

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

