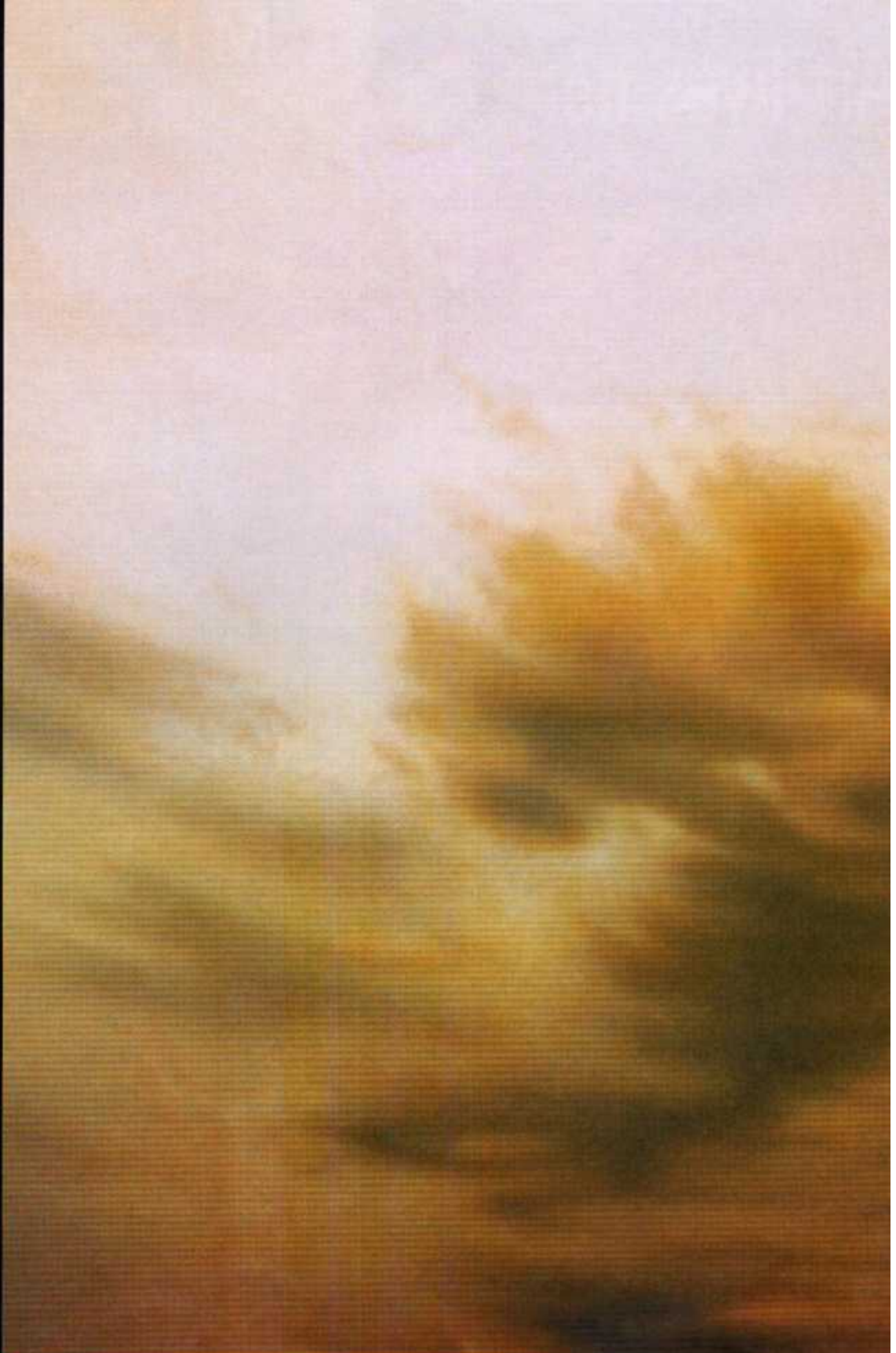


Artweek



■ Amanda Ross-Ho ■ Paul Mullins ■ Ulrike Palmbach ■

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bility equal parts necessary and absurd, yet achingly human. While the exhibition achieves an interesting sort of malleability, overall, it lacks the purposeful verve of more committed pieces such as *Mantle* and *Sad Sack*. But underneath the clever manipulation and self-conscious art-world commentary lurks a deeper kind of questioning with an inviting sense of humor. Bits of day-to-day detritus are placed here and there behind rough holes cut in various pieces of sheet rock throughout the exhibition. One of these, a cat's water dish, lies empty in perhaps the most wry and curious nod to questions of meaning, malleability and purposefulness of all.

