



Shotgun Review

Stephen Lichty

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For his first solo show on the West Coast, New York–based artist Stephen Lichty has recast Capital Gallery as a liminal space. Capital, itself a storefront repurposed as art gallery, is currently white-walled and bare except for a painting and a sculpture, eponymously titled *Mural* and *Ring*, respectively (both 2015). The final component of the exhibition is a live performance that occurred at the opening on July 24, 2015.

Mural measures 48 by 50.4 inches, and is painted on the far wall of the gallery using casein derived from human breast milk and naturally mined magnetite pigment. Dense black, it has a weighty presence and appears to exert a gravitational pull of its own, while simultaneously resisting gravity by virtue of its verticality. Viewed from the side, its granular surface resembles that of a meteor.

Delicately suspended closer to the gallery's capacious window is *Ring*, a 10-inch-diameter steel ring oxidized black by a process akin to gun bluing. It floats in midair, like a monocle on a tether.

This is an extreme space to negotiate. The viewer is confronted with reductive forms that embody dissonant qualities, including blackness and whiteness; the circumscribed and the infinite; solidity and hollowness; density and levity; the hard-edged masculinity of magnetite versus the tender feminine nurturing of breast milk. Paradoxically, it is the emptiness and in-between-ness that make this a place of pure potentiality.



Stephen Lichty. *Stephen Lichty*, 2015; Installation view, Capital Gallery, San Francisco. Courtesy of the Artist and Capital Gallery.

On opening night, Lichty materialized suddenly on the pavement outside Capital, an austere presence attired in black. Entering the gallery with deliberate slowness, he took off his shoes, and then, using a tree branch as a sounding device, he made the ground's presence heard by scraping the floor, coaxing out of it a screeching and wailing. The performance concluded with a few simple corporeal gestures: slow pronation/supination of the hands, hands placed on buttocks, and a sustained bow.

Lichty's ritual, notable for its reverence for ground and space, imbued the art with new life. *Ring* seemed not only a lens but also a portal steering me toward *Murals* atramentous expanse as the latter's pull grew even stronger. The square and the circle had undergone a transubstantiation of sorts. Employing economy of form and gesture, with respect for material, Stephen Lichty conjured up a topology of transcendence. He revealed himself to be not only thinker and dreamer, technician and tinkerer, but above all, an alchemist.

Colin L. Fernandes is a physician, writer, and collector. His writing has appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Contra Costa Times*, a Penguin anthology, the *San Francisco Arts Quarterly*, and the online magazines *Art Practical* and *Daily Serving*.

Stephen Lichty is on view at CAPITAL, in San Francisco, through August 29, 2015.