

Frieze
'Jim Hodges'
18th June 2008
Jonathan Griffin

Jim Hodges

STEPHEN FRIEDMAN GALLERY, LONDON, UK



ghost (2008). Courtesy of the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London.

I would be willing to bet that the 'urban camouflage' fabric pattern (white, light grey, charcoal and black) is employed far more frequently by city-dwellers aiming to stand out from the crowd than by the military hoping to move undetected through the urban battlefield. Jim Hodges has cut and separated out the patches of colour from samples of the fabric and re-stitched them to create four works that look, at first glance, rather like large Modernist monochromes, the lines of thread resembling a frenzy of brushstrokes. The series, titled 'The End of Time' (2008), presents a tautological puzzle: Hodges has metamorphosed the utilitarian pattern, initially designed to visually scatter and disappear the bodies that it covers, into four solid rectangles that look perfectly at home against the white walls of a

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commercial art gallery.

Hodges, however, is not simply concerned with spinning tidy conceptual witticisms. His interest is in chaos – the kind of disorder that is arguably the *lingua franca* of the natural world, that simultaneously terrified and thrilled the Romantics, a tongue that is perpetually bewildering and alienating to the human race. 'The End of Time' describes something close to this in its thrashing lines of stitching and its subtle variations in colour. Contrary to his disingenuous attempt to impose order on a found system, Hodges is revealing the discrepancies that sprout like weeds between the cold slabs of rational process that he lays on top.

Weeds figure in the exhibition's secondary focus: *ghost* (2008), a tangled diorama covered by a large bell jar placed reverently in the centre of the neighbouring gallery. Inside, a lump of earth seemed to sustain a few examples of scraggly plant life, as well as a scattering of dead leaves and a couple of brightly coloured butterflies. Above it, a larger plant might have given the scene some shade were it not made entirely of clear glass. This strange form gives the lie to the rest of the construction: every element in the piece, from the pine needles to the ladybird that can be spied in the undergrowth, is realistically rendered in coloured glass. Here is an object so fastidiously crafted (by a 'master glass fabricator', as it turns out) and acutely fetishized that it almost hurts. Its preciousness shouts down the melancholic echoes indicated in its title – one ghostly form rising up over other (differently) ghostly forms, all of which conjure some bucolic and cutesy illustration of a hedgerow wilderness that is itself a ghost of something that perhaps never existed.

Like 'The End of Time' in the neighbouring room, the power of *ghost* relies on its own alienation from its initial reference point, via time-consuming (not to mention expensive) craft processes. These works should therefore be wolves in sheep's clothing – whispers of untameable forces that lurk in the shadows of their disguises' outward banality. However the forms that the works take are so airless that it seems an impossibly long walk back to where Hodges started out from.