

ARTFORUM

Helfand, Glen, "Critics' Picks: Will Rogan," *Artforum*, July 20, 2018



Will Rogan, *The obscurity of the mid day twilight*, (detail) 2018, marine paint, mast, ceramic, sea life, 20 1/2 x 21 x 21".

SAN FRANCISCO

Will Rogan

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25th Street

June 28 - August 25

"Albatross," Will Rogan's strangely potent exhibition, is timely in multiple senses. The sculptures, found objects, and photographs allude to the effects of climate change and also to the concept of time itself, in its varied scales and paces. Immediately, seascape photographs and rocks placed like Minimalist sculptures on the floor establish a geological baseline.

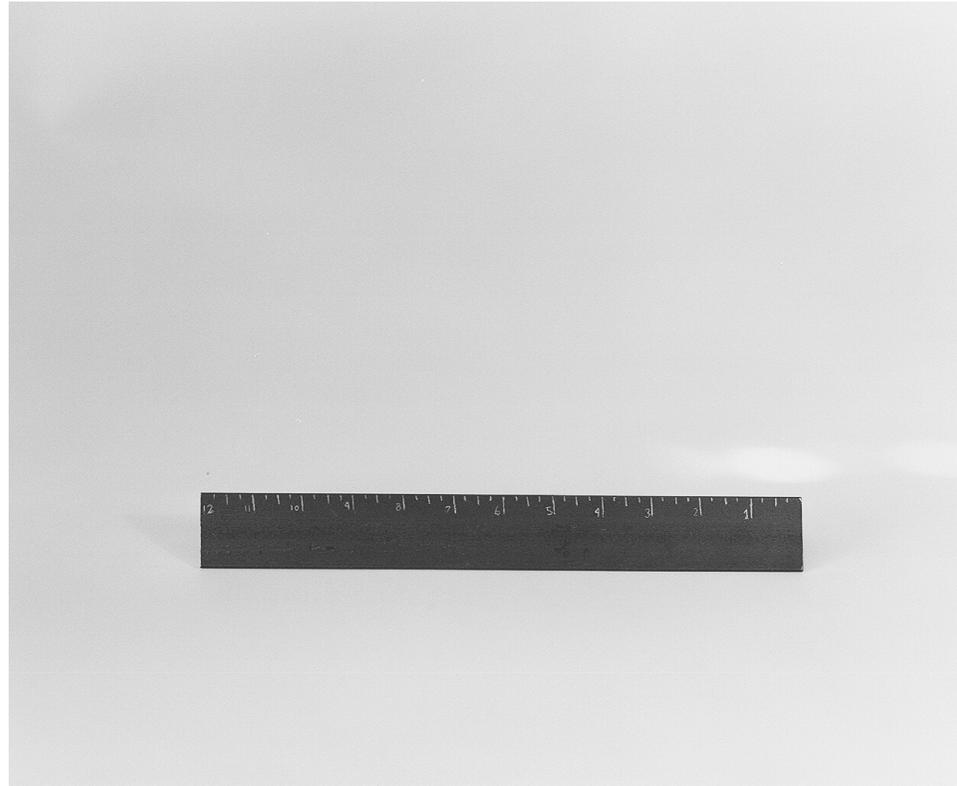
Weights and chains from cuckoo clocks droop from photographs in small handmade frames,

and elsewhere, horological mechanisms have been reconfigured to make die-cut shapes of urns, keys, and faces that rotate at their own, sometimes nervous rhythms. Time slips on, glacially, humanly.

Rogan currently lives and works on a houseboat in Sausalito and summers in the Antarctic, making photographs while on research trips—generative experiences that are reflected here. *The obscurity of mid day twilight* (all works 2018), for example, repurposes his boat's mast, a tall object painted shiny maritime white, as an elongated pedestal that reaches into the exposed gallery rafters. Placed on top is an urn that was submerged for a year and a half in the water below Rogan's domestic vessel, attracting whatever algae, barnacles, or sea grass would grow. From the floor, it looks like a wise, mangy owl.

The large stones and boulders also serve as bases for oversize ceramic novelty mugs filled with slowly evaporating seawater. These porous vessels, fired but unglazed, have already begun to grow a fuzz of salt crystal from the brine. In *Filter, Stress (What Stress?)*, the parenthetical phrase is inscribed on the mug's surface in scribbly Roz Chast-ish script. A nearby photo, *Eclipse Snake*, depicts a rattler the artist encountered on a hike. The wood frame, carved with frantic squiggles, exudes a sense of impending, camouflaged danger.

