

# ART NEW ENGLAND

CONTEMPORARY ART AND CULTURE

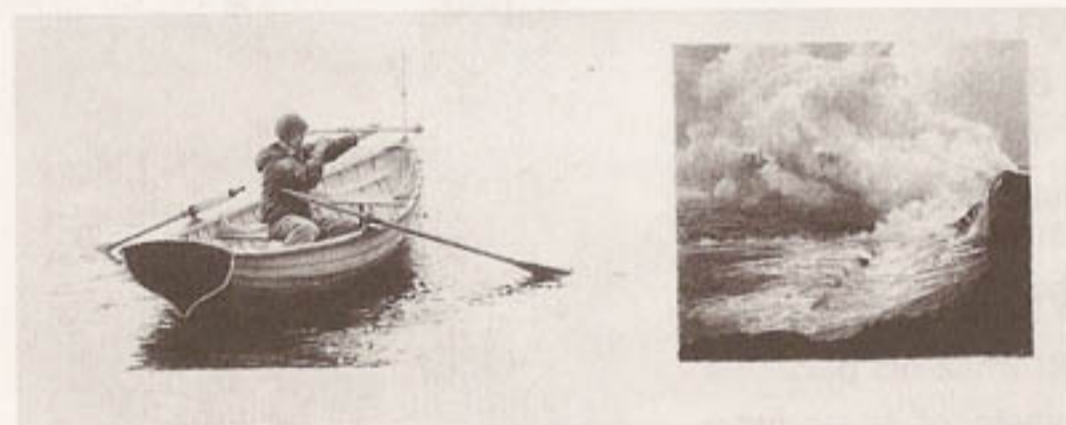
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## VERMONT

Doll-Anstadt Gallery/Burlington [www.dollanstadtgallery.com](http://www.dollanstadtgallery.com)

### ETHAN MURROW: THE OBSESSED SURVEYOR



Ethan Murrow, *The Hydrogen Expedition*—this could be my first steam net site, graphite on paper, 18 x 44", 2005.

To say that Ethan Murrow has arrived would be an understatement. The Vermont-born, Chapel Hill-educated, current resident of Seattle has been exhibiting work for nearly ten years with remarkable success. Murrow excels at making work that exudes quality—be it painting, drawing, video, or installation. In 2003 at Spaces Gallery in Cleveland, Murrow sewed pieces of dyed and painted paper to make a remarkable wall collage, *Thread Sections*, a 144-inch-by-168-inch installation. In 2004, in a piece titled *Thieved Novellas*, Murrow used dozens of 5-inch-by-5-inch ink drawings covered in beeswax to tell the story of his grandparents. With his paintings, Murrow is able to capture space, motion, grace, and mood in work where the subject is pure fantasy and the detail is practically photorealistic. In short, Murrow is an artist to watch.

At Doll-Anstadt Gallery, Murrow exhibited four short videos, which are accompanied by graphite drawings on paper. His videos are about struggle, about searching for something that may or may not be there. He dresses up this iconic narrative with pseudo-scientific gear and the weight of exploration. His persona,

"The Explorer," is the central, solo character used to move this narrative forward.

In *Atmospheric Data Log Recording Keeper*, clips of changing skies are interrupted by scenes of The Explorer working (sometimes banging) on worn, odd scientific equipment while distorted sound is heard in the background. In *The Lost and Faulty Depth Sweeper*, The Explorer digs a hole in the sand to find the "faulty sweeper" and provides commentary about the difficulty of maintaining his equipment. Next, The Explorer wades out with his gear of buoys tied to ropes in *Mollusks, Wrecks, and Undersea Vents*. A sound best described as a foghorn blasts slowly and repeatedly in the background. And lastly, in *A Dialogue at the Sandy Transect*, a one-sided interview with The Explorer is heard while scenes of measuring and sample-taking appear on the screen.

While the videos recall surrealistic cinema and the use of artifice to create reality, the drawings direct the viewer's attention and heighten the project's emotionality. The *Zeppelin Fiasco Series* is composed of six drawings. In *250 Hours of Waiting For It*, the drawing is fixed closely on The Explorer's face. He is looking up through the bulky goggles; oversized headphones cover his ears; his neck is strained while he "waits for it." The drawings are action. Their figures are caught in motion. They tell a story about the story.

The four videos build upon each other, slowly unfolding the story. At one point in the fourth video, The Explorer becomes agitated at the voiceless interviewer. He stumbles and declares, "I don't know what I'm looking for...I'm just out here searching." With that remark, the gestalt of *The Obsessed Surveyor* becomes clear. Murrow's work is not really about exploration; it's not even about The Explorer who figures so prominently. It is about obsession. Ric Kasini Kadour



Ethan Murrow, *The Zeppelin Fiasco* (series), graphite on paper, 12 x 12" each, 2005.