

Static Breathing

by Eve Wood

Tam Van Tran, "Beetle Manifesto, Nov. 23-Dec. 28, 2002, at Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects, 5363 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, Ca. 90036

Tam Van Tran's paintings in "Beetle Manifesto," his third solo exhibition at Vielmetter, achieve a strange and magical balance between organic and man-made materials, purity of form and a perverse sort of mechanization. Done on paper made from Spirulina, the works are crazily perforated in strips and criss-crossing patterns, with the fragmenting parts then stitched together with staples. Simultaneously still and kinetic, the paper undulates, dips and practically squirms off the wall.

A 30-something Vietnamese-American who lives in L.A., Tran has a peculiar resourcefulness with materials, using staples and a hole punch to devise a tension between content and literal form. His colors, derived from spirulina, chlorophyll and green pigments, are designed as a meditation on nature. *The Beetle Manifesto* series, for instance, is meant to invoke a forest canopy turned to lace by legions of beetles. Other works are done on formica, with large areas left uninflected, as if still a wilderness.

Each piece is a pathway toward an endlessly shifting center, and many of the marks delineate no clear direction, but crossover, cut through and around the causeways of color as with *Path of Preparation*, where the artist has cut pathways of holes into the paper. These paths are joined and conjoined, overlapped and affixed in every possible direction with staples, and hanging from the edge like a small addendum to a complicated treatise, is a piece of tin foil, less an afterthought than an accretion spawned directly from the work itself.

With this new work, Tran has merged an intense interest in the detail and specificity of the mechanized image with organic form like witnessing a breath that's held forever. The results are startling.



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