

Lux and Unnamed Places (Reviews)

Country Club Gallery's exhibitions deal with the abstraction of place

By Laura Leffler

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The two current exhibitions at Country Club Gallery have something in common — namely, a sense of place. And yet the two artists included here, Christina Seely and Evan Hecox, deal with the idea of place in profoundly different ways.

Seely's exhibition, *Lux*, is clearly the focal point. Fourteen large-scale digital photographs, each mounted on an aluminum panel, cover the majority of the gallery's space. *Lux*, the San Francisco-based photographer's on-going project, deals with urban consumption in an intelligent, if expected, way. Seely studies NASA night maps that document Earth's brightest places — urban spots, all in North America, Western Europe and Japan.

Her result, these glowing, anonymous photographs of cities, each with a different vantage point, owes everything to light. Long exposure time allows the artist to capture changing elements and movement (think of airplanes traveling through a night sky or cars zooming down a highway), and the profound effect that these lighted elements has on their natural surroundings. The photographs are technically perfect, finically detailed, framed, positioned and mechanical. But there is more here.

Lux is the scientific term for a unit of illumination. Of course, it also elicits a sense of abundance, comfort and wealth. As such, Seely's photographs are about more than just light and technique; they explore the reason for the light, the conspicuous consumption behind the light. Indeed, how much more ostentatious could each of these cities get, bellowing out their affluence into the skies to be captured by NASA?

But Seely's photographs aren't NASA maps. They are surprisingly intimate in their anonymity. Each city could be confused with another if the viewer is not intimately involved with them. (Most people here will recognize Cincinnati, fitted in among Berlin and Kyoto.) Each photograph shares a title, "Metropolis," adding to the idea that it is not the place that is so important, but the light and the significance of that light. That notion is slightly kicked aside with Country Club's map of the gallery, however, which spells out the placement, probably to make the work seem more accessible.

On the far wall of the gallery, Evan Hecox's small exhibition, Unnamed Places, consists of three drawings and two paintings and turns out to be a gem of a show. Hecox, a Denver-based artist and illustrator, is clearly fascinated with the urban landscape. In each of his images, a sense of the mundane goings-on of city life is betrayed by the artist's Chinese-style brush stroke, a beautiful process that transforms the everyday into something nearing the spiritual.

Hecox, like Seely, deals with the abstraction of a place rather than a specific place. Hecox does not get bogged down into details or science, though. He is more concerned with the psychological aspects of urban culture, of walking down a crowded street in Chinatown. "Moody images," says the gallery's press release. There is a sense of loneliness and dehumanization that can only be likened to the German Expressionist movement.

At the same time, though, Hecox does not seem to offer a criticism of what exists in these urban streetscapes. Nor is it an excited praise. Hecox, for all his loving brushstrokes, seems only to be capturing a truth.