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# LUHRING AUGUSTINE

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Christopher Wool, *I'm In Ecstasy  
When You Lay Down Next to Me, 1995*,  
enamel on aluminum, 90 x 60".

## CHRISTOPHER WOOL

LUHRING AUGUSTINE  
GALLERY

In the pursuit of annihilating imagery, Christopher Wool's new paintings present a richly inarticulate pictorialism on the verge of collapsing into nonobjectivity. He lays siege to the rudiments of his own painting language to embark on a fitful construction process that not only allows for mistakes and false clues but actively exploits them. Wool offers us access to a world where things are layered to the point of implosion, where iconographic elements are built up only to virtually fall apart. These recent paintings are also his most emphatically "painterly" to date: the more Wool endeavors to blot out, with enamel-laden brush, the mechanical still-life imagery (a silk screen of potted flowers) that is repeated in a number of works, the more complex things get. It's as if he's attempting to frustrate recognition—to underline the banality of that moment.

While the new paintings inevitably recall the artist's unmistakably elegant style (a synthesis of Abstract Expressionism's tactile visuality and scale, Pop's slick surfaces and pictorial directness, and aspects of '70s Pattern and Decoration), mutations abound. In juxtaposing the mechanical and the manual, Wool takes his ongoing investigation of the conceptual relationship between the handmade and the mass-produced to another level. He "attacks" the silk-screen-produced backgrounds with his brush, leaving behind drips and drip trails—the telltale signs of a process-oriented painterliness. This shift in his practice reaches its most radically abstract pitch in *Knee Deep*, 1995, in which the imagery (silk-screened in a deep blue that looks nearly black, a tone that emerges in a number of works) is almost entirely wiped away

by black paint, and we find ourselves "knee deep" in a murky, flat space.

Wool has apparently put aside his long-term fascination with the verbal puns, phrases, and stencil-based graphics that put him on the map, as well as the allover, regulated patterns of abstracted organic forms that he created with printing stamps. In his earlier works, Wool wanted those "concretized" words and letters to collapse under their own weight, succeeding in dovetailing the linguistic, the pictorial, and the compositional. In these new paintings there's a calculated entropy: some works are clotted with a strangely picturesque imagery that feels more like visual interference; when things become even more eviscerated, we are left with congealed absences that suggest weirdly claustrophobic spaces. If one considers the enamel-on-aluminum paintings *I'm in Ecstasy When You Lay Down Next to Me*, 1995, *Give It Up or Turn It Loose*, 1994, and *Knee Deep*, 1995, in that order, the movement from tactical pictorial interference to full-fledged attack becomes readily apparent.

This is probably the first time that Wool has so fully and rigorously challenged his long-standing penchant for the decorative, and he's discovering that ugly can be pretty too, as an untitled work from 1995, in which the artist has scrawled black spray paint over a white ground, attests. For Wool, it's as if now it's all about a charming irresolution: he's attained that state of grace that comes with letting things fall apart.

—Joshua Decter