

Michael Ashkin,
Andrea Rosen Gallery, through
March 4 (see Chelsea).

My first thought about Michael Ashkin's new work had little to do with the work itself and more to do with the fleeting life of fads in the art world. Was it just the last Whitney Biennial that put Ashkin's miniature panoramas of industrialized landscapes on the art-world map? Back then, it seemed as if everyone was into models. But that craze soon faded. Ashkin, too, has moved on, switching from model-making to video in an attempt to broaden his work.

Ashkin's main piece here, *Proof Range*, consists of monitors showing just the sort of benighted scenery that he mastered in his sculptures: in this case, an abandoned military base in South Jersey. We see large, concrete em-

bankments, barricades and acres of tarmac overgrown with grass. It's the kind of place that boys, particularly, love to stumble upon in their wanderings from home—the kind of place where both their imaginations and antisocial tendencies can run wild.

Ashkin's film parks itself on a view, stays there, then shifts a bit and stays there, too. The intensity with which he fixes upon the subject suggests still photography more than film; it appears that he's trying to monumentalize the site as something beyond its prior use, or even its current state as a romantic ruin. Indeed, there's something haunting about this piece, but I'm not entirely convinced that Ashkin's approach to his subject is all that compelling.

A series of photos in the front of the gallery shows that Ashkin, himself a

Jersey boy, has always taken pictures of the Garden State's industrial wastelands as studies for his models. In his romantic connection to those forlorn sites, Ashkin reveals himself as a spiritual heir to Robert Smithson—and kin, perhaps, to Tony Soprano.—*Robert Mahoney*



Michael Ashkin, *Proof Range*, installation view, 1999.