

Art in America

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Jason Middlebrook at Sara Meltzer and the New Museum

Four mixed-medium sculptures representing world-renowned museums were the centerpiece of "Visible Entropy," Jason Middlebrook's second exhibition at Sara Meltzer Gallery. The models presented an intersection between celebrated architecture and time. Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum Bilbao is depicted as if abandoned, its unmistakable forms graffitied and decaying next to a truncated freeway overpass. *The Getty Center* (all works 2001) appears as a ruin, a 21st-century Stonehenge, with caked dirt and lichen replacing the building's white facades. (One imagines architect Richard Meier tearing his hair out were such neglect to occur.) Man-made and organic forms fuse in *Tate Modern*, which culminates with a three-foot-high rendering of the building's central chimney as a geologic core sample.

One of five works on paper comprising the remainder of the show, *Spiral Jetty* visually resurrects Robert Smithson's monumental 1970 earthwork in vivid inks, acrylics and pencil. Middlebrook's jetty defies degradation,

rocketing through space in comic-book-superhero fashion, projectile boulders and squiggly lines streaming behind. Although the gallery's press release credited Smithson's writings on monuments and museums as a source of inspiration for Middlebrook, the selection of drawings on view had a pessimistic Pop sensibility that more readily recalled Ed Ruscha's painting of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art on fire. In *Humpty Dumpty*, a roughly 7-foot-square drawing, a bastion of art meets a violent end, as fragments of an unidentified museum—l-beams, hunks of concrete, sculptures, paintings—blast toward the viewer.

Middlebrook's recent site-specific works have examined the vitality of elemental life forms. *The Geology of Biology*, the artist's ambitious mural project for London's Wellcome Trust, was a vibrant history of the ecological world from the Big Bang to the present. His installation piece *Dig*, currently on view in New York at the New Museum, edges an open stairwell with a thick cross-sectional layer of faux topsoil and plants, as if the earth were reclaiming the site. With this scene of simultaneous excavation, destruction and resurgent life, Middlebrook again suggests that the fate of the museum-monument is subject not only to public opinion but to the omnipotence of nature. —Emily Bowles



Jason Middlebrook: *The Getty Center*, 2001, mixed mediums, 34 by 51 by 63 1/2 inches; at Sara Meltzer.