



Tick Tock

Will Rogan scores with a canny show of photography at Altman-Siegel
10.12.10 - 4:52 pm | [Matt Sussman](#) |

In a characteristically poetic passage within 1980's *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes describes early cameras, given their cabinet-like appearance and precise mechanical innards, as "clocks for seeing." I couldn't shake the phrase while taking in Will Rogan's "Stay Home," an ambiguous smile of a solo show composed of photographs and three-dimensional photographic collages at Altman Siegel.

Taking the measure of time is very much on Rogan's mind, as it was on Barthes' some 40 years ago. A photograph is but an imperfect means of forestalling time's onward march: it offers the present a momentary record of an instant long gone. So too has photography, at least in the nondigital form that Barthes was writing about, become an index of a past medium, and in our current age of Photoshop, an object for nostalgic longing (see the Hipstamatic iPhone app).

Rogan skirts this sand trap even though his practice deliberately engages with 1970s printed matter and evokes a range of photographers from that decade and later, most notably Lee Friedlander and Daido Moriyama's social landscapes, and to a lesser extent, Sherrie Levine's appropriations. The three small sculptural collages of cropped images affixed to painted wood pieces with beeswax even look as if they are from another time. Indeed, it's easy to get distracted by Rogan's mode of address ("hey guys, here are some cool books I found at a yard sale, and look what I came upon while walking to the corner store"), by his work's muted cleverness and calculated arrangement of happenstance, that it can be easy to overlook the substance of what he's saying.

Viewing the Past As it Happens takes its title from a passage in a picture book on astronomy that is itself the subject of the photograph. The book lies open; a picture of a galaxy on the right page. A description on the adjacent page details that what we are looking at, that what astronomers gaze at through their telescopes night after night, is in fact millions of years old. Of course, this also functions as a gloss (as does the photograph's title) on the act of taking a picture: in that moment when we look into the viewfinder, our fingers poised to capture what we see before us, we are in a sense seeing what will become the past.

Two other photographs of educational books, *The Elusive Nature of Time* and *Man Versus Clock: The Unequal Struggle*, drive the point home that the photographer's relationship to time is a Sisyphean one, even as the lifted bathos of their titles sends up the self-seriousness inherent to such postulating. Rogan seems to say, "Don't freak out, too much," while simultaneously holding up evidence to the contrary. The detritus that catches Rogan's eye in other pictures — reflective glass shards, a gutter-lodged beer can, a taped-together window, an abandoned sneaker — are corollaries to the amazing sign on the paper shredding business captured in *Shredder* that reads, "DOCUMENT DESTRUCTION — While You Watch," in light of which "document" starts to read more as a verb than a noun.

With *Busts*, a series of six magazine pages (covers perhaps?) that have been altered so that only the ghostly white silhouettes of unknown seated subjects remain, Rogan moves from documenting destruction to participating in it. It's hard to tell whether or not the outlines are formed from erasing a prior image or painting over unrelated text, some of which is visible underneath the white. Regardless, the message is still clear: time is on no one's side.