

LINDA STILLMAN

b. 1948 New York, NY. Lives and works in New York and Hillsdale, NY

"I paint a section of the sky every day and display them by the month or the year. Here is a year's worth..."¹ This is how Linda Stillman describes her *Daily Paintings*. A large grid of small rectangles in varying shades of blue and gray, the *Daily Paintings* resemble a heavily pixilated image from afar. Up close, however, the nuances of each panel become more apparent, providing glimpses of clouds here and there. As Stillman's statement implies, this series is an ongoing project in which the artist undertakes the daily task of painting a small section of the sky and adding each panel to her growing collection. The result is a conceptually and visually compelling summary of an amount of time determined by the artist. Though Stillman does not set any strict time limit for her work, she paints the view from a predetermined windowpane in her studio (real or imagined) to achieve a specific angle every day, no matter where she is, in order to assure continuity within the series. The specific time, date, and location are recorded on the back of each panel. Her practice reminds us of another project exhibited here, Reiner Leist's *Window Project*.

The conceptual basis of Stillman's oeuvre, ranging from these *Daily Paintings* to photographs of found gloves to a project recording the progression of a vegetable garden over the course of a few months, finds its origins in the paradoxical work of John Cage. Most important here, is Stillman's also paradoxical reliance on chance and her inherent daily discipline in maintaining rigorous parameters in her work. She has specifically highlighted Cage's impact on her work, citing her own interest in "the everyday stuff and found objects of daily life...[and] the relation of order and chaos, purpose and chance."² Stillman, however, does not use any strict form of chance operations—such as Cage's use of the I-Ching—daily weather conditions or the survival of vegetation, however, are naturally outside of the control of the artist.

Stillman is more attracted to Cage's interest in indeterminacy than his foray into chance per se. (Chance can be calculated according to probability theory; indeterminacy cannot). Stillman relies on indeterminacy, as she relies on nature. The counterpart is that Stillman rigorously follows the demands of her self-imposed observance of the daily sky conditions, whatever that might be. Duration, another important concept in Cage's compositions, also plays an important role, as Stillman must choose a set period of time to execute her works in order to control the number of panels in each piece. In this instance, an entire year is used, but she has also displayed individual months.

Stillman's use of her surroundings also finds a parallel in Cage's concept of silence in music. For Cage, no true silence ever exists. Silent passages in his music, such as the entire composition of the infamous *4'33"*, were filled with everyday, ambient noise. The sky takes on a similar purpose within Stillman's *Daily Paintings*. Like ambient noise, the color of the sky is an unavoidable element of our daily lives, yet one that few people pay much attention to. By focusing an entire series of works on the sky, viewers are forced to focus their attention on it and think of their surroundings, just as Cage hoped to do with music through his heavy use of silence. In Stillman's own words, this "silence" allows her, and Cage, to prove that "we should marvel at the natural world and our material culture and not take it for granted."³

Jennifer Wolf

Notes

1 "Daily Paintings," *Linda Stillman*, www.lindastillman.com/daily-paintings. Accessed on October 22, 2011.

2 Linda Stillman, email correspondence with author, January 1, 2012.

Daily Paintings, detail: 2007, 2007

Acrylic and gouache on paper mounted on panels

365 panels: 77 x 47 x 3/8" (195.6 x 119.4 x 1cm) overall

Collection of the artist

