

Art in America

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Every Bit of Breath I Have: Luke Stettner at the Kitchen

by Matthew Shen Goodman



Luke Stettner at the Kitchen.

"I made way too much work," said artist Luke Stettner as he took a break from installing "this single monument," his new show at the Kitchen (through Mar. 1), "but I think we'll be able to fit it all in." There's certainly a demand for output from Stettner, who has two shows opening within a month of each other this winter; his second solo show at Kate Werble Gallery comes in late February (Feb. 22-Mar. 29), and features mostly photography. The Kitchen show appears alongside Boru O'Brien O'Connell's "Draft, capture, -"; both organized by the Kitchen's assistant

curator Lumi Tan, the two exhibitions occupy parallel halves of the same space, divided by a partial wall down the center of the room.

Consisting of new drawings, sculptures and text-based works, Stettner's pieces at the Kitchen tend toward the minimal in form and pale white in hue. Still, within that reduced palette, Stettner has created a wide variety of objects using a variety of techniques. Toward the front of the room sits *this single monument (paper roll)*, a 700-pound spool of white paper on a ramp, stabilized by custom-made wedges of limestone and alabaster. Nearby, at the other end of the scale spectrum, is *this single monument (eyes)*. A 2-foot-high charcoal-on-paper drawing of a series of eyes, the piece is the result of Stettner projecting Egyptian paintings of female mourners on a wall and tracing over only the eyes.

Consisting of a series of sheets of white Ultrasuede ranging from 2 to 11 feet long, *this*

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single monument (line) hangs from the ceiling in the center of the space. The sheets are staggered over 8 feet; each is painted down the center with a black line that, though incrementally widening from sheet to sheet, appears to align perfectly in a continuous, uniformly sized strip when viewed head-on.

Next to the hanging sheets on the dividing wall is the show's title work, a series of framed excerpts from facsimiles of William Carlos Williams's correspondences dating from his time spent studying medicine at the University of Pennsylvania to the poet's final years, before his death in 1963. Hung side by side, the sentences read as a new individual letter, focusing on Williams's anxieties as a poet, often proving ambitious and despondent in the same excerpt. "Nothing much ever gets said, so why should I waste breath?" Williams writes in one, before continuing, "Perhaps I should spend every bit of breath I have in the attempt."

"It's remarkable how consistent Williams was," Stettner said, "from the beginning to the end of his life. You see his struggles with being an artist, but also his struggles about being a decent person in the world and how you measure yourself morally." Of Stettner's other works, *this single monument (marble dust)* seems to most strongly echo Williams's elegiac musings on memory. A low-hanging Plexiglas shelf holds the marble remnants of the artist's father's funerary urn, which Stettner ground down to dust. It's a continuation of *The Grey Ash Soft* (2011), a glass vase filled with the urn's remains, covered with oil and water, which was featured in Stettner's first show at Kate Werble in 2011. Stettner plans to show the dust in some new iteration with every show he does. With the piece, and with the dust's continual usage, Stettner seems to mirror Williams's minimal but meticulously considered prose. Stettner crafts a narrative both personal and aesthetic, managing to incorporate as personally significant an object as a family member's urn without it seeming maudlin, but while also not ignoring its emotional resonance.