— Glen Helfand



A keen observation of the material environment and a concomitant reflection on time's passing repeatedly surface in Will Rogan's photographs, sculptures, and videos. For the early photographic series *Public Sculpture* (2001), Rogan captured unexpected moments of strange beauty in the urban environment when things went awry: a car door opening and pinning a bicycle to an RV; a snail climbing up the side of a car; a plastic bag entangled in barbed wire; a sewer cover that was painted over and over in the street, with each repainting revealing the rotation of the cover. Rogan's recording of these kinds of chance discoveries in his environs, where chaos eclipses a natural order, typify his subtle, inquisitive style. He locates the meaning inherent in seemingly insignificant everyday situations by connecting them to larger, existential concerns relating to the nature of things in the universe, both physical and metaphysical. In effect, the accumulation of these documented moments is a way to both make sense of them and appreciate their mystery.

Many of Rogan's varied interests coalesce in *MATRIX 253*, which features motifs he has revisited in his work for over a decade. Moreover, the passage of time, subtly evoked in the sewer cover photograph, underlies many of the works in the exhibition. In *Picture the Earth spinning in space* (2014), he rephotographed his earlier color picture in black-and-white, a transformation that obscures the legibility of the image. Without the bright yellow stripes visible on the surface of the rotated sewer cover, it is difficult to discern what is out of place as the defining yellow and black street paint disappears into gray scale. *The way it is* (2004), the original, color version of the photograph, was last shown a decade ago and Rogan's revisit of it here, in his first solo museum exhibition, shifts the meaning of the image from a marker of elapsed time in the urban environment into an uncanny signpost of time's accrual in his own work.

Clocks, indices of time, have been consistent motifs in Rogan's oeuvre, appearing and reappearing in various forms. His adoption of Salvador Dali's melting clock, in particular, has emerged in recent years as a poignant symbol of the changing structural nature of time. Significantly, Rogan appropriated the iconic Dali image from a kitschy mug that sits on his desk—something he experiences everyday in his studio—rather than from a canonical art-historical text. In one sculpture, seven Dali clocks rendered in brass drape like Slinkies over the steps of a fragile ceramic staircase, which the artist fired in a pit in his backyard. Rogan made all seven of the clocks by hand, cutting them from brass sheets and then bending and inscribing them accordingly. Their shiny industrial material contrasts with the organic matter of the fired clay; yet, the rounded contours of the brass clocks endow them with a seeming softness, while the hard rectilinearity of the ceramic steps implies a false sense of strength. The preponderance of clocks on the small staircase seems an absurd excess, mocking our attempts to track and quantify time, even as it inevitably slips away.

Twenty-four (2014)—one of several mobiles that Rogan has made over the past few years—also conjures a timepiece, albeit one that is nonlinear and ordered by chance. The numbers from a clock face dangle beneath the mobile's arms, yet they rotate in an illogical manner, guided randomly by air

currents, sometimes even spinning in reverse. Rogan cut each of the numbers out of brass sheets and then painted them white on one side and black on the other, with the edges revealing the natural sheen of the metal. In *Negative* (2014), Rogan appropriates a cheap plastic film camera that *TIME Magazine* sent out to its subscribers in the 1980s. Rogan has reversed the original design and shape, transforming the camera into a negative of itself, with the letters TIME rendered in reverse—another instance of time as a shifting, illegible construct.

A sense of upended order, or of an understanding of time that looks both forward and backward, also informs Rogan's photographs of a reversed one-foot ruler made by his daughter on which the numbers run from right-to-left rather than left-to-right. The numerals on the ruler—one through twelve, again summoning those found on the face of a clock—call attention to our desire, or need, to quantify and regulate the world around us using tools with a standardized system of units. The backwards ruler, like the inverted camera, shows the glitch in the system, where a personal, subjective ordering threatens to undermine a prevailing structure and regime.