—Annie Buckley

Amanda Ross-Ho: Nothin Fuckin Matters closed in February at Cherry and Martin, Los Angeles.

Annie Buckley is a freelance writer based in Los Angeles.

Samantha Fields at LightBox/Kim Light Gallery

Samantha Fields's paintings at LightBox, all depicting monstrous storms, cover quite a lot of conceptual ground. They dust off old-fashioned (which is not to say obsolete) ideas of transcendentalism and the sublime—exemplified in the work of the Hudson River school painters of the mid-1800s—but suggest, too, apocalyptic visions of the future in which a compromised Earth is ravaged by hurricanes and twisters. Fields describes herself as an environmentalist; in a statement she writes that she feels a kinship with painters like Thomas Moran, who sought to preserve America's wilderness by helping to spearhead the National Parks movement.

The menacing skies depicted in *This Land*, Fields's first major solo exhibition, aren't imagined. She spent the summer of 2006 chasing storms in Nebraska, coming away with thousands of digital photographs. One painting might represent a composite of several different photos—

she notes, for instance, that several of her Nebraska skies are paired with landscapes lifted from the Mojave Desert (most works in *This Land* include only a thin, darkened strip of earth). Global warming

Fields's project seems straightforward enough—and in fact it might be a bit *too* straightforward if there were not something strikingly odd about these paintings. While you can imagine many painters approaching the subject of a violent storm with agitated brushwork, the surfaces of Fields's paintings are entirely without texture. Betraying not even a hint of a brushstroke, they reveal nothing of their process. A paper-thin layer of paint uniformly covers each canvas. Areas of color—gray, orange, blue, yellow, black—blend seamlessly, not overlapping so much as fusing together. Scrutinizing a painting at close range feels like gazing into fog: Your eye finds nothing definite to latch onto. But while the works in *This Land* lack a rich quality of surface, they are still seductive—luminous, evasive and atmospheric. As painted skies, they're extraordinarily convincing.

It turns out that Fields makes her paintings using a process she adapted from Japanese airbrushing techniques, meticulously layering mists of color in a way that leaves no trace of her hand. The end result is a matte, photo-like surface. While others have painted photo-realistic or photo-derived images as a means of commenting on the relationship between painting and photography, Fields's project seems less concerned with aesthetic theory and more concerned, in a way, with human psychology. After all, both painting and photography have been used as a means to capture what we see in the world and to re-present it on our own terms. But of course, replicating the way something looks, however faithfully, doesn't amount to comprehending it. Weather, for example, remains a chaotic system, impossible to predict very far in advance despite the use of high-tech instruments.

Viewed as a whole, Fields's process



Samantha Fields, *To Rain Upon the Earth (Colorado Plain)*, 2006, acrylic on canvas on panel, 48" x 72", at LightBox/Kim Light Gallery, Los Angeles.

embraces two extremes of human nature. On the one hand, her direct experience of these colossal storms (an act she describes as "essential" to her work) indulges a universal desire to peer over

the storms into paint—a mute, still version of a formidable and uncontainable event—fulfills an equally powerful human need to feel in control of whatever surrounds us.



Sean Higgins, *Last Island*, 2007, ink-jet print transfer, acrylic on Plexiglas, at sixspace, Los Angeles.

Shuttling between these two poles, her process actually parallels Kant's notion of how we experience sublime events: First comes the stage of overwhelming awe, then comes the stage of rational recuperation. We take a naïve but necessary comfort in our mind's ability to assimilate such phenomena as catastrophic storms—then we manage, once again, to assert the superiority of our consciousness over our fundamentally incomprehensible environment.

—*Katherine Satorius*

Samantha Fields: This Land closed April 7 at LightBox/Kim Light Gallery, Los Angeles.

Katherine Satorius is a freelance writer based in Santa Monica.

viewer's focal plane by mounting the print behind the glass. The result is a delicate balance of the eye, an effort never to be brought into the difficulty of remembering images are delicately edged of perception, and visual memories which are resurrected.

Though the technique is stunning and unique, it is much more than a simple creative media. The artist's at least three distinct larger body of work, less images of ocean of unknown landscapes. Though they are by their representati