

# SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

Art on Paper  
May 2005

## LOS ANGELES

Mark Grotjahn: Drawings  
at Hammer Projects, U.C.L.A.'s  
Hammer Museum, Los Angeles

In this exhibition of drawings of butterflies and flowers (all 2004 and all colored pencil on paper), Mark Grotjahn transforms nature into conceptual abstraction. The approximately two-by-four-foot drawings, labors of love covered with the artist's fingerprints, update natural-history painting for the twenty-first century.

Two *Black Flower* drawings read like organic versions of Frank Stella's 1960s Minimalist black paintings. Made from gently curving parallel lines that start at the paper's edge and converge at the center, both also bring to mind Georgia O'Keeffe's close-ups of flower stamens and pistils.



Mark Grotjahn, *Untitled (colored butterfly white background 10 wings)*, colored pencil on paper (65 1/2 x 47 1/8 in.), 2004. Courtesy Blum & Poe, Los Angeles, and Anton Kern Gallery, New York. Photo by Joshua White, courtesy Hammer Museum, Los Angeles.

Renaissance perspective merges nature and culture in Grotjahn's butterfly drawings, in which he anchors groupings of triangles to gently sloping, vertical black lines. He attaches the triangles at obtuse angles, so that they look like abstract butterfly wings. Each "wing" is like a multicolored, prismatic fan: Grotjahn first divides their interiors by drawing one-point perspective diagrams inside them and then fills each new triangle with color, never using the same hue twice. His technique makes each wing appear to recede into space. If you stare at these quasi-Minimalist, Conceptual drawings for a while, the triangles start to flutter, like the wings of a butterfly floating on the breeze.

Grotjahn's color formulas are unscientific. First, he chooses a group of pencils whose colors "hold together." Then, he lays them on a table, selects a pencil from the group without looking at it, and uses it to fill in one wing section. By using organizing principles but leaving room for randomness, Grotjahn's art is like Darwin's nature: it has a system, but everything is unique.

—Bridget Goodbody

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