Over the last several years, Rogan has been interested in magicians, collecting old issues of the magician trade magazine *M-U-M* (an acronym for Magic-Unity-Might) and incorporating its pages into his work. He was first drawn to the journal while researching the magician Doug Henning (the focus of an earlier body of work) who gave up practicing magic to study transcendental meditation. In one series of works on paper, he erases the magicians' bodies, leaving only the object(s) they hold; in another, he covers certain parts of their bodies with triangles of black paper. Through this obscuring process, he imbues the magician, an operator of the unknown, with an even greater sense of mystery. For a new artist book, *Broken wands* (2014), made for this exhibition, Rogan reproduces obituaries published in the magazine, focusing on those that mention photography or clocks, or that commemorate magicians who died in the middle of performing an act. He sets the clippings starkly against a black ground, as if to underscore the fact of mortality.

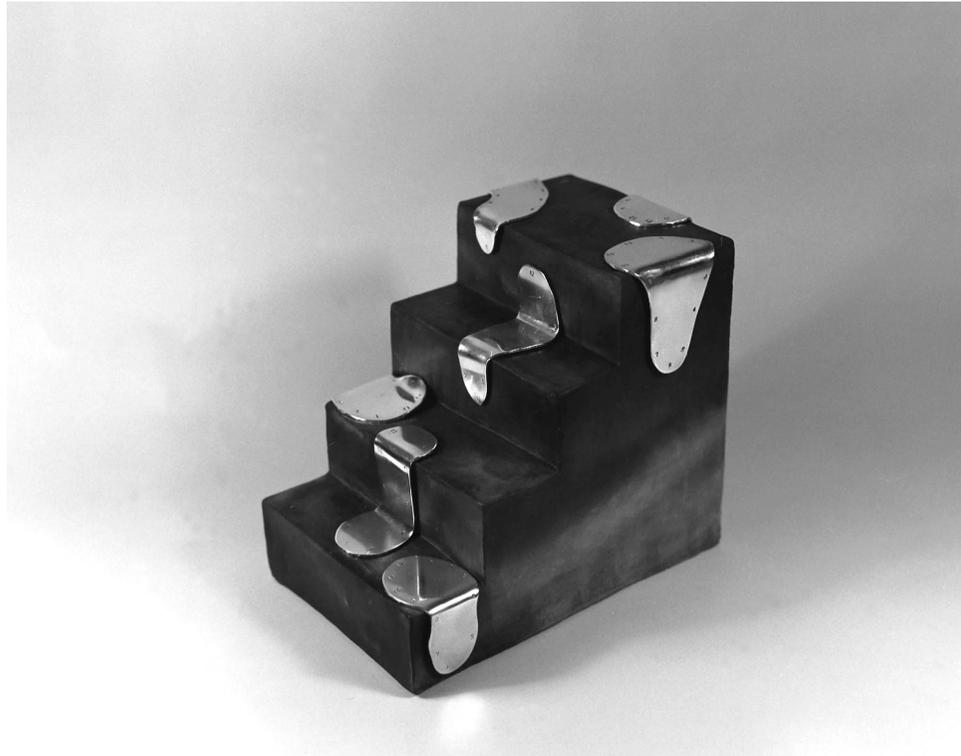
Throughout the exhibition, Rogan visualizes a series of diverse time scales as manifested in common objects, where mystery, banality, finality, and beauty are all productively and subtly entangled in one another. As a symbolic crescendo, the exhibition concludes with Rogan's video of an old white hearse exploding in extreme slow motion, perhaps a magician's attempt to subvert his own mortality. Rogan here transforms the destruction of a universal symbol of death into a transcendental imagistic effect, revealing the hidden minutiae (and magic even) in the event. "To show the death of this object in a beautiful way," the artist says, "is to suggest that beauty and tragedy are muddled, that inside everything is a kind of pragmatic operating system, and magical incomprehensible beauty."

Apsara DiQuinzio

CURATOR OF MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART AND PHYLLIS C. WATTIS MATRIX CURATOR

Will Rogan MATRIX 253 APRIL 11–JUNE 9, 2014

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY ART MUSEUM & PACIFIC FILM ARCHIVE



Biography

Will Rogan was born in 1975; he lives and works in Albany, CA. He received an M.F.A. from the University of California, Berkeley (2006), and a B.F.A. from the San Francisco Art Institute (1999), in addition to attending the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture (1998). Rogan's work has been featured in solo exhibitions at Laurel Gitlen, New York; Altman Siegel, San Francisco; Objectif Exhibitions, Antwerp; the Atlanta Contemporary Arts Center, Atlanta; Misako and Rosen, Tokyo; and Diverse Works Project Space, Houston. Selected group exhibitions include: *Reactivation: The 9th Shanghai Biennial*, Shanghai; *When Attitudes Became Form Become Attitudes: A Restoration / A Remake / A Rejuvenation / A Rebellion*, CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Art, San Francisco; *Terrain Shift*, The Lumber Room, Portland; *Fifty Years of Bay Area Art: The SECA Awards*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco (SFMOMA); *Light in Darkness*, Western Bridge, Seattle; *Walking Forward-Running Past*, Art in General, New York; and *2010 California Biennial*, Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach. He is the recipient of a Rockefeller Media Arts Fellowship (2004) and of SFMOMA's SECA Art Award (2003).

