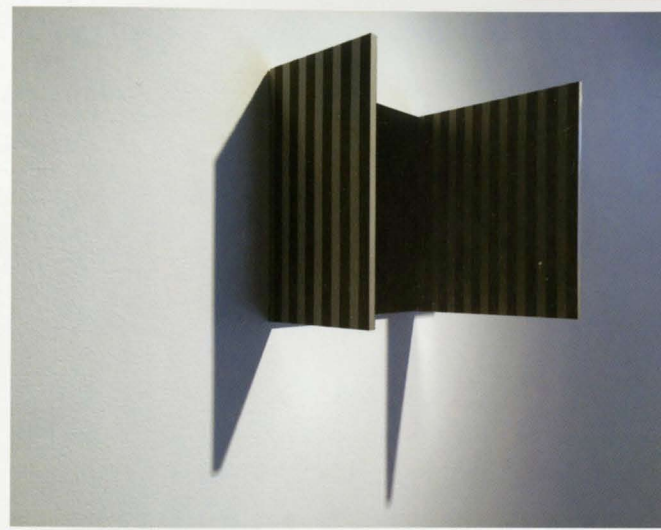
Pete Schulte at  
Whitespace Gallery

Spare and understated, Pete Schulte's installation *Build a Fire* was conceived expressly for Whitespace Gallery, a tastefully restored Victorian carriage house, nestled among spreading oaks and worn flag stones, with a gravel driveway that crunches underfoot. Schulte lines the walls of this inviting space with two wall drawings and several works on paper, his palette restricted for the most part to gray, black, and white, these restrained hues echoed in equally minimal sculptures. Although abstracted and agreeably ruminative in mood, the installation takes on an increasingly somber tone as the viewer ponders the titles of individual pieces, given not on wall labels, but rather more discreetly on a printed checklist. In other words, the artist invites the viewer's collaboration in teasing out the installation's subtle but decidedly apocalyptic undercurrent.

A wall painting in the gallery's first room offers a respectful nod to Sol LeWitt. *Goodbye Old Paint (Three Shades of White)* (all works 2015) shows barely perceptible vertical stripes below a wider band above, all in a triad of alabaster hues. But it is the



Pete Schulte, *Lying in State*, 2015, enamel on aluminum, 2 x 2 1/2 x 144 in. Image: Courtesy of the Artist.



Pete Schulte, *Walls in Flat Black*, 2015, Enamel on aluminum with glass sphere, 14 1/4 x 11 1/4 x 9 in.

punning title alluding both to the medium and to a cowboy's lament over his dying horse that lends the work a plaintive note. A drawing in muted shades of aqua and gray—the only color among the show's restricted values—*Shoot Out the Lights* is made up of a myriad keyhole-like forms, the image seeming to mutate and restructure itself when seen from different angles, these flickering rhythms presaging the shifting perspectives of the show. Again, an inimical title belies the soft colors and gentle, oneiric imagery.

In contrast to the rather rarified wall pieces, *Sphere*, relegated to a corner, is a heavy concrete ball painted black and white. Originally titled *Mute*, the work bespeaks a dense, indeed unrelenting and dogmatic delineation of opposites—good and evil? Equally portentous is the sculpture in the second room, *Walls in Flat Black*, vaguely reminiscent of a Renaissance altarpiece, whose side panels usually open to reveal religious scene on the inside. In Schulte's work, however, the sides are unequal and project outward at a 90 degree angle, casting spiky shadows on the wall; and the center, where one would expect color, is tenebrous. A small sphere—symbol of perfection?—is attached to the outside, "excluded," if you will.

Its title borrowed from Victorian mourning envelopes

EXHIBITION REVIEWS



Pete Schulte, *X*, 2015, graphite, pigment on paper, 10 x 10 in.

sent to prepare the recipient for news of a death, *A Letter edged in Black* is a low rectangular box with the inauspicious title printed on half of the surface and a retro turntable on the other. Filling the gallery with an almost palpable presence, a vinyl record spins a 15-minute recording of ambient sounds from a previous exhibition opening. Deeply impressed during a stay in Italy by its sounds—murmurs swelling in the Sistine Chapel, organ concerts in the evening, footsteps during the passeggiata—Schulte was "taken by sound occupying space." These seemingly

random sounds underscore the artist's interest in the contextual environment.

Two other sculptures accent the notion of mutability, echoing the installation's nuanced yet bodeful tone. *Broken Line Drawing*, segments of aluminum stripped in black enamel, stands nine feet tall, its lean elegance effecting a precarious balance. *The Clock* is a square etched with concentric circular grooves holding steel ball bearings that can be rotated like planets around the sun. Bringing together the two most stable geometric forms—circle and square, one symbolizing the

heavens, the second earth—together with the notion of time from the title, the work brings to mind the cosmos. Yet the ball bearings altered at will suggest the fluctuations of chance, as symbolized in the Roman goddess Fortuna, personification of life's capriciousness, whose emblem was the wheel of fortune.

The installation culminates in Whitespec, a smaller space, across the courtyard. In the tiny anteroom, a lone drawing, *X*, takes its title from the emphatic cross in white whose edges bled out against the gray ground. The implications are clear: to delete, obliterate, cancel. Displayed on the brick floor of the adjacent rectangular room, *Lying in State*, a long narrow piece in black enamel on sandblasted aluminum, echoes the earlier vertical sculpture in the main gallery. As before, it is the title that conveys the full meaning: a funeral finality.

Thus Schulte effects an admirable synthesis of abstraction and engaged narrative. Without cataloguing contemporary horrors, he nonetheless evokes the apprehensive mood so many feel these days. It is at the end of the installation that the full implications of the title, *Build a Fire*, come into focus: fire creates smoke and serves as a warning.

Dorothy Joiner



Pete Schulte, *The Braid*, graphite, pigment on paper, frame, 7 x 86 1/4 in. All images: Courtesy of the Artist.