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Jonathan Callan

NICOLE KLAGSBRUN

A sculptor by training, British artist Jonathan Callan exercised a sort of benevolent vandalism in this engaging show, his first New York solo. He alters found images and objects—punching holes through books, for example, or taking a picture of an Old Master painting, then carefully scratching it out. Despite such acts of annihilation, his end results are mostly elegant and masterful.

Take *Near and Far*, a photo of a lush green forest one might find in *National Geographic*. Callan enlarged the picture (to four by three feet), magnifying its Benday-dot pattern, and then partially erased the

Jonathan Callan,
Absence, 2000,
scratched photo-
graph in frame,
42" x 56" x 2 1/4".
Nicole Klagsbrun.

image. Up close it's apparent that the color of the tree trunks and branches has been stripped away—as if by the edge of a pin, leaving the imprint of thousands of tiny vertical white hatch marks in its place. The combination of the mechanically reproduced image (an amalgam of brightly colored blown-up Benday dots) and the evidence of Callan's scrupulous and time-consuming handwork creates a picture both ironic and beautiful.

In another lovely landscape, *Broken Sky*, Callan took a magazine picture of billowing clouds and systematically poked holes through it, the punctured dots adhering to a piece of white cardboard underneath it. Callan then lifted the perforated paper just an inch or so off the cardboard and fastened the two together with long sewing needles. The amount of time invested in this double image seems oddly commensurate with the fairy-tale-like feat it achieves: to catch a cloud and pin it down.

Callan takes a more ham-fisted and humorous approach with other materials. In one piece he uses *The Deserted Landscape*, a book containing an 18th-century poem by Oliver Goldsmith about the loss of the English countryside to encroaching industry, and pokes pin-size holes through the center of each letter of each word on two facing pages. Like dough squeezed through a pasta maker, white silicone has been pushed from behind the pages and through the holes, creating waving tendrils of ooze. Although the sentimental verse is somewhat obscured by the grotesque growth, the landscape of the pages is deserted no more.

—Katie Clifford