

FEATURES

Giancarlo Scaglia and Miles Gertler at Corkin Gallery

Photo and text by Alice Pelot

The Corkin Gallery in the Distillery District is a historical, industrial structure with exposed brick, high ceilings and abundant natural light. With two project spaces, and multiple floors, each work has space and welcomes our full attention. Jane Corkin has chosen two undeniably topically and aesthetically compatible artists Giancarlo Scaglia and Miles Gertler.

Scaglia's four large works thematically based on his three-year investigation into the history of El Fronton. El Fronton is an island off the coast of Peru that housed a maximum-security prison for political prisoners (built in 1917) but only reached a level of infamy after a violent confrontation in 1986, that left behind only ruins. Three of Scaglia's works are diptychs of black ink on white Japanese paper and mounted on fine stretched linen resembling the cover of a Mead Composition notebook in pattern, or Modernist painting in scale. The series titled *Stellar* directly connects the black and white speckled works to constellations, however the white does not shine through the black background, instead the black seems to have flaked off leaving holes behind. The works are disconcerting due to the disconnection between title and aesthetic. The artist widens the meaning by adding his fingerprints, and there are also feathers stuck to the surface recalling the messy environmental business of oil spills. The reason for this cognitive dissonance was an intentional connection made by Scaglia during his research on El Fronton. The massacre – for which the island is known – left behind bullet holes in the walls of the cells in random patterns from which Scaglia forms symbols of this history like the patterns we call constellations. Scaglia's fourth work, titled "Golden II," is an installation including an unstretched painting of the island painted entirely in shades of gold with a selection of rocks from the island placed on the floor with feathers. The rocks relate to the Land Art practice of the non-site in which elements are taken directly from the works location to act as off-site documentation. The rocks and feathers in Scaglia's works are appropriate punctuation for the research he did on El Fronton.

On the upper floor of Corkin Gallery, Miles Gertler's installation *Superlith* is displayed in the project space. His works of black and white paper architecture explore the power of architectural revisionist history. Gertler uses architectural renderings and archival photography to produce empty landscapes punctuated by structures to establish a political iconography of oppressive buildings. Architectural revisionist history has a history of its own driven by political leaders. For example, prior to WWII, Hitler employed architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel to redesign Germany's history through classical Grecian architectural iconography to produce an image of the nation as powerful and lasting. The buildings in Gertler's "Speculative Fiction" series are marble monoliths appearing in his scenes like the one in "2001 a Space Odyssey." Some of the buildings resemble the concrete, cube structures of Le Corbusier, set atop thin columns to allow for movement beneath, some echo the forms of Russian Constructivist maquettes, as well as Classical sculptures and architectural forms.

In most of the prints, the buildings express no particular function and do not relate to the surrounding landscape; they are like foreign spaceships or sculptures of omnipotence. A scale model of one such structure titled "Superlith, Supralith" (resembling his other work "Seven, Hanging Gardens") is installed in the project space populated with fiberglass molds in front of three panels including fields and distant monoliths. His largest work is a geological composite printed on wheat paste and gypsum panel. The study's title "No. 1, Zoom" is textured like marble, but the abstraction also presents like a pixelated photograph zoomed in too close.

In the movie "Blow Up," the protagonist believes he has photographed evidence of a murder, but the closer he zooms into the body, the further obscured it becomes, and he is only able to form vague symbols. It is this postmodern dilemma that for me is the most interesting connection between Gertler and Scaglia. Gertler implies classical material and vaguely oppressive iconography to construct symbols of power, and Scaglia refers to the most ancient system of symbols to provide a metaphor and historical value for the remnants of a disastrous event.