FRONT
Scout's ruler

ABOVE
Picture the Earth spinning in space

LEFT
Seven

RIGHT
Still from *Eraser*

Works in the exhibition

Broken wands
2014
Artist book
5 ¼ × 7 ½ in.

Eraser
2014
video, looped; color, silent;
5:45 mins

Negative
2014
Mixed media
3 × 5 × 4 in.

Picture the Earth spinning in space
2014
Gelatin silver print
16 × 20 in.

Scout's ruler
2013
Gelatin silver print
16 × 20 in.

Scout's ruler
2013
Gelatin silver print
20 × 24 in.

Seven
2014
Ceramic and brass
9 × 6 × 7 in.

Twenty-four
2014
Brass, paint, wood, metal
Dimensions variable

All works courtesy of the artist; Altman Siegel, San Francisco; and Laurel Gitlen, New York.

THE MATRIX PROGRAM IS MADE POSSIBLE BY A GENEROUS ENDOWMENT GIFT FROM PHYLLIS C. WATTIS AND THE SUPPORT OF THE BAM/PFA TRUSTEES.

ALTMAN SIEGEL

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ARTFORUM

Will Rogan

LAUREL GITLEN

122 Norfolk Street

September 8–October 20

Will Rogan's latest work does not stray far from the explorations of time's passage that he has successfully displayed in previous exhibitions at Laurel Gitlen. Yet, the gallery's new expanded space allows the artist to spread out and thus extends the viewing time, directing our pace to align with the meditative subjects of his work. Nowhere is this more evident than in a series of black-and-white photographs documenting a mural in Berkeley, California, that Rogan regularly bikes past. The mural depicts a familiar timeline: the human-driven progression from a barren landscape in *The Beginning* (all works 2013), where the bow of a boat makes a foreboding appearance, to a residential neighborhood crowded with cars, bicycles, and subways in *The End*. In contrast to the implied speed with which Rogan himself experiences this compressed rendering of time, our experience of the mural through these modestly sized images becomes fragmented, but still transporting. Rogan's generic titles suggest that progress may have actually reached *The End* and that we exist in a perpetual *Now* (another scene celebrating industrial and cultural development).

Rogan's agility in reimagining existing images continues with his graceful sculptural works. This attribute is presented quite literally in *Laced*, where interlocking pieces of wood faced with book pages of portraits give the impression of an endless rearrangement. More fetching are the larger works in which the space between two- and three-dimensional elements is contracted, such as in *Black Shape*, where a shard of black glass props up a book page to meet a printed black shape. Poignantly, Rogan takes his book pages from catalogues deaccessioned from an art school library, but leaves the artists on these pages unidentified. Whereas one could interpret this as an artist reinserting his predecessors into the public consciousness, the present interchangeability of their printed manifestations could also point to another of Rogan's works as an inevitable fate: *ShredIt*, a matter-of-fact photograph of a shredding company collection truck.



Will Rogan, *Laced*, 2013, wood, paint, book pages, 6 x 5 3/4 x 3 1/2".

—Lumi Tan

REVIEWS



André Ethier,
Untitled, 2010, oil on
Masonite, 16 x 12".

green, half his face rotting away; while yet a third offers a gaudy mass of electric blue flowers oozing blood. In each case the subject is squarely and stereotypically countercultural in pitch and the application of paint competent but unremarkable.

None of these strategies inspires close looking, but all of them prompt queries about the critical status of Ethier's painting within the landscape of contemporary art. Some of the most apposite questions raised by these essentially genreless, loner expositions are also the simplest: How does a gallery like Honor Fraser benefit from showing these paintings? What do the paintings gain from being shown in a highbrow gallery context? What value does the art world reap by considering such works as part of a broader discussion about, for instance, the threshold between materiality and mimetic painting, or the relationship

between historical portraiture and outsider genres? Is the viewing anxiety provoked by the tastelessness of Ethier's paintings in fact their content? Is their wholesale challenge to orthodoxies of subject and style enough to make them critically interesting? If so, are they to be understood as a form of critique? These provocative questions are, however, all extrinsic to Ethier's paintings, raising the final and most telling question: Are the works themselves worthy of serious consideration?

