

CHICAGO IN REVIEW

For the mailed card announcing his show at Robbin Lockett (February 15–March 23), **Vincent Shine** chose an 1895 photograph of a sculpture depicting an "Orang-outang Strangling a Savage from Borneo." As the "lower" primate strangles a broken human body, a younger orangutan looks on in open-mouthed amazement, horror, or vocal collusion, while natural animal prowess wreaks violent revenge on its evolutionary descendant. Though seemingly pretty and benign, Shine's tiny papyrus sprouts, ivy branches, and duckweeds crafted out of the very "unnatural" materials of acetates, acrylics, and neoprene, enact a similar revenge of the natural. By being so "true to nature," Shine imbues the little sprouts with the resistance of the complex natural world to taxonomic objectification and to projected romanticizations. Their realism induces the memory of experience with a real natural world, their isolation invokes the classifying activity of the natural history museum, and their small scale fetishizes their "nature" as fragile delicate beauty. Shine plays to the hilt the viewer's desire to be seduced by realism, which is easily heaped with meaning from the associations of the represented. He has no ecological agenda, but rather investigates the development of the human relationship with the natural world—from an attitude cohesive, communal, and respectful of nature to one of manipulation, separation from, and destruction of it, a position that has produced the current environmental crises.

Shine's scientific representation and aesthetic abstraction deal equal violence to a specific sample that must be sacrificed for the sake

of the model. In this new work, Shine fixes that elegiac moment of death, in elegantly wilting papyrus sprouts that languish theatrically over their white gallery supports. Living papyrus plants, the source of the first paper, died in the service of written communication, the abstraction of language that can outlive the writer. Shine backhandedly offers proof that art can transcend mortality through its representation. He deflates the pomposity of this will to immortality by merely offering the same, only fake.

By using rectangular minimalist white boxes as supports for the plants, Shine effectively replaces his representational trickery within the more recent tomfoolery of transcendental modernism. In a new series, various species of mushrooms sprout from the sides and tops of the bases, seemingly growing out of the decay of minimalist claims for the autonomy of the artwork. The sublime purity of the pristine geometric presence of the boxes is marred but somehow resuscitated by the random organic profusion of fungus sucking historical nutrients from its host. Shine frustrates an easy perception of the work by making the mushrooms look like their clay models, a dull gray-green material bearing the imperfect marks of their making. The "real" "natural" colors are provided on a page of text, described in language that is necessarily imprecise: e.g.: "white to grey or greyish brown," "dingy yellow to light brown, covered with black scales." Shine's willful disruption of the seamless representation jettisons the objects back into abstraction but still seduces the imagination to "paint" the forms in their "true" colors. This meltdown of representational and conceptual clues scatters any possibility for a unified interpretation. Shine's program: to render fictive, and deadly, the human propensity to project savagely upon a specific nature the (ineffectual) controls of abstraction and romanticization.

by Kathryn Hixson