

ARTFORUM

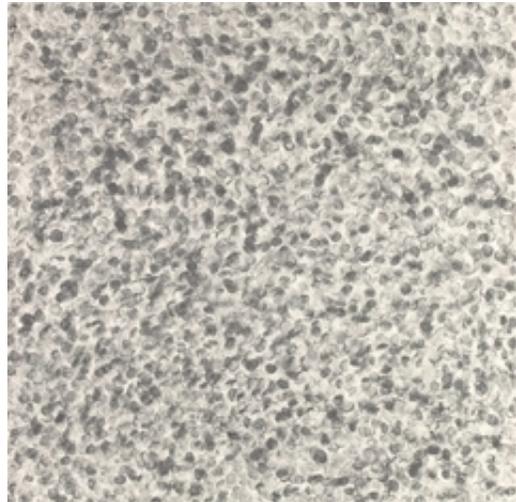
Joel Shapiro

CRAIG F. STARR GALLERY

5 East 73rd Street

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Float Joel Shapiro's name in an art-world crowd, and the images conjured will likely be of shrunken bronze houses and barely balanced sculptures. Spanning the period from 1969—the year of his inclusion in the Whitney's pulse-taking survey "Anti-Illusion: Procedure/Materials"—to 1972, Shapiro's latest show distills a moment prior to his foray in the unresolved brand of figuration for which he is now known. Two types of work are on view: drawings composed of the artist's inked fingerprints, and horizontal spreads of small, fired-clay units that permute sculpture's essential spatial vectors. Both emerge through direct contact with the artist's hand as it presses, cups, stacks, and rolls. Contra Minimalism's obsession with rigidity, Shapiro tests the ways in which materials yield to touch. The result is work caught between art as verbal predicate and art as material instantiation, between the hand's singularity and the impersonal logic of Donald Judd's "one thing after another."



Joel Shapiro, *Untitled*, 1969–70, ink on paper, 17 1/2 x 17 1/2".

Thirteen fingerprint drawings, all untitled and from various dates, attest to Shapiro's talent for straddling conceptual binaries. Each consists of repeated impressions of one of Shapiro's fingers—index or pinky—in wavering lines or looping, all-over dispersals that recall Piero Manzoni's series of several years prior, "Fingerprints," 1961. Some prints are sharp, their whorls and arcs lithographic; others resemble painterly daubs, their grooves obscured by excess ink. Several compositions riff on the grid's orthogonal logic, their marks progressing in rows that never quite align at the paper's rightmost edge. Two are so crowded with ink as to be almost monochromatic. Here, by confining his impressions to a square that is slightly skewed and hedged by a border of untouched paper, Shapiro seems to nod to Kazimir Malevich's Suprematist icon *Black Square*, 1915. It is a pairing that deserves to be teased further.

Performing a sort of serial self-portraiture, Shapiro subjects our culture's definitive sign of identity to an iterative order that, paradoxically, insists on singularity, as variations in pressure and density leave no two prints exactly alike. Ambiguities aside, this show makes one thing certain: If the history of Process art is to be rewritten, Shapiro deserves a starring role.

— Courtney Fiske

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