—Christopher Bedford

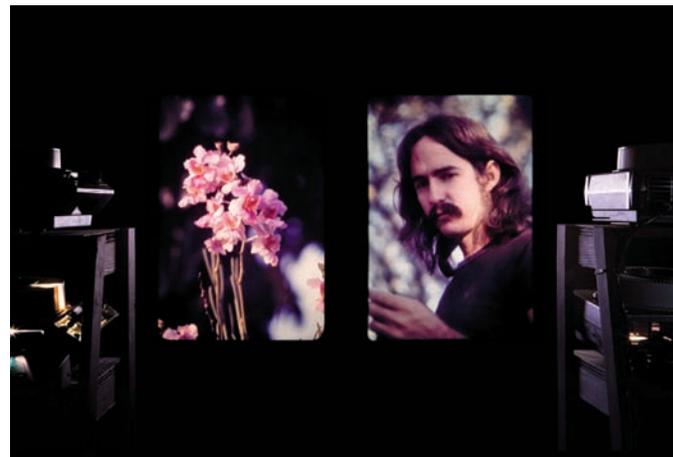
“Hearts of Palm”

NIGHT GALLERY

Night Gallery (hours of operation: 10 PM to 2 AM) is an off-space in East Los Angeles nestled between a taqueria and a beauty salon. Opening last February under the direction of artist Davida Nemeroff, this intimate nocturnal venture appeared as a welcome other to the city's more pedestrian gallery scene. The venture's innocuous slackness—the artworks aren't exactly titled or untitled, the installations may change during the course of the show, the space is attended by whichever trusted friends happen to be hanging around on a given evening—only lends breathing room to the venue's black-walled cube.

Night Gallery's recent exhibition “Hearts of Palm,” featuring designer and artist Peter Harkawik with Wintergarten Ltd (a collaboration between LA-based artist Parker Davis and an anonymous partner), was an exemplary demonstration of this loose yet rigorous sensibility—a show in flux both conceptually and literally. For instance, in Harkawik's installation *Flesh & Flash (retrofitted)* (all works 2010)—a single photograph of the artist's hand gripping a bulbous daikon, the index finger mangled (having once been injured by a belt sander), appeared for weeks to be the work's only component. However, on the final night of the show, Harkawik, adding paint to the photo's surface, introduced a latticelike wooden construction to the wall and a chair to the space, thoughtfully positioned for ideal viewing. That Harkawik would have completed the piece sooner if not for an unforeseen emergency only reinforced the sense of trauma, tenderness, and urgency that the artists conjured through material form.

Elsewhere in the room, Wintergarten Ltd, already known for its published collections of found pictures, contributed two sculptural installations that were, not surprisingly, anchored by found content. For example, in *Untitled*, the collective adorned a large slab of funeral marble with an arrangement of suggestive figurative photos (two of which were stolen during the opening). And in *Mike Wilson (Diary of a Deceased Amateur Photographer)*, two side-by-side slide projectors illuminated (nonsequential) images taken between 1975 and 1982 by a semihomeless wanderer named Mike Wilson, whose photos Davis rescued from the garbage after Wilson's demise. Here the itinerant artist's circle of posthippie friends is shown from January to June amid various still lifes and close-ups of plants: men skinny-dipping by a lake, their tan lines testifying to their outdoor lifestyle; a melancholy sun-kissed blonde on the beach; a brunette, crouched in a thicket of bare branches, peeing; a harvest of mushrooms in open hands; an empty snowy field. Wilson appears too, as a transient poster boy for late-1970s drug culture, perched on a yellow Volkswagen, cupping a handful of marijuana. After cycling through this series, the projections plunge into a period of darkness punctuated only by the clicks of the slide carousel that cannot help but evoke, with haunting simplicity, a representation of mourning.



Wintergarten Ltd,
Mike Wilson (Diary of a Deceased Amateur Photographer), 2010, still from a four-channel slide show of 110 35-mm color slides on two screens. From “Hearts of Palm.”

