



CROSS REFERENCES: OPEN STUDIO AT THE SANTA FE ART INSTITUTE

SANTA FE ART INSTITUTE
1600 ST. MICHAEL'S DRIVE, SANTA FE

A recent studio visit to the Santa Fe Art Institute

revealed that the Institute is, indeed, a seat for the interchange of art and culture on a global scale, in this case extending from the communities of Belgium and the Netherlands to New Mexico. At the invitation of Albuquerque writer Ton Haak, formerly of the Netherlands, Dutch artists Gerco de Ruijter and Jeroen van Westen were joined by Belgian ceramist Anne Ausloos in their residencies at the Institute. The four collaborated on a project that explores the differences between the arid mountain country of northern New Mexico and the wet lowlands of Holland—both iconic scenes in the history of art. From enduring seventeenth-century views of Delft and Haarlem to early American modernist settings, the two genres seem at odds, and present numerous opportunities for exploring archetypes of civilization in the Old and the New World. This is a fascinating premise for a museum exhibition, and one can look forward to these four artists taking their project to such a conclusion.

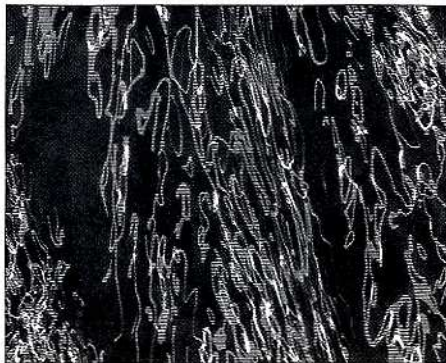
De Ruijter has spent time in this area in the recent past, in particular, photographing near Abiquiu. His method of capturing images is rather unique—he floats a camera on a kite or, if there's no breeze, attaches it to a helium balloon, and using a remote control, watches as the camera flies low over its intended target [see pages 36-37]. When de Ruijter determines that

the viewfinder may capture something worthwhile, he clicks the shutter. The results are haunting close-ups of the land, as if we are looking at its very pores. The scale is unfamiliar to our eyes, and that is what makes his photographs so compelling: it's as if we are seeing these places for the first time. No longer focusing on traditional landscape compositions—that is, foreground, horizon, and background—we see the elements exposed and vulnerable to human intervention.

Van Westen's video of sparkling, tumbling water has the same sensibility, as if nature were somehow defenseless, and at the same time remains triumphant in its timelessness.

Perhaps due to the likelihood of the imminent destruction of our natural environment, there is a beauty in this work that is dependent on the very proximity of its subject's demise. Without trivializing their overlying language, Van Westen and De Ruijter's works render it constant, a formal exploration of iconic nature.

Ausloos, working with the properties of local soils as they transform from silt to rock and back again, imparts a more conceptual underpinning to the project. But again, there is something so basic about the clay beneath us that working with it in nearly any manner is sure to evoke an elegiac devotion to the material. The earth remains. At least, one can hope so.



Jeroen van Westen, Water, NM, video still, 2005

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