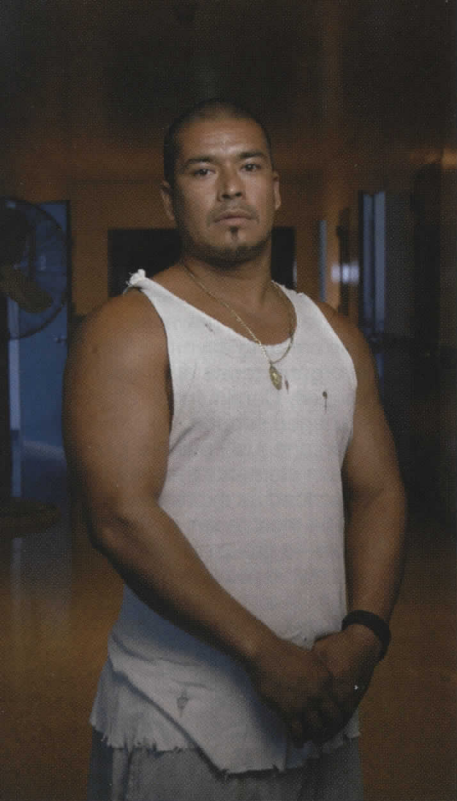


Gregory Crewdson at Luhring Augustine

Fourteen of the 20 coldly beautiful pictures constituting Gregory Crewdson's new series, "Beneath the Roses," were included in this show (opening simultaneously with exhibitions in Los Angeles and London). Appropriating the frictionless visual textures and labor-intensive production methods of big-budget motion pictures, these elaborately staged photographs nearly snuff themselves under their own ponderous weight. This is curious because these tableaux mean to provoke a frisson at the fine, fleeting line between the quotidian and the uncanny. A glossy booklet distributed by the gallery lists production notes, photos of Crewdson and crew at work, and full credits: locations, tech people, actors, even casting. Like all fictions, Crewdson's pictures solicit our willing suspension of disbelief, but they are enfeebled rather than enhanced by their blatant artificiality.

These untitled, 57-by-88-inch



dwarfed by the tracks, which fill the bottom third of the picture, and by huge cylindrical tanks in the background.

Unlike stills from an actual movie, there is no enveloping plot, no matrix of emotion, motivation and memory, of which these images can be symbolic. In contrast to Cindy Sherman's evocative, brilliantly economical "Untitled Film Stills," they are willfully obscure. In the most self-conscious example, a woman in her 50s stands naked in her motel bathroom (at three minutes to midnight) bleeding from her groin. Beside the still-made-up bed on which her open suitcase rests is a nightstand, opened to reveal a blue cardboard box labeled "Perfect Picture Puzzle."

—Stephen Maine

Frank Stella at Paul Kasmin

Frank Stella's dramatic

and drawn-out turn toward the Baroque has until now been more successful in his writing than in his own painting and sculpture. His vigorous series of Norton Lectures, collected in the book *Working Space* (1986), advocates an advancing, physical spatiality on the order of Caravaggio and Rubens translated into abstract painting. Abstract painting, of course, has generally preferred an optical space that squeezes out illusion in favor of a grafting of the flat "sign" of the painting onto its literal surface. And no one inscribed this practice more deeply into abstract painting than Stella himself in his "Black Paintings" and the metallic-enamel shaped canvases and polychromatic polygons that swiftly followed. His brilliant "Painted Birds" introduced a sculptured baroque spatiality into his painting, but with a tight rein on just how far his French curves and glittery color could fan out into real space before being tugged back to their anchoring rectangles. His subsequent production has seemed steroidal, however, overblown and ragged. Most major artists go through transitional periods, a kind of recurrent growing up in public that can be painful to watch, but Stella has been all knees and

elbows for much of the last three decades.

So what to make of the 16 new sculptures at Paul Kasmin? Words like "supple" and "lyrical" spring to mind, descriptives that haven't been applied to Stella's work since—well, maybe ever. The showstoppers are still humongous and somewhat threatening, but they achieve a formal coherence that makes their scale genuinely exciting. Once again there are curves, but the materials have evolved into a gestural script that feels more spontaneous and fluid than before. The two chief elements in these works are a curving steel pipe that twists and turns like a suddenly animate python and functions as a curvilinear mast or boom that anchors parabolic "sails" of black carbon fiber (the same material used in the Stealth bomber, Stella has noted with Darth Vader-ish satisfaction). This carbon fiber is a recent addition to Stella's arsenal of materials, and it works major changes in his art. It's wondrously manipu-

pipe swerve in unison from the back until the top pipe rears up and curves back over the sails that it also apparently is bracing. A length of skinnier piping twirls around this rearing mainmast as a scalar and rhythmic counterpoint to the slower movements unfolding through the larger elements. It's as if Bernini had somehow gotten hold of Tatlin and tutored him in the curve.

If this is the synthesis between elegant Baroque spatiality and the material energies of Constructivism that Stella has been working toward, then the wait appears to have been worth it. And all the large-scale pieces move toward this synthesis in singular fashion, each with a different relationship to its volumes and driven by a different internal torque. In the second gallery, the spiraling embrace of *memantra* (2004) launched itself from its right corner, while its neighbor, *batis-batis* (2004), assumed an antic contrapposto from its fastening hinge on the wall. In the larger back gallery the ovoid

Fiona Tan: *Correction* (detail), 2004, video installation, six screens, 5 by 3½ feet each; at the New Museum.

digital C-prints are ostensibly glimpses into the unglamorous lives of small-city New England folk, for each of whom some unknown thing is in the process of going mysteriously awry. The interior shots take in significant portions of two or three rooms in sufficient detail to include minute, coyly conspicuous narrative clues. What humor they possess is probably unintentional, as in an interior shot of a heavily made-up woman and a bookish young man sitting at a dining table, staring blankly at a bloody beef roast as if waiting for it to say something. In fact, everyone stares blankly in these pictures, but it is unclear whether they are pensive, exhausted, possessed or drugged.

Indeed, copious pills are among the set dressing, along with the station wagons and rotary phones of earlier decades, and dated storefront monikers, the found poetry of American mercantile life: Shear Madness, Oasis Liquors, Jim's House of Shoes. The exterior locations benefit also from the inherent visual drama of wood-frame houses and boxy, refitted mill buildings seen against the tumescent Berkshire hills. Scattered young people linger in the vicinity of a railroad track at dusk; listlessly looking for something (a prescription?), they are



Gregory Crewdson: *Untitled, Summer 2003 (Clover Street)*, 2003, digital C-print, 57 by 88 inches; at Luhring Augustine.

latable into broad swerving planes that change in thickness along a languorous curve. The result is a form that seems to have grown out of the idea and process of a specific work, rather than having been imported from another process and intentionality in some improbable feat of he-man collage.

Adjoeman (2004) sat on the floor of the gallery's front room, and its black sails whip-curved toward the viewer with extraordinary visual momentum. The two supporting lengths of parallel

visual bulk of *Siyalk I* (2002) was held up by a pistonlike column of steel centered on a platform of rolling wheels; the whole resembled an infernal machine addressing the cosmos. Nearby, like an abstract Madonna, the whirling arms of *djaeok* (2004) cradled a spherical form comprising hexagons and pentagons; the entire construction was suspended from the ceiling by a giant chain, so that a touch could send the work into a slow twirl. The smaller pieces and maquettes in the show generally