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ROBERTA SMITH Art Review of Noah Sheldon's *Pink and Tan*

Gentle Textures in an Outpost Of Color and Quiet Ecstasy

The Metropolitan Museum of Art has some wonderful, carefully orchestrated chill-out spots — permanent little oases where you can sit, rest and muse without breaking the spell of art. The museum might consider adding another: “Pink and Tan,” Noah Sheldon’s solo exhibition at the D’Amelio Terras Gallery in Chelsea.

It’s simple. The Met acquires “Pink and Tan” lock, stock and barrel — or rather, player piano, wind chime and lighted pegboard — and makes it the heart of its 20th-century galleries. There it would function like a modern, slightly Dada version of the Ming Scholar’s Court in the Chinese galleries or the George Nakashima wood-paneled reading room in the Japanese galleries: something specific but meditative, about art but also atmosphere. As with the Ming court there is even a fountain.



Noah Sheldon’s installation “Pink and Tan” incorporates sound, sculpture (with a fountain) and photography

Mr. Sheldon, who first studied to be a composer, is skilled at separating beauty from the material world while reminding us that it is just about everywhere. He makes his quietly ecstatic art out of almost nothing, or, more accurately, several almost-nothings, carefully juxtaposed.

Here he starts by putting pink gels on the gallery’s fluorescent lights, unsettling your sense of intrinsic color. The side walls are lined with wan black-and-white photographs. On the left seven of these trace the path of a hazy sun over different nondescript landscapes.

Rugged hills and a barbed-wire fence give the soft images a harsh Western mien. They conclude with one large, grainy color image of a blazing yellow-and-red sunset that is nonetheless made of several superimposed scans.

On the right six similarly pale images zero in on dry grass tangled in abstract, calligraphic patterns. Three are close-ups, and three are closer still, as if to emphasize that there is always more to see. These images are flanked by relative brazenness: two large color images show the tips of peacock feathers, which combine gorgeous “eyes” with wafting grasslike strands.

Nearby, the metal hemispheric fencepost caps of a wind chime tinkle incessantly, thanks to little mechanical tugs. Its falsetto counters the resonant bass of the old but complexly amplified player piano. It picks out a round of nine notes all timed to different intervals that form a wayward, time-lapse almost-melody. These sounds have a visual counterpart in a large sheet of pegboard bisecting the gallery; it is riddled with tiny Christmas-tree lights that glow and fade at different intervals. On one side you see mostly lights; on the other, green wires form a climbing vine.

The fountain adds gentle, burbling sounds to the mix. It is the most solid, overtly worked piece in the show, and it centers on a modeled cement cone, painted swimming-pool white, that might be a scholar’s rock reinterpreted in plaster by Giacometti. This sits in a plain plywood box whose stainless-steel interior and tinted fluorescents create near-rainbow effects. After a while, you may notice that the wind chime casts a chandelierlike shadow of pink orbs on the wall, while in the corner the light coming from the gallery’s offices is pale green.

As an ensemble Mr. Sheldon’s work sharpens the senses without seeming to demand much of them. It makes us aware of the way the world reverberates into art and art reverberates back, bouncing off everything in the immediate vicinity. One could imagine people at the Met leaving this oasis to explore the rest of the museum with stars in their eyes.

“Pink and Tan” continues through Saturday at D’Amelio Terras, 525 West 22nd Street, Chelsea; (212) 352-9400.