

The Highlights - Nicholas Krushenick at Marianne Boesky

Nicholas Krushenick, *Crossover*, 1972

Standing in line at the Kensington Post Office in South Brooklyn, as my eyes fell on a mailing labels software and clip-art kiosk, I was reminded of the paintings of Nicholas Krushenick. Krushenick, whose paintings were most recently shown by Marianne Boesky, worked in New York from 1929 until 1999. While Warhol and Lichtenstein were busy tackling the more figurative aspects of Pop, Krushenick, it seems, was tinkering with the things that sit on the periphery, the language of populist knowledge exchange.

This particular kiosk looked like a small, abandoned, cardboard high-rise, complete with billboards and graffiti. While it contained no actual packages, it explained that the software for sale provided the opportunity to print stylish mailing labels from your home office. Included with the CD software were a bundle of clip-art images, some of which decorated the more nebulous regions of the kiosk. Clip-art looks more and more to be the grandchild of Pop: images refined to the point of faultless legibility, the goal being most rapid informational exchange. The result, however, is an almost total abstraction. Cell phones are now equipped with their own array of miniature pictures: think smiley faces and miniature envelopes, think martini glasses and airplanes. The ubiquity of texting and instant messaging has popularized a new form of animated 'emoticons,' a slightly ominous term.

I began to think this was the arena in which Krushenick plays. Although, like Warhol, he is obviously borrowing from things like comic books and environmental signage, he is interested in something more banal and obscure. While Lichtenstein's references to print technology are overt, Krushenick concerns himself with the language of transitions, fades, and borders. In *Crossover* (1972), Krushenick foregrounds the connection to cinema present in much of his work with a celluloid-like border around the painting. I watch as it dissolves from positive to negative, pluses to minuses and back again.

Nicholas Krushenick, *Pumpkin*, 1998

Every painting in the show incorporates the use of black lines that function simultaneously as border, texture, and shade. They separate the flatly painted color fields of the paintings. They darken them. They change their color. They make them spatial, as in *Pumpkin* (1998), in which Krushenick uses the painfully simple device of cross-hatching down one side of the

painting to bring the entire surface forward. Occasionally they even mimic Johns' use of parallel lines as evocative of brushstrokes, as in *Untitled (Mango Madness)* from 1993. The inadequacies and tremors of the human are cleanly removed as if hand-painted brushstrokes have been run through the equalizing filter of imaging software.

It is often said that some artists are ahead of their time. While I usually find this to be due at least in part to the accidental speed with which culture shifts its direction, Krushenick seemed to be particularly attuned to a way of thinking through images that would resurface later. His brand of geometricism prefigures the abstraction-as-social-architecture in the work of Peter Halley, or as written language formation in someone like Jonathan Lasker. It almost seems that even younger artists, such as Laura Owens, owe an aspect of digital thinking to Krushenick. Krushenick's unique contribution, while falling in step with Pop's elevating techniques of low- to high-art, not only takes the marks of graphic spaces and breaks them into their most valuable parts, but also suggests the infinite shifts in scale of virtual vector-based imagery, the way clip-art is designed. With the click of a plus- or minus-button, you can have the image of a black rectangle as big as the universe, or small enough to pass through the palm of your hand.