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Peter Soriano

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HYPERALLERGIC
Sensitive to Art & its Discontents

Surveyor of Shadows

By John Yau | October 22, 2016

Peter Soriano's career over the past twenty plus years falls more or less into three phases: discrete sculptures; combinations of sculpture and drawing, usually affixed to a wall; and, starting in 2012, drawings done directly on the wall in acrylic and spray paint. Simply put, Soriano has become a sculptor who doesn't make objects — an itinerant, postmodern descendant of early American limners.

For his current exhibition, *3 murals and related drawings*, at Lennon, Weinberg, which closes today, Soriano completed three wall drawings, which take up most of the gallery, which is known for its long, narrow length, and a small, sky-lighted alcove. While writers have drawn a line, so to speak, between Soriano and Sol LeWitt, it seems to me that there are profound differences between their wall drawings. Whereas LeWitt's self-contained works make no reference to the changes of everyday life, Soriano's are based on time, light, and shadows cast by real things. They are observational abstract drawings done on a large scale — large schematic captures of time passing.

I was particularly struck by the mural "Beat-Up Subject" (2016), which is ten and half feet high and more than thirty feet long. The title comes from Stuart Davis, who said in an interview with John Wingate in 1957 that a work he had returned to after a number of years was a "beat up subject" — something whose limits Davis pushed without ever losing sight of the original subject. The subject for Soriano's "Beat-Up Subject" is his house in Penobscot, Maine, and the shadows it casts at different times of day, all of which are outlined and dated in the mural.

There are countless paintings of houses with peaked roofs casting shadows, and they've been done by everyone from children to Sunday painters to such celebrated artists as Edward Hopper, Fairfield Porter,

Louisa Matthiasdottir, and Lois Dodd. Usually, these works are about a particular moment, a feeling.

Soriano also embraces an ephemeral moment, but through his use of a dry, non-pictorial vocabulary, he is able to push a time-honored subject down a new path. Instead of depicting the house itself, he uses colored lines and spray paint in conjunction with tape and stencils to document the its peaked roofs and the shapes of the shadows they cast. The alienating and disorienting effect that everything that is expected to be right-side up is upside-down, with the building's silhouette pointing downward from the meeting line between the gallery's wall and ceiling, permeated my experience of "Beat-Up Subject."

Soriano made the lines of the house by affixing tape to the wall, spray painting it yellow and then peeling the tape away. The empty bands of unpainted wall, with spray paint on either side, emanate a yellow aura, which is quite effective in conjuring up the brightness of the sun. Below the yellow bands, and partially overlapping them, is a series of sharply angled red lines. There are color-coded rectangles (red, orange, green, blue) in which stencils and spray paint have been used to note the time and date. One reads "12:25, 25/7/16" in red rectangle, and below it, in a green rectangle, "10:25, 25/7/16." Other stencils indicate that the artist has recorded the shape of the shadow over consecutive days at the end of July 2016.

The contrast between the downward-pointing verticals, horizontals, and diagonals of the "yellow" house and the diagonal planes formed by the outlines of the shadows may be purely factual, but they elicit so much more: the house's angles, pointing downward, seem suspended and about to plummet; the shadow's shapes become collapsed forms, a cardboard box in the process of being unfolded and flattened. This might lead to the idea that the house's internal shapes mark the edges of a container waiting to be folded into a three-dimensional shape. In this scenario, the shadow lines demarcate what happens after the container has been emptied out.

The dance between the house and shadows, and between the house's relatively stable angles and the shadows' seemingly collapsed and stretched shapes, underscores time passing. In our busy lives, we might not notice the minutes passing by. But there are also those wistful moments when we wonder where all the time went. Despite the fact a Soriano drawing can be put up "permanently" in a variety of places, it still feels as temporary as the shadows. That sense of change and transience feels matched by the use of tape, stencil, spray paint and paint. Subject and execution resonate with each other. That was the surprise and pleasure for me. I was able to look at an upside-down world and realize the many ways that it mirrored reality. Soriano's drawing underscores our sense of return, change, and absence – states that could either comfort or disconcert us. It speaks to something fundamental in our lives – our consciousness of mortality.

3 murals and related drawings continues at Lennon, Weinberg Inc. (514 West 25th Street, Chelsea, Manhattan) through October 22.