

## ART

## Reviews

## Space is the place

Craig Kalpakjian finds the virtue in virtual reality **By Tim Griffin**

Arguably, the most meaningful works of art from any era ponder the same basic questions, and in this respect, the work of Craig Kalpakjian, which is currently on view at Andrea Rosen Gallery, is among the most pertinent in existence today. His high-precision renderings of dystopian office interiors may seem to be based on actual models, but they are completely fictional, having been wholly invented by the artist on his Mac computer. Curators at the Getty Museum in Los Angeles recently organized an exhibition of Renaissance paintings, postulating that they offer the first examples of virtual space, and certainly Kalpakjian, like the old masters, is attempting a sort of seamless transition between the real and the illusory. But in Kalpakjian's hands, classical perspective reads more like cool science fiction: He is articulating an historical moment when the signposts of perception seem to have shifted ever so slightly, not only because of the introduction of a new philosophy of seeing, but also because of the technological tools that make such thinking possible.

Kalpakjian's work during the early 1990s was sculptural, consisting of ordinary, concrete symbols of bureaucratic, legislated space—a bullet-proof bank-teller window, for example. But as the real-life tools of such kinds of control became ever more subtle and abstract—as bulky closed-circuit cameras, say, gave way to heat sensors—it only made sense for Kalpakjian to leave sculpture behind. His cameras and two-way mirrors, which once turned up in the gallery as physical objects, became instead the subjects of computer renderings, dissolving, in effect, into the very same electronic fields that surveillance devices delineate.

That work also included images of air ducts and anonymous hallways, networks and conduits

that offered ready-made visual metaphors for the electronic matrices on which the new technology—and new economy—are based.

Kalpakjian creates pictures that reveal an immaterial world that is all around us. It makes sense, then, that the artist discusses them in terms of what Descartes once said



Craig Kalpakjian, *Black Box*, 2002.

of the brain's pineal gland: that it is the nexus where body and spirit come together. Kalpakjian recasts that idea in terms more fitting to our age.

A few such renderings are on view here on a scale much larger and more enveloping than that of Kalpakjian's previous work. The Cartesian principle is most evident in a single video animation, shown on a plasma screen that lies flat on the floor like a sculpture. The sequence features a tracking view of a finely polished granite floor, in which a ceiling hung with rectangular fluorescent lights is reflected; the taut grid of floor tiles contains the wobbling contours of the reflections, creating the strange sense of looking up while in fact looking down. Occasionally, the animation zooms in on its vir-

tual subject. Because its gray hue resembles that of the gallery floor surrounding the screen, it's easy to feel as if the actual floor beneath your feet were moving, instead of its video double. Space seems to become fluid and malleable, rather than fixed.

The most important piece in the exhibition is a sealed box containing an AIBO dog, the small computerized robot-toy made by Sony. You can't see into the crate's interior, and the pet is never let out, which makes the piece something of a cross between a Skinner box and an isolation tank. Yet the dog, named Weegee after the famous photographer, offers viewers a kind of remote vision: Every day, Kalpakjian has it photograph the box's interior; he then hangs the resulting grainy image on the wall. In essence, we are shown illustrations of a real space from a machine's point of view. The dog's

perspective actually exists, but we will never own it except in an indirect way.

Of course, Kalpakjian's idea doesn't depend on technology. More than a century ago, the first essay by then fresh-faced university professor, Friedrich Nietzsche, considered the relativity of human experience, and said that we should never think that our view of the world was all-encompassing and stable. After all, he argued, how could we ever understand the perceptions of an animal—those of a dog, for example? Kalpakjian's artificial dog and the images it offers represent a new breed of the same species of thought.

Craig Kalpakjian is on view at Andrea Rosen through May 4 (see Chelsea & vicinity).

## Mark Innerst

Paul Kasmin Gallery, through May 4 (see Chelsea).

Mark Innerst has been making lovely paintings of New York City for at least two decades. Now he's becoming something of a Hudson River painter as well, though the part of that waterway that has caught his attention lies not in Thomas Cole territory upstate but just beyond Innerst's own gallery in Chelsea. Standing out among the busy townscapes and dreary landscapes that form the bulk of this exhibition—and seem so mechanical that they quickly wear out their welcome—are four river views which, by comparison, have a certain freshness and simplicity of form.

The best of these, *On the Hudson*, shows the blood-red silhouette of a ferry slip against an expansive, pastel-tinted sky. In another, the enormous golf-ball nets that hang next to Chelsea Piers frame a view of the city from the river, in which we also see a distant billboard represented as a mysterious blue rectangle floating in the air. It is in these paintings that Innerst achieves the Luminist ideal he is generally after. His other cityscapes, which borrow the look of blurred snapshots, date themselves as post-September 11 by the frequent appearance of American flags. Small in scale, these compositions are dominated by vertical rows of glossy new skyscrapers and generally look up-town from Times Square, with an emphasis on the up; their focus is not the jungle of signs or blur of traffic at street level but the vanishing light of dusky skies from above.

Innerst's engagement with the sky is what makes his river paintings work, too. But the wild blue yonder is sorely missing from another series, of woody landscapes. Here, bits of daylight show through the trees, but even a multitude of distinguishing details can't hold their own against an earthy, somber palette that tends to swallow everything up. The cityscapes, at least, have the saving grace of bold primaries, but for all their jazzy color and geometry, they are about as lively and authentic as a frozen smile. Perhaps it's just a sign of the times.—Linda Yablonsky



Mark Innerst, *Chelsea Piers*, 2002.