



Art On



Paper

March-April 2002

Stephen Sollins: Dwelling.

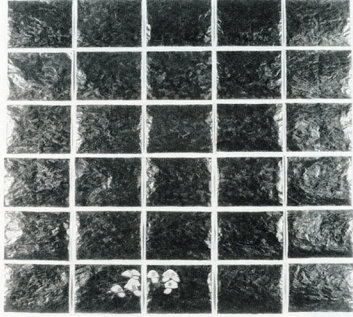
Mitchell-Innes and Nash, New York.

In his past work, Steven Sollins has deployed the processes of cutting out or “whiting out” to explore the architecture of the printed page as a kind of abstraction. Sollins has “Exactoed” the graphic boxes of a newspaper’s space-for-rent ads, for example, leaving only their frames, or whited over each line in an Emily Dickinson poem to produce a ghostly structure of lines of varying lengths cleansed of words.

In his show at Mitchell-Innes and Nash through March 2, Sollins turns to mail-order camping-supply catalogues in a series of ten *Range Drawings* (2001), arranging their pages into large grids and,

with pencil and ballpoint, carefully and patiently obliterating all but a few of the catalogue’s illustrations. When Sollins chooses to retain six tiny, identical rafts from within a large grid of 42 pages, for instance, his blacked-out field becomes a swelling ocean, rendered pocked and irregular through his graphic persistence. Now floating on this pencil-mark expanse, Sollins’ rafts attain a level of clarity and necessity, even a kind of pathos, impossible in their previous catalogue world of descriptive texts and juxtaposed sale items. Similarly, when Sollins leaves eight pup tents in two sections at the bottom of a 30-square grid, the graphic ocean of blocked-out catalogue now becomes a thick night, the very condition of foreignness, uncertainty, and failed vision from which tents are designed to

Stephen Sollins,
Untitled (Settlement),
pencil on catalogue
pages (48-1/2x53-1/8
in.), 2001. Courtesy
Mitchell-Innes and
Nash, New York.



protect us. By turning catalogue pages into tragically indifferent or even hostile environments, Sollins' activity of obliterating reinforces the very function of the items he selects to leave. Lights projecting out from the tents reveal the wordy catalogue soil in which they've set down their stakes. This technique, coupled with the small newsprint edge around each sheet, ties this piece to its catalogue origin in a slightly more direct and effective way than the raft piece, whose markings run flush to each sheet edge.

Because this body of work depends upon the camping catalogue as an anonymous advertisement received in the mail (on which Sollins lavishes inordinate attention), it makes less sense for him to order uncut proofs from the same camping-supply company in order to increase his page size, as he does in several other pieces. Though the larger page sizes of these works are visually compelling, part of the metaphoric meaning is lost in the customizing. At its best, Sollins' new work converts a readymade world of floating, equivalent catalogue objects that are saturated in advertising copy into large-scale landscapes whose powerful bleakness emerges in part from the time and concentration required to transform the busy, loud pages into eerily quiet seas, nights, or graphic abysses.

—*Lytle Shaw*