

GERING & LÓPEZ GALLERY

Art in America



View of William Anastasi's *Blind*, proposed 1966, executed 2003, painted room and furnishings; at White Box Annex.

William Anastasi at White Box Annex

In late 1966, when resistance to the war in Vietnam was beginning to roil, Conceptual artist William Anastasi presented *Blind* to the Dwan Gallery as part of a series of site-specific projects that posited the space of the gallery as an essential component of the work. For logistical reasons, *Blind*, a critique of the realities and illusions of warfare and perception, was never installed, although it seemed a perfect vehicle for much of the sentiment of the times. Recently, almost 40 years later, in the midst of another divisive military intervention, *Blind* was finally realized, and it appeared very timely. Stunningly simple, it might be considered a room designed for deceptions.

Anastasi painted the gallery in camouflage pattern, from floor to walls to ceiling, covering doors, light switches, columns, reception desk and two office chairs. A telling detail was the meticulous bisecting of the structural column

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located at the gallery's entrance. It was camouflaged on the side that was part of Anastasi's allocation—the space is not completely enclosed—but remained its usual white on the other, which is part of another artist's installation. This is the kind of territorial demarcation that wars are all about. Roughly, energetically executed in pale olive drab, muddy browns, lightly tanned flesh tones, grays and blacks, the camouflage was vertiginous in overall effect. The viewer's orientation and sense of measure was disrupted, as three dimensions compressed into two, the room flattened and distances became confused—a metaphoric equivalent, it would seem, to a world blinded by the rhetoric of war.

Camouflage in its current form was developed by artists during the course of World War I, roughly concurrent with Cubism and with the observation that flattened, broken-up surfaces tend to read ambiguously. Here, Anastasi camouflaged an interior space rather than an exterior structure, making what was invisible visible, reversing the usual strategy of camouflage. Some questions Anastasi's installation provoked: How visible or invisible can war and its consequences be? Can we camouflage death and destruction, the piles of corpses, the shattered homes, villages and cities? Does war cloak our essential humanity or is our essential humanity war? Is civilization itself merely veneer, filigree, camouflage? *Blind* gave us much to think about.

—Lilly Wei