

THE DELICIOUSNESS OF STAYING STILL: MARSHA COTTRELL AT ELEVEN RIVINGTON

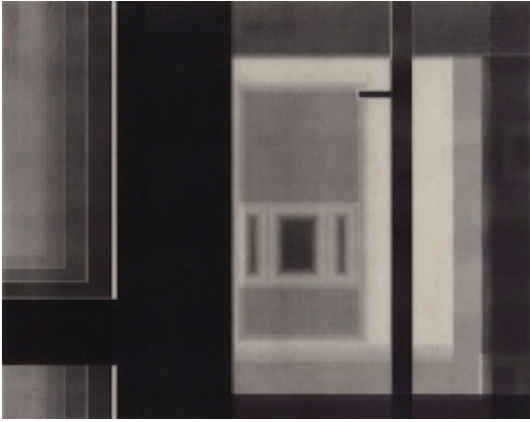
By David Brody



Marsha Cottrell, *The Deliciousness of Staying Still*, 2015. Laser toner on collaged paper, unique 81 x 142 ½ inches. Courtesy of Eleven Rivington

From MoMA's "The Forever Now" to the New Museum's "Surround Audience," curators are twisting in knots over the digitalization of contemporary art. More conceptually penetrating and gorgeous than anything in either show are Marsha Cottrell's unique handmade digital prints at 11 Rivington. Since 1998 she has been probing the interface between computer and ink, treating electrostatic toner as a rich, primordial mezzotint, and taking a devil's advocate approach to the machines and programs under her intimate control.

The exhibition at the gallery's two separate storefronts begins with a ten-point sampling of Cottrell's past styles and ideas. Configured as a single work, *Index 1 (Presence of Nature)* (1998-2013) includes one dazzling explosion of architectural grammar from 2005, representative of a large body of improvisational design storms wrought from office systems. In comparison, Julie Mehretu's endlessly celebrated panoramas seem distinctly flat, static, and formulaic. Other stops on Cottrell's travels are represented by a couple of dark, astronomical mappings that twinkle with distant typographical quasars, and by down-to-earth, paper-centric experiments with translucent layering, smudging, and multiple printings. Perhaps the most refined work, from 2010, uses a



Marsha Cottrell, *Old Museum (Interior 7)*, 2014. Laser toner on paper, unique, 9 1/4 x 11 1/2 inches. Courtesy of Eleven Rivington.

pixel-wide grid of white lines to sculpt a mirage of sills and jambs raked by fading light, an enigma every bit as scrupulous as the optical sublime of Wayne Gonzales and Dan Walsh.

The new work on view intensifies such delusions of light and space, with the smooth-cornered window format of the *Aperture Series* suggesting, while denying, a night view from an airplane, or perhaps an old TV just as the cathode is dying. Pay close attention to the way the edge between outer frame and inner space is *imagineered* differently in each image: as Ben Day gradations; as translucent layers of onion skin; or as hard edge

Vasarely-like topology. The cool intimacy of these works is

counterbalanced by the galactic rapture of *The Deliciousness of Staying Still* (2015), a wall-sized collage of a sun floating in blackest space – no quasars or twinkles anywhere in the solid bank of glued office-sized sheets, each resolutely saturated edge to edge (apart from the sheet with the white circle) by slate-dry toner. This format of a central white disk appears throughout the show in smaller works, sometimes eclipsed by a black moon. Cosmic eye tests of radiating lines that force illusions of blinding glare, as in a Gustave Doré wood engraving, these “Spectral Suns” often elicit secondary moirés at the limits of digital and optical resolution. With a different sort of exactitude, a series of squared up interiors probe reflected light and soft focus. These Seurat-textured mediations seem to mock the conspiracy between hard edge abstraction and institutional architecture. Aglow with silence and emptiness, Cottrell’s images of vacant “Old Museums” (as they are slyly titled) suggest the aftermath of a burglary.