

Art On Paper

June 2001

Miranda Lichtenstein, "Lover's Lane." Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects, New York.

Only ten prints comprised this, Miranda Lichtenstein's second New York solo show, yet together they seemed to tell a story (albeit an open-ended one). For whatever narrative or meaning viewers ascribe to these scenes, they are based as much upon what Lichtenstein chooses to leave out as upon what she depicts. Lichtenstein photographs only at night, using the headlights (or, at times, the brake lights) of her car as the sole source of illumination, imbuing the work with either bold, simple contrasts or a murky, twilight air. Her pretty mundane subject matter (underbrush, a fallen fence, dead leaves on a field) gets a certain juice from her nocturnal, scene-of-the-crime style. In one oddly compelling image, a sliver of pale blue sky opens a narrow crevasse within a dark silhouette of trees; in another, scrappy weeds and a chain-link fence form a tangled jungle, with just a bit of a clearing, or maybe a dirt path, visible in the distance. A statement that accompanied

qualities that tease the imagination.) *Untitled (Bennett's Farm)* (1999) is ostensibly just a suburban lake glimpsed on a dark night, with a few shrubs on the far shore, yet the water has an iridescent, moonlit quality, like flowing strands of glowing hair, and the headlight beam takes on an almost existential presence—a stand-in, if you will, for us. If she snapped that headlight off, would the whole scene disappear into nothingness, as if it were all a weird dream—or would it go on, somehow, without us? Lichtenstein's previous photographic series, entitled *Danbury Road* (1997–98) (shot similarly at night in Danbury, Connecticut), was more successful overall, but in a way, it was more simple. Every image in *Danbury* focused on a specific subject (most often a house or structure) that seemed to emit an almost cinematographically perfect ambient light. Here Lichtenstein's focus is less pinpointed, more vague, yet all these nearly abstract shots of scrub brush and fences also seem more experimental, more risky. If such scenes can convince us that mystery and drama are to be found most



the exhibition informed viewers that Lichtenstein chooses these sites because they're used by suburban teenagers as private spots for romantic trysts, parties, and the like. That's interesting, but not very, given photography's preoccupation of late with all things adolescent.

Better are the images, which stand up, purely formally, as powerful mixtures of natural and ambient light. (Indeed, it's their abstract, enigmatic

anywhere, we have no choice, then, but to follow Lichtenstein down her dark paths.

—Sarah Schmerler

The Ingrao Collection. Galleria Comunale d'Arte di Cagliari, Sardinia, Italy.

An exhibition this winter at the Galleria Comunale d'Arte di Cagliari (the Municipal Art Gallery of Cagliari) showed some 250 works from