

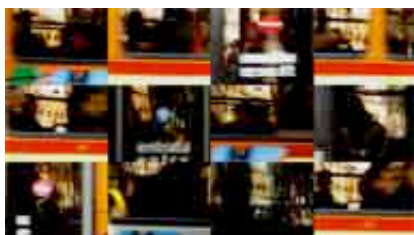
AARON PETERSEN and CATHERINE GFELLER

May 27 - June 24, 2006 at [Ruth Bachofner Gallery](#), Santa Monica

by *Judith Christensen*



Catherine Gfeller, "Shelve," 2006, photograph, 57 1/2" x 43 1/4".



Catherine Gfeller, "Corleone," 2006, photograph, 43 1/4" x 77".



Catherine Gfeller, "Seuil," 2006, photograph, 43 x 61".

Bay Area painter Aaron Petersen and Swiss-born photographer Catherine Gfeller share a common inspiration--the bustle of the modern city.

Petersen could be speaking for both artists when he asserts, "The marks I make reference how I see living in a contemporary urban environment; often banding together into dense flurries of activity, marching and dancing. I am intrigued by how individual parts/people/marks can stand alone, and how the dynamic changes when grouped together. I watch this in my daily life and it finds its way into my work." These shared perceptions about the dynamism of cities, the manifestation of such energy in `artwork, and the grouping of individual elements provide a commonality in Petersen's and Gfeller's work in terms of composition and rhythm. The artists diverge, however, in the specific vehicle each uses to express this understanding. This distinction is not just a function of different media--painting versus photography--it is intrinsic to their sensibility and response to this urban energy.

Gfeller represents the city more literally than does Petersen. She immerses herself, photographing multiple views of architectural features, as well as people moving about within the framework of a city's architecture. The figures are not posed or static, implying immediacy and involvement. Each completed image is a montage in a grid pattern that utilizes several perspectives either of the same locale or of similar architectural features. The repetition may be strict or not, creating various echoes within the piece. The grid pattern itself, as well as the reappearance of the same person in a similar, but slightly different position, infuses the images with movement.

In "Seuil I," she varies the sizes of the divisions within the grid. The pattern--one row alternates narrow with wide, another axis sprinkles multiple narrow divisions with a wide or vice versa--creates a pulsating rhythm. Within the grid other patterns emerge--lines of a building, stripes painted on a bus, letters on signs. In "Shelve," the strong vertical lines of the building in the background create their own rhythm, compounding the cadence of Gfeller's grid and the figures within it.

Petersen's approach is more contemplative.

The stance he assumes gives him greater distance from his subject. While Gfeller's work pulses, Petersen's flows. If Petersen were a photographer, he would likely be producing long-exposure photographs in which lights, motion and activity overlap, eventually merging to create abstract forms.

Although his inspiration is the city, his abstractions tend towards forms that appear more organic than human-designed. It is Petersen's process that produces the curves, circles and other shapes that suggest buds, leaves and tree trunks.



Aaron Petersen, "Domain," 2005, oil on aluminum, 47 1/2 x 47 1/2 x 3".

He pools translucent oil paint on the surface of an aluminum panel, allowing it to flow, sometimes intermingling with layers that are underneath, then finishes with a final layer of artist-controlled brush strokes. Except for the title, "Urban Reef" could elicit impressions of a landscape, as muted organic forms and translucent bubbles float against a field of trunk-like vertical shapes and a watery blue background. But the intersection of the forms, the long sweep of the curve and the repetition of the vertical shapes provide a distinctive cadence and a vibrant energy that is consistent with Petersen's intent.



Aaron Petersen, "Urban Reef," 2005, oil on aluminum panel, 24 x 24 x 3".

Although there is a measure of randomness in how the paint moves across the surface, Petersen controls its viscosity, the initial placement and the final layering. In fact, both artists maintain careful control of their artwork, imparting a sense of dynamic movement without allowing the image to fall into chaos. As Gfeller and Petersen focus on the pulse of the urban environment from which they draw inspiration, they penetrate its visual surface, creating rhythmic dances in which each artist performs different steps.

