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Art in America

Nam, Hiji, "Day's End in America: Shannon Ebner at Kaufmann Repetto," Hyperallergic, January 2, 2022

CITY OF I.000 EYES STURM UND DRANG. FOOTWORK TERMINUS AND OTHER SAVAGE DAYS IN THE FIELD.	A L R D E N S L T Y A L R M A S S A L R P R E S S U R E	WEATHERED TERMS. SEARCHED TERMS. A SOCIAL SALADS & DIS POETIC ASTHMATICS. A SUDDEN PRESSURE FILLS THE AIR.	CON DUC TION CON MEC TION CON MER GENCE CON MO LUTIONS AROUND THE SUN.	HOW THE SOCIAL GOT REASSEMBLED HUNG OUT TO DRY ON AN IMPALPABLE HORIZON
LE WAR LA LIE ARE ESSENCES. THEN WHEN WILL THE WATERY BORES BEGIN TO DRY UP TODAY. THE FORECAST REFERENCE EVAPO TRANSPIRATION REPORT IS IN. SOMETHING LIKE THE DAILY FRET. THE WEEKLY FRET. AND THE DEPARTURE FROM NORMAL FRET. TRANSITION TO OPERATIONAL STEP & FRET DOPES INTO THE ATMOSPHERIC WHOOW & ZERO GALM OF	A M B I E N T A I R II PLACE ANY THING THEN WHAT IS THIS UBIOUITOUS PHENOM ENON OF FACE TO FACE TO RELATIONS. SOCIALIDAS IN AS SOCIALIDAS IN A	CLOUD CLOUD ATLAS BASE CLOUD CLOUD BURSTS DECK CLOUD CLOUDS COVER UCROWDS COVER UCROWDS NHADS ON XXXXX BO DIES XXXXX HANDS ON XXXXX HANDS ON XXXXX HANDS ON XXXXX HANDS ON XXXXX HANDS ON XXXXX BO DIES I THEN WHAT SAY YOUL	GRAYDAYS YJIRALDAYS. CLOUDS THAT WATCH. CLOUDS THAT WATCH. CLOUDS THAT WATCH. CLOUDS THAT LISTEN. STORM AND STREES. SPIT WREST. ARREST. CUMULUS MUNILIS CUMULUS MEDIOCRIS CUMULUS MEDIOCRIS EYERYTHING LOST BY WORK OF ART WASENSE OF DIS EASE HAS REYER EXPLAINED ANYTHING LIKE THIS BEFORE	OF STORM DRAINS B U L K H E A D S AND PUMP STATIONS. FRET TO THE LEFT T THE FRED TO THE RIGHT A LANDSCAPE OF DIAT FORMS LTT SHAPE NOTES CALLS OUT INTO THE NIGHT FIGHT 4/OR FLIGHT
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Shannon Ebner, *FRET*, 2022, archival pigment print, 116 by 237 inches. PHOTO GREG CARIDEO/COURTESY THE ARTIST AND KAUFMANN REPETTO MILAN/NEW YORK

As a young MFA student at Yale in the late 1990s, Shannon Ebner set out on a pilgrimage to Nova Scotia to find her hero, Robert Frank. The Swiss artist's black-and-white photobook The Americans (1958) became a defining social-critical document of postwar American life, and the English edition often includes an introduction by Jack Kerouac: "After seeing these pictures you end up finally not knowing anymore whether a jukebox is sadder than a coffin." The tragedy of America often haunts Ebner's pictures, as in her 2017 exhibition "Stray" at Galerie Eva Presenhuber in New York, where her images featured wry phrases she'd spelled out such as EX - PRESS / HOPE FOR THE ARTIST IN AMERICA (a line from Susan Howe) and AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHS. That uneasy presence lingers in "Fret," her recent exhibition at Kaufmann Repetto in New York, which included thirteen melancholic black-and-white street photographs. In CODE OF FLAG BEHAVIOR (2022), a United States flag is visible behind a round pane of partly frosted glass that reflects bare trees in the distance, though the logic of these pictorial layers is subtly off kilter. A cryptic manipulation of perspective seems to be at play; it permeates many of the photographs, formally conveying how personal and national narratives are subject to editorial interventions and translations. In METRO PICTURE (2022), a door is marked with two sets of handprints-another discontinuity, as the delightfully childish signature typically found on frosty car windows reads more as a cry for help on the handle-less door.

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With Robert Frank: 'He Was Just What You Would Expect from a Description by Jack Kerouac'

Words as Pictures: Shannon Ebner in LA Ebner's pictures are also full of familiar streets and neighborhoods surrounding the gallery: a SoHo construction wall, a Lower East Side phone-screen-repair shop, the Chase Bank on the Bowery-the gray matter of the city, a place where layers of history and language flow and converge. See TIMBUK2 (2022), picturing a storefront that concurrently advertises a pop-up sample sale as well as retail space for rent, or DAYS END (2022), where the artist photographs David Hammons's 2014-21 work Day's End, a monumental metal building frame in Hudson River Park that serves as a tribute to Gordon Matta-Clark's 1975 architectural cuts out of the shed that once stood on the site, also called Day's End. Ebner seems to have double-exposed a picture of a chain-link fence over the image of Hammons's work. Within the larger context of her practice, these pictures seem to gesture to the alienation, discontent, and dissipation that have long been disavowed in romanticized and optimistic visions of American life. If such national mythologies were particularly powerful in

Frank's time, today it is clear that even the nostalgia for the "good old days" rings hollow.

For her 2019 exhibition at Altman Siegel in San Francisco, "Wet Words in a Hot Field," Ebner constructed individual letters of the alphabet out of paper and pasted them onto a wall with water to photograph each separately; she then selfreflexively composed the prints of the letters into phrases borrowed from the instruction manuals of 35mm DSLR cameras. The same alphabet appeared in this exhibition in her visual-text poem FRET (2022), which occupied a gigantic wall in the gallery with a meditation on loss and anxiety: HOW THE SOCIAL GOT / REASSEMBLED & / HUNG OUT TO DRY / ON / AN / IMPALPABLE HORIZON / OF STORM DRAINS, / BULKHEADS / AND PUMP STATIONS. Her methodology remained promising, but the form (which carried traces of that mutable category of "concrete poetry") was affected by a



Shannon Ebner, *COMMERCIAL STREET*, 2022, archival pigment print mounted on aluminum, 11 ¹/₄ by 14 ¹/₂ by 1 ¹/₂ inches.

PHOTO GREG CARIDEO/COURTESY THE ARTIST AND KAUFMANN REPETTO MILAN/NEW YORK

rather exhausting degree of pathos. In the exhibition text, the artist cryptically wrote that she conceived of the wall poem as a "weather event that is facing off with a group of images that are forecasting the social world." Her words, there and on the wall, reminded me of Lars von Trier's 2011 film *Melancholia*, in which Earth, directly in the path of the titular planet's orbital death-dance, faces total annihilation. Ebner again: CONDUCTION / CONVECTION / CONVERGENCE / CONVOLUTIONS / AROUND THE SUN [...] A LANDSCAPE OF / DIRT ... CALLS OUT / INTO THE NIGHT, / FIGHT &/OR FLIGHT. This biblical forecast is one of collapse and breakdown—of the social, of the self. Reasons enough to fret, but if contemporary life has made clear the fragility of America (not only a myth, but also a disease), the rupture of its triumphant arc might ultimately be a form of salvation.