

March 6, 1998

## ART IN REVIEW

By **KEN JOHNSON**

Michael Ashkin  
Andrea Rosen Gallery  
130 Prince Street  
SoHo  
Through March 21

Michael Ashkin's magically realistic miniature landscapes look like the works of a model railroad hobbyist, but with a difference. Whereas the typical hobbyist tries to create an idealized world, Mr. Ashkin constructs Godforsaken industrial wastelands. Though not as awesomely expansive as the huge piece he showed at last year's Whitney Biennial, the table-top tableaux Mr. Ashkin presents here still offer cinematic, impressively spacious bird's-eye views. (Measurements range from one to almost six feet.)

In each, somewhere near the center of a plane made to resemble a desert, a mud flat or polluted shallows, you find a tiny remnant of human habitation: an overturned truck sinking in a rubble-strewn bog, a valved pipe sticking up out of stagnant water, an abandoned oil rig. These elements are like surrogates for the lonely wanderer who confronts the void in Caspar David Friedrich's paintings.

Some may read Mr. Ashkin's work as a critique of modernity, but it is mood rather than message, the poignant feelings of isolation and sadness, and the ingeniously crafted illusion, that mainly account for the attraction of his mordantly romantic visions. **KEN JOHNSON**