

Art in America

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Jonathan Callan at Nicole Klagsbrun

The visual loveliness of Jonathan Callan's work is remarkable.

especially considering that his methods include eccentric procedures like "punching" books and photographs, squirting silicon on things and scratching photographs. Callan's art also has an incredible lack of irony, given its creator's status as a Young British Artist who routinely pilfers images and tampers with found objects. This, Callan's New York debut, featured a body of work that deals with the transmission of information; as his artist's statement puts it, it addresses "the relationship of disembodied knowledge to embodied experience and materiality." Essentially, it revels in the notion that individual perception is neither self-contained nor under control.

To Callan, "punching" is a process of tapping and pounding with small tools. Images and books are thus eroded, texturized and distorted; images can also be layered and adhered to other images. A pastel-colored map was "punched" across the top of an antique daybook for *Pacific Ledger* (2000). The map seems to be either devouring the book as a virus might or bursting through it as a mold

would. The juxtaposition seems to confound the delineation of territories—not just of land, but of order-making itself. Callan finds a host of possibilities for



Jonathan Callan: *Near and Far*, 2000, scratched photograph, 56 by 42 by 2 1/4 inches framed; at Nicole Klagsbrun.

this "punching" process, including tapping Mao Zedong into Elvis in a Warhol monograph, and making layered, sculpturesque objects that look like topographical maps.

Callan also worked from large photographs of leafy green forests, scraping at the emulsion to make delicate white lines. *Broken Sky* (2000) began as a

large photograph of clouds. Small round holes were punched on it in a gridlike pattern before the emulsion was peeled away from its paper backing. For the final piece, the tattered, perforated forepaper hung from thin silver prongs protruding from the wall.

Callan cites physicist Per Bak's notion of "self-organized criticality" as his inspiration for an ambitious, untitled "dustscape." Pristine and white, the piece is more than 8 feet square and around 2 feet high. It was made by sifting cement powder through a horizontal board in which holes had been randomly drilled. The result looks like a model of sharp alpine mountains.

Callan is clearly taken by the fact that the relationship between information (interpreted by minds) and minds (shaped by information) is interactive. He finds the exchange to be guided by an ordered disorder (i.e., chaos theory), which he determinedly brings into his work. As a theme, the impossibility of separating mind from matter is inherently deep and philosophical—but, ultimately, one is left wanting more. Fortunately, Callan's work doesn't rely wholly on concept. Its beauty stands entirely on its own.

—Sarah Valdez