

# ARTFORUM

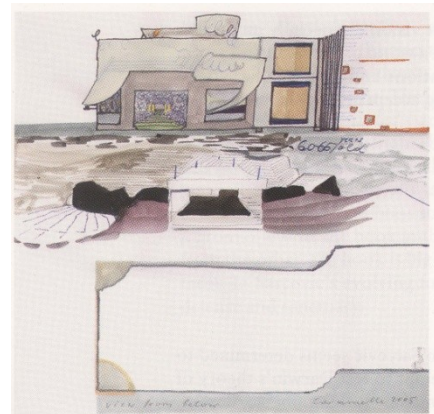
VIENNA

TRACY WILLIAMS, Ltd.  
NEW YORK, NY

## Ernst Caramelle

Galerie Nächst St. Stephan  
Rosemarie Schwarzwälder

This show is kind of commentary on what moves Ernst Caramelle in his life in art. Pigment on plaster, color on walls, sunshine on paper, a folio of delicate drawings con brio—from these basics this cosmopolitan artist, born in Tirol in 1952, composes a topographical intervention in the galleries, with an “ultra-light gesture,” as the title of one of the drawings, from 2001, also suggests. Caramelle’s aesthetic is based on those processes that, in contrast to physicality and gesture, take thought and concept as their central point of departure. And since for Caramelle there are no ideas without formalization, these appear physically as drawings, photography, video, and wall paintings—as fleeting, sun-faded ephemera or as slightly more tangible, object-like gesso pieces.



Ernst Caramelle, *View from below*, 2005, ink, watercolor, and pencil on paper, 8 ½ x 8 ¼”.

Many artists who, like Caramelle, work in a conceptual framework have questioned the classical categories of painting and sculpture, interpreted them anew, or abandoned them altogether. But the parameters of painting have never lost their interest for Caramelle. Yet he is an expert in all that is provisional. Between content and form oscillates a work that is never hermetic, never even entirely finished. Its visual openness lies in its nature as process, its intellectual freedom in the flow of time, while its status as an aggregate changes as needed.

One of these aggregates is the alternative system of representation by which he has been known to transpose the traditional exhibition space into book form. In 1979 he entered the annals of international Conceptual art with his “Forty Found Fakes,” published in New York. The black-and-white catalogue pretended to illustrate the works of renowned artists. But in fact it was filled with found images from newspapers and magazines that had coincidental similarities with works

by Buren Beuys, Serra, and Judd. This richly referential artwork dealt with a veritable mountain of reflections on perception, reproductions and originals, forgery and authenticity. Available in the gallery now is the catalogue of Caramelle's 2005 exhibition in the Fundação Serralves in Porto. This is an artist's book that gathers his complete printed works from 1974 to 2004. Here it becomes clear that, for Caramelle, artwork and memory, original and documentation are part of the same universe. Therefore, as the maker of synopses of experiences in vision and thought, he takes the relationships between the works just as seriously as their relationships to other contexts.

Never is Caramelle so outspoken as when he draws. In a selection of extremely loose new works on paper, he observes architecture, art history, what it means to be an artist, the world. These are pithy vignettes, sketches in which he integrates language and script. The complex semantics of the drawings answer the mute lineage of the local Expressionism with Wittgensteinian language philosophy. With his play on words and meanings, Caramelle proves to be a thinker and a poet who understands drawings as something universal, as the beginning and end of a process of thought. "My works always come from my head," he says. "I rarely do anything from the gut."

Fundamental skepticism about speed and affirmation have allowed Caramelle to create a body of work distinguished by its extreme economy of means. It is the work of a discreet, delicate draftsman and of a master of understatement: In a world of unlimited accumulations, the only sustainable move is subtraction!

—*Brigitte Huck*

*Translated from German by Sara Ogger.*