Such a predilection for the documentary, and an impulse to appropriate, channels the cultural malaise of our present-day economy. In “Hearts of Palm” materials were scrounged from flea markets and storage-unit auctions, possessions of the broke and deceased traded at bargain prices: a fluid market for the margins. And as Nemeroff and her tribe embrace the uncertainty of their undertaking while piecing together its parameters, Night Gallery appears to be a kind of acquiescent medium itself.

—Catherine Taft

SAN FRANCISCO

Will Rogan

ALTMAN SIEGEL

Will Rogan's first exhibition with Altman Siegel, “Stay Home,” presented a loose constellation of objects, including three small sculptures, a spread of six “erased” drawings, a piece comprising two prisms painted half-black and suspended at eye level in the window, and eleven handsome gelatin silver prints (all works 2010). Unlike his past efforts, which have explored the intersection between the quotidian and the fantastic (instances of what André Breton would have called



Will Rogan, *O O*,
2010, gelatin silver
print, 16 x 20".

“objective chance”), this latest foray stays true to its title, beginning with a series of photographs taken in and around the artist’s own home in the Bay Area suburb of Albany. The result is something like Atget goes to Oakland, with a mixture of street and domestic scenes that are as unremarkable as they are random, a simple recording of objects embedded in their own physicality: a lone high-top on the sidewalk, a garden hose coiled around two parallel hooks, a beer can flash-reflecting the sunlight.

But of course Rogan’s sleight of hand lies in his ability to extract the uncanny from the banal, and these images quickly lend themselves to preoccupations familiar to his work, including questions of contingency and the document. Temporality, in particular, emerges as a strong undercurrent, referenced in each of these images, but most explicitly (and humorously) in a second suite of photographs that takes as its subject a 1960s Time-Life book on “time.” Rogan rephotographs choice spreads from this vintage publication, allowing each image to be punctuated with the book’s cheeky chapter headings—“The Elusive Nature of Time,” “Time Clues in Ancient Trash,” and “Viewing the Past as It Happens”—that could easily double as quasi captions for his philosophical investigations, if not glib punch lines. But the work’s very materiality prevents us from getting lost there, grounding us in the present with the details: We see the book’s bent pages, the grain of the fiber paper in the prints, the dust Rogan allowed to remain on the negative. With the process of its making thus foregrounded, what emerges above all else is the print’s tangible engagement with its medium—namely the photographic.

In *Camera Lucida* (1980), Roland Barthes famously remarked that “the first photographic implements were related to techniques of cabinet making and machinery of precision”: “Cameras, in short, were clocks for seeing.” Rogan takes this dictum to heart, offering a poetic meditation on the temporality and process of analog black-and-white photography—a reverie that resonates across the exhibition, from the tonal depth of the prints to the restricted use of color (as seen in the wood used in his small sculptures), and the prism, halved and offered up to the light.

It is tempting to read the overall effect of the show as an elegy for a technology now largely outmoded in the age of digital reproducibility (and, on cue, we could quote copiously from *Camera Lucida* and Walter Benjamin’s “Little History of Photography” [1931]). But Rogan intuits that photography, like all material technologies, is continuously witnessing its own obsolescence. So rather than evoke a swan song (which would be redundant), he simply meditates on the mechanism itself in all its voluptuousness. Somewhat ironically, this is demonstrated most clearly by a set of six drawings, “Busts,” in which portraits found in the pages of the official Society of American Magicians magazine have been erased from the printed page, leaving behind ghostly silhouettes.

The fragility of these stripped images playfully evokes both the earliest photographic processes and photography’s theorizations: the daguerreotype, the calotype, and the idea that they possessed the ability to embalm time. Yet Rogan’s isolated figures are not caught in the deathly fix of the pose, as Barthes would have it, but suspended and left to fade, as is the fate of any snapshot.

