

## Dog Days

by Natalie Hegert

### HEAT ISLAND

Group Exhibition

Smack Mellon

92 Plymouth Street, Brooklyn, NY 11201

June 18, 2011 - July 31, 2011

Dog days. Cut through the greasy air, thick with humidity. Mosquito bites and black tar rooftops. Skin prickly with salt, a deep grime collected under fingernails. Odors intensify and linger. The only respite found in a public pool shared with hundreds of others. There's a reason that New York City residents (those who can afford to) quit the city during the worst of the summer months, abandoning it for cooler, breezier climes in the Hamptons or upstate.



The hot city is the theme of a smartly curated show at Smack Mellon, *Heat Island*, with works ranging from informative documentary to abstract painting and sculpture. Curated by Natalie Campbell, the exhibition takes as its departure point the urban heat island effect and from there explores many aspects and effects of the city in summer: absorption/reflection, the transformed landscape, water and ecology, and social exchange. The works communicate the awkwardness and discomfort, the futility and stagnation of the summer through humor and levity, confined compositions, and reflective surfaces.

Several large sculptures/installations positioned in the expansive gallery space—a curving, fun-house brick wall made of mirrors by Erin Thurlow, the cracks in the mirrors rupturing the surface, further distorting the distorted reflection; a composition of colorful residue caught from the bouncing of tennis balls against the gallery wall, the remnants of a performance by Birgit Rathsmann; and a hilarious installation involving a sofa and an enormous, ineffectually large fan—position the social body as the primary locus of the experience of summer.

Photographic and video works further explore the conditions of the heat island, communicating the municipal and ecological challenges of the city, or more generally dealing with the feeling of despondency in the summer streets. Kim Hoeckele's photographs of the Newtown Canal render the dreck and scum floating on the surface of the water into swirling abstractions. The Newtown Canal, recently named a federal Superfund site for its high levels of water pollution, is just a few hundred feet from my house but rarely do I visit it; Hoeckele's photographs are a grim reminder of how New York's polluted waterways are anything but refreshing. For a more in-depth look into the city's water system, the Center for Urban Pedagogy's video, *the Water Underground* (2005), produced along with students at the City as School, provides an informative yet amusing documentary on New York's water treatment facilities and the nasty politics involved.



Katy Higgins' photographs resound with a dull thud, the way the hot air hits you as you step outside. These views of Brooklyn front yards—an emptied kid's swimming pool, some toy trucks on Astroturf, a square of freshly turned dirt, a brick porch—share a vertical composition, flattened plane and muggy palette, emphasizing the confinement, claustrophobia and spacelessness of the city's residences. Following along the wall of the gallery's small room are three paintings by Andrew D. Moeller that exaggerate a spaceless, perspectiveless representation of the built environment; in his meticulously detailed rendering of banal architecture, every brick exhaustively painted, every air-conditioner in its place, he channels the flattened closeness of Martin Wong's storefront paintings, but reductively removes any sense of idiosyncrasy or expressiveness, favoring muteness, conformity, and the precision of an architect. These even brick walls hearken back to Thurlow's mirrored wall while providing counterpoint to Rena Leinberger's piles of debris and detritus found in the main gallery. These communications, connections, and frictions between the many artists' works' materiality and subject matter makes this showcase of emerging talent an exhibit to linger in before emerging again into the heat of the city street.

On Thursday July 7th, Smack Mellon will host a performance by the band **the Ice Machine + Swift**. Pack some bodies in that gallery and feel the heat.



—Natalie Hegert

(\*Image: **Kim Hoeckele**, *Untitled (Methane)*, 2010, digital chromogenic print, 30 x 40 in. Installation view: **Michael Beitz & Matt Monroe**, *Grounded*, 2009, mixed media, 15 x 13 x 12 ft.)