

# SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

Art Papers  
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## **Mark Grotjahn, Paul Sietsema, and Brent Petersen**

by Ella Delaney

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Mark Grotjahn, Paul Sietsema, and Brent Petersen's recent exhibition at Gallery 16 explored varying strategies regarding the currency of the reproduction. Methods employed by the artists reflect and contrast those utilized by the gallery, which regularly accompanies its exhibitions with digitally created and reproduced limited-edition multiples. Grotjahn, Sietsema, and Petersen, however, gleefully throw the reproduction process into retrograde, showing works that recontextualize ordinary, mass-produced objects and all-pervasive icons as handmade, one of a kind works of fine art. While both approaches have similar results--both gallery and artists create objects for the high-end art consumer--the droll, mundane sources that inspired the artworks, and their deliberately handmade execution, disallows straightforward seduction. The artists resist making perfectly crafted reproductions invariably intended to awe and confound the viewer. The objective of these reproductions differs diametrically from the grandeur of recent art world takes, most notably Glen Seder's *Approach* (1996). This uncannily exact reproduction of the facade and part of the street adjacent to Capp Street Project took the notion of reproduction to new, hyper-literal heights and induced a spectacular Hollywood-like impact-- all while commenting on the artistic tradition of representation. Sietsema's concerns are far more personal and subtle. In *Running Shoes* (1996), Sietsema recreates his own pair of worn out New Balance running shoes using exactly the same materials from which the "originals" were fabricated. Though entirely credible as a reproduction, their fabrication is just sloppy enough to give the shoes away as handmade. They read more as a re-creation of a favorite personal item than a reproduction, which imbues the object with a sense of wishful longing. The act of recreating a favorite, worn out possession-- especially one used as a means of attaining a better, or somehow different self-- transforms the act of re-creation into an attempt at resurrecting dreams and longings connected to that object in order to alter the present. Recreating the personal as a wishful means of modifying the present provides the connective, thematic thread to another work by Sietsema, *House For My Mother, House For My Father* (1997). Here, he presents two models of suburban houses--nearly identical in materials and scale, differing only in their arrangement of windows, doors and entryways. Reminiscent of a school project, I found myself

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combing the sterile, white suburban models for clues to the palpable undercurrent of domestic dissolution hinted at in an otherwise colorless depiction of wholesome suburban existence. After some moments, it becomes apparent that Petersen's series of untitled, numbered paintings are actually depictions of readily familiar corporate logos, (i.e. Citgo, Valvoline) reproduced here as large, shaped minimalist paintings. Petersen rarefies corporate advertising iconography through this, its new found affiliation with the lexicon of fine art. This pairing locates precisely the underlying complicity (or should we say synergy?) between high art, corporate culture and consumerism. It's a perfect, comfortably easy fit. The work's irony hinges on the fact that while Minimalism began as a non-commodity art movement, it has since become the locus of the corporate collection, the desirable image that powerful corporate bodies long to project. Despite Petersen's protests to the contrary, the work functions best when viewed as critique, demonstrating a sincere embrace, not of modernist, but rather, market ideals. Grotjahn's untitled recreations of murals located in and around Los Angeles-- though on a far humbler scale--are too context dependent to work in a San Francisco gallery. Though probably familiar to every Angeleno, the connection between these small, gouache reproductions of sunsets and meadows and the murals they depict was lost on most San Franciscans. It is impossible to know whether some reference to their source within the context of the display might have helped the work. Grotjahn's intentions remained unclear: were these reproductions intended as straightforward renderings of a sappy, amateurish original, or were they sappy, amateurish parodies of a straightforward original? Without knowing, the work misfires, looking, at best, like a failed attempt at an anti-craft aesthetic. Two timely factors seemed to prompt this recent exploration of the reproduction. First, it's little wonder that both artists and gallery are searching for and commenting on art market strategies in an age of dwindling resources devoted to the arts, given that validity is measured and resources allotted strictly by virtue of one's market value. Second and more importantly, though, the work shown by these three artists reads as a response to the gallery's specific context as a dealer in digital reproductions. They invert concepts long ago enunciated by Walter Benjamin, who theorized a new kind of art, made possible by the machine, that was infinitely reproducible while lacking a one of a kind original. Grotjahn, Sietsema, and Petersen resurrect the traditional mainstay of an art object's value, its one of a kind-ness, but give it a retrograde twist by re-creating the original as a copy of things and concepts that are themselves also copies. Now that's marketing!

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