—Franklin Melendez

MONTREAL

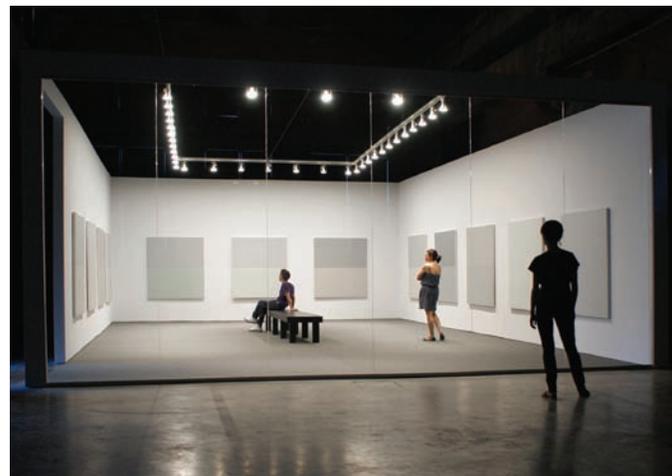
Luis Jacob

DARLING FOUNDRY

Long involved with the house music scene, and a founding member of the Anarchist Free University of Toronto, Peruvian-born, Toronto-based Luis Jacob makes art that takes the social body, both individual and collective, as its primary subject. Organized by Marie Fraser, “Tableaux Vivants” was the first segment of the multipart midcareer retrospective of the artist’s work that will be touring Canada through 2011.

The oldest works on view, thirteen photographs from “Evicted Studios at 9 Hanna Avenue; November 1999,” were taken within an obsolete industrial complex in Toronto that had been rented to artists for years. When the site was slated for redevelopment and the new property owners ordered the artists out, Jacob documented the immediate aftermath of the eviction, depicting the trauma of that community’s displacement through the traces—many testifying to unseen violence—left on the space. With all that has taken place in the years since Jacob shot the series—especially the worldwide financial crisis largely caused by speculation in private housing—it’s tempting to ascribe an uncanny prescience to these images.

As exemplified by another work, *The Inhabitants*, 2008, Jacob’s more recent output continues to explore the exposition of the personal sphere. A run of five black-and-white photographs, it portrays two men and two women performing relatively mundane acts within a domestic setting (an installation created by Jacob titled *Habitat*, 2005, at the Kunstverein Hamburg)—the men relaxing, one reading a magazine; a woman seated in meditation; the group assembled, staring calmly at the camera. Unlike in “Evicted Studios,” the space here is staged and devoid of any incidental material signifiers. Even the figures are unclothed. But Jacob has not stripped his subjects bare per se. Rather, they are members of a nudist colony, exhibiting themselves in a state that, while generally regarded as private, they feel comfortable presenting publicly.



Luis Jacob, *Tableaux: Pictures at an Exhibition, 2010*, twelve oil paintings, custom-built room. Installation view.

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frieze

Will Rogan

Laurel Gitlen, New York, USA



Time is an essential part of Will Rogan's work. In his recent show at Laurel Gitlen, moments, days and years unfolded, in his use of light and treatment of seeing, perceiving and preserving images.

In the front room, a collection of prisms were hung from wires secured to the ceiling (Sleep, all works 2010). Each one was spray-painted a black matte, eliminating its ability to refract light. Opposite the sculpture was a gelatin silver print of a functioning prism (Day). On a perpendicular wall were two photographs, one of a woman in the woods wearing a jacket printed with a map of the world (World Jacket), and the other of the cover of H.G. Wells' 1895 sci-fi novel The Time Machine, titled The Time Machine Closed. In the gallery's second room these photos reappeared but with precise changes: The Time Machine Scratched was essentially the same set-up as its Closed counterpart, however it was a more lightly exposed print. A scratch on the negative was visible and the book was in the same position but its age was more apparent, the spine of the book taped together, the cover tatty and worn. Another image of the prism, considerably darker, called Night was referencing the time of day in which this photograph was taken, 12 hours after its counterpart; and almost an identical photograph to World Jacket with the same title was taken just moments after its counterpart.

Additionally, a video of incense slowly burning, the ashes of the lit stick slowly crumbling away; a photograph of a child-sized T-shirt printed with a clock pointing to three o'clock, titled Julia; and two sets of Rogan's erased magazines were also on view. In the first series of erasures, 'Pairs', Rogan revisited earlier works, using covers from the 1970s magic magazine MUM. Using an eraser, the artist removed the magician from the image. Dates and title of the publication were faintly visible and, with close examination, subtle abrasions and rips could be seen. In the other series, 'Equivalents', taken from pages of MUM, Rogan has again erased the magician, in turn representing the artist himself who has the same power to make things appear or rendering them invisible.

Rogan's work deals with both nostalgia and mortality, as time (and people) disappear. Intervals become the marker of time – an interval of moments in the two World Jacket photographs; days, as in Day and Night; and, in the erasure series, years.

Marina Cashdan

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NOVEMBER 2010

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