

ARTFORUM

New York

“September 11”

MOMA PS1

22-25 Jackson Avenue at 46th Avenue

September 11–January 9



View of “September 11,” 2011. Top: Fiona Banner, *Black Bunting*, 2001.

For the past ten years, the meaning of September 11 has been elastic, its tension easing and straining to encompass mournful impulse and a desire to forget. [Peter Eleey](#)'s unhurried exhibition of works by forty-one artists treats 9/11 as a lens through which to consider collective trauma—even though the majority of pieces here were made before 2001. Although the show opened on the tenth anniversary of the attacks, its poetic, melancholic demeanor is less concerned with memorializing than with presenting an introspective and political acknowledgment of the ambivalence that surrounds that fateful day—namely, the art world's consistent difficulty in responding to the attack on its own urban center. Time changes everything.

A number of works, for example, point to muted patriotism. [Fiona Banner](#)'s funereal *Black Bunting*, 2001, is strung throughout the hallway. The work, while partylike, evokes lost innocence and a consequent inability to unequivocally express national pride. [Jem Cohen](#)'s *Little Flags*, 1991–2000, a film that ominously depicts a Gulf War victory parade, does something similar, by showing the Financial District's streets covered with white debris. [Jeremy Deller](#), however, makes the point most boldly with his re-creation of George W. Bush's "Mission Accomplished" banner. The pre-9/11 works resonate most deeply, as much for the fact that they're lesser-known selections by noted artists as for the idea that the cultural undercurrents they express are fairly constant—we just require major events to sear in their meaning. There's a formalist violence, for example, to the mid-1970s offerings by [Mary Lucier](#) and [Gordon Matta-Clark](#), each almost surgically remaking the New York cityscape long before Al Qaeda did. Eleeey's astute arrangements amplify such allusions.

The show also wisely addresses the World Trade Center from its literal and metaphoric interior rather than its iconic exterior. [John Pilson](#)'s office cubicle photographs, shot between 1998 and 2000 in the nearby World Financial Center, speak to the ordinariness of lives inside those buildings, of cubicle dividers isolating workers in a nearly comical manner, while [Stephen Vitiello](#)'s *World Trade Center Recordings: Winds after Hurricane Floyd*, 1999/2002, is here mounted in PS1's spooky basement space, allowing the moans of the WTC buildings to express some communal pain in abstractly elegiac terms. The show visually (and tonally) marshals intangibility, particularly the momentousness of 9/11's cultural impact—yet also dynamically embraces the impossibility of neat resolution.

— [Glen Helfand](#)