

LOS ANGELES

Claude Collins-Stracensky

HAMMER MUSEUM

Evidence of a manic, multitasking mind quietly pervaded the assembly of otherwise contemplative objects and larger architectonic maneuvers that constituted Claude Collins-Stracensky's solo show at the Hammer. Before entering the square, glass-walled gallery located in the museum's main lobby, one was directed to look through large circular apertures inserted in the drywall barriers separating the lobby from the gallery and the gallery from the street. Unlike the infamous portals Gordon Matta-Clark once chainsawed into condemned buildings, a gesture inevitably recalled here, Collins-Stracensky's *Sight Line*, 2009—smooth excisions from the colored vinyl and reflective Mylar adhered to the gallery's glass walls and the drywall partitions inside the glass exterior—was notable for its elegance rather than for any apparent brutality.

And, unlike Matta-Clark, in whose “anarchitecture” the residue of the seemingly violent action *was* the work, Collins-Stracensky used the opening as, well, an opening salvo—a lens of sorts, through which one could see displayed the show's four sculptures, four framed photographs, and two larger photos in light boxes. If the cutout of *Sight Line* offered a focused peep show into, and through, the gallery, then the whole facade of the gallery—with its glass walls outfitted in tinted,



View of “Claude Collins-Stracensky,” 2009.

reflective yet transparent Mylar—provided a wider, if still somewhat occluded, perspective of the whole, echoing the four sculptures, which functioned the same way, albeit on a much smaller scale. In *The Garden of Forking Paths*, 2008–2009, for example, a slanted “sandwich board” of tinted, reflective glass is held by a steel armature; see-through and punctured by holes, the planes reveal two mirrored Plexiglas disks held in place between them, activating a retinal play of transparency and reflection that functioned as a schematic model for the gallery.

The three other sculptures also feature containers on custom metal scaffolds. In *Spatial Extension, the Oneness and the Suchness*, 2009, a box of tinted glass planes is supported by a minimal two-legged steel stand; a ceramic vase holding staghorn fern leaves is mounted inside the box, perpendicular to the ground, suggesting one of Donald Judd's or Larry Bell's refined geometric objects crossed with an ikebana arrangement.

This tension between the baroque flourishes of nature and the cool, crystalline surfaces of culture also emerged in Collins-Stracensky's photographs. In *Untitled (Tree. 1st St. Bridge, Los Angeles, CA)*, 2008–2009, a dense clump of foliage erupts unexpectedly from a concrete bridge; *Untitled (Spring Windstorm. S. Bundy Blvd., Los Angeles, CA)*, 2004–2009, documents the collapse of a metal roof from its post-and-beam support. These surely represent the artist's interest in observation—in looking at the overlooked—while also speaking to his sculptural concerns. The latter impulse is clearest in *Untitled (Exploded Thinker. Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH)*, 2003–2009, in which an edition of Rodin's famous sculpture was blasted—and radically altered—by a vandal's dynamite.

These photos suggest “found” sculptures, but it is not always apparent how the artist wants them to work in relation to the carefully composed objects nearby in the gallery—or in relation to his manipulation of the gallery space itself. If the show sought to offer a framework for the act of looking, Collins-Stracensky risked losing any clearly defined model of perception in the ambiguous interaction of too many discrete parts, not to mention the sheer accumulation of influence—of the artists already mentioned, but surely also of the perceptual play of Robert Irwin, the photographs of Gabriel Orozco, and the glass sculptures of Collins-Stracensky's peer Patrick Hill, among others. Fewer things to look at might have made the whole easier to see. Still, the artist's ambition and considerable finesse were fully on display, and it is easy to imagine him following at least one of these forking paths to great success.

—Michael Ned Holte