



Dan Colen, *TBT*, 2014, flowers on bleached Belgian linen, 47 x 37".

oil or acrylic but with crushed flowers. Others, less delicate and with more forceful gestures, are made with chewing gum. The materials may be unconventional but the results hold up formally; Colen is an adept student of styles forged two generations back and the effect is hardly ironic. His skills as a representational painter are considerable, too. At times he indulges in trompe l'oeil effects, most spectacularly in *Secrets and Cymbals, Smoke and Scissors (My Friend Dash's Wall in the Future)*, 2004–2006, a full-scale representation of a studio wall thick with pinned-up clippings and other memoranda. A kind of indirect portrait of its subject, it is also an object lesson in the facticity of memory. The bombastic density of this piece is in striking contrast with the airy insubstantiality of so many others on view here; it is an accumulation of many words and images. And maybe for now the best way to see Colen's work as a whole is in a similar manner. "Help!" suggested that his oeuvre is more than the sum of its parts—and there are many parts I haven't even mentioned, from massive sculptures in the form of boulders to delicate drawings and goofy manipulated thrift-shop paintings—though the insight that would bring out their inner coherence remains elusive.

—Barry Schwabsky

BUFFALO

Deborah Stratman

HALLWALLS CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTER

United primarily by an inquisitive approach that fuses the heart of a poet with the mind of a scientist, artist and filmmaker Deborah Stratman's works engage a staggering range of concerns, geographies, and forms. The dominant impulse underlying her practice is a desire to reach an understanding of a subject, whether it is an astronomical phenomenon—the comets of . . . *These Blazing Starrs!*, 2011, for example—or an ontological condition, such as freedom (*O'er the Land*, 2009). Some questions are, of course, unanswerable, and Stratman's research rarely results in resolution. For the artist, understanding is always provisional, a benchmark at which new mysteries emerge and opportunities for poetics arise.

buried upright, their boxy rear halves sticking out of the ground—is obviously one in a long line of efforts to cite Minimalist structures using readymade objects. Its duple format and mournful tenor might recall Felix Gonzalez-Torres—his 1987 pair of clocks, *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)*, for instance. Gonzalez-Torres is also the inevitable reference point for *Love Roses*, 2014, a collaboration with Nate Lowman. This is a vast walk-through curtain made of thousands of glass crack pipes with little artificial flowers inside them—apparently, these are sold in convenience stores in the guise of romantic offerings, a deception not meant to fool anyone: Users merely toss the colorful contents away.

The prettiest of Colen's paintings are lyrical abstractions whose stained-in hues were not made with

Sinkholes and other subsurface voids were the object of inquiry in "Swallows," Stratman's artist-in-residence exhibition at Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center. The installation, which juxtaposed appropriated materials (such as pylons, sandbags, caution tape, traffic barriers, YouTube videos, and a digital slide show of sinkhole photos) with the artist's own creations (monotype prints, sculptures, paintings, drawings on vellum, and large dioramas), recalled such eccentric institutions as the Museum of Jurassic Technology or Marcel Broodthaers's Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles. Stratman offered a spectrum of perspectives—poetic, philosophical, political, and playful—through which to consider holes and voids, thereby creating a polyvalent montage similar to those found in her videos *In Order Not to Be Here*, 2002, or *The Name Is Not the Thing Named*, 2012.

The exhibition opened with a wall text comprising aphoristic meditations inspired by Roberto Casati and Achille C. Varzi's 1994 book *Holes and Other Superficialities*. The language was formal at first ("Since every hole is ontologically dependent on its host, being a hole is defined as being a hole in [or through] something") and ended casually ("Holes cannot be the only things around"). This shift in tone mirrored the modes through which Stratman moved in the show. Alongside a wall text giving a factually detailed account of the cause and effects of a particularly spectacular sinkhole in Louisiana in 1980, Stratman presented a short video loop of a playfully menacing and endlessly advancing tunnel (drawn from the classic *Looney Tunes* opening sequence). Amid these reveries, Stratman asked: How might something defined by absence be represented? One answer to this question is a set of sculptures she cast from small depressions in the earth, each contoured by the artist to reflect the shape of an actual sinkhole.



View of "Deborah Stratman," 2014.

A few works employing more unsettling perceptual or emotional tactics created a sense of mounting wariness. "Untitled (From the Swallows)," 2014–, for example, is a series of thrift-shop landscape paintings that the artist inverted and then painted over with cross-sections of cavernous black sinkholes. The cracks between the rendered voids allow for a glimpse of the overturned original landscapes—a claustrophobic view of the surface through a subterranean lens. Stratman's mini-museum culminated in a wall text offering an account of a 2006 sinkhole that opened up in a living room in Alta, California, leaving the rest of the house undisturbed. One resident fell to his death, while his pregnant wife slept undisturbed in an adjoining room. With a dream logic reminiscent of David Lynch's films, "Swallows" unsettled our assumption that the foundations on which we rely—our earth, houses, and roads, and perhaps, by extension, our governments—are truly solid.

—Chris Stults