

# Flash Art

R E V I E W S

LISA RUYTER

LEO KOENIG INC.

Lisa Ruyter's suite of paintings is titled "Imitation of Life" after the 1959 Douglas Sirk melodrama of the same name. But perhaps "Imitation of Death" would be more appropriate. In fact, if her watery depictions of cemeteries — from Pere Lachaise in Paris to Boothill Graveyard in Tombstone, Arizona — were to take this title, death would be something we long for, rather than the grim, rain-soaked stage for bitter tears on cue in everything from The Godfather's mafia burials to C-SPAN broadcasts of Princess Di mourners. We might long for death's finality, its silence, its permanence, and even its escape, simply because Ruyter's shimmering negativeland makes death look like the ultimate, luxurious exit strategy. Headstones bob like storm-tossed buoys. Stark, defoliated trees mock the comforts of a leafy bower. And everywhere the tell-tale signs of surface grain yield to the sparing geometries of the graphic line and the planar surface. Who would've thought that a cemetery's gothic template could be reconfigured as a meditation on modular structures? Structures whose pale blue or irradiated yellow facades transform slate-gray monuments into monumental platonic ideals.

Strip a dead architecture of its sentimental backstory and what you find is Ruyter's puddles of lime and lavender, amorphous-seeming, but kept in check by her precise black outlines. That is to say, a new architecture, supersaturated and loud, yet one whose melted contours efface any notion of a graveyard's utility. We don't imagine buried bodies, hunch backed grave-diggers, or a black silhouette of mourners viewed from a distance because Ruyter won't let us.

This is the dream of architecture, not a central casting prop. And, as in most dreams, the emphasis is on a constantly morphing landscape in front us, rather than a lone airless room for the enactment of some Chekovian chamber piece. Ruyter paints from photographs of the actual sites so the dream lens, plus the photographic lens, plus her own imaginary lens — three times removed from lived experience — suggest a concentrated immediacy, a compacting of temporal experience, that you just can't get from the televisual model.

David Hunt



LISA RUYTER, *The Hole*, 2001. Acrylic on canvas, 96 x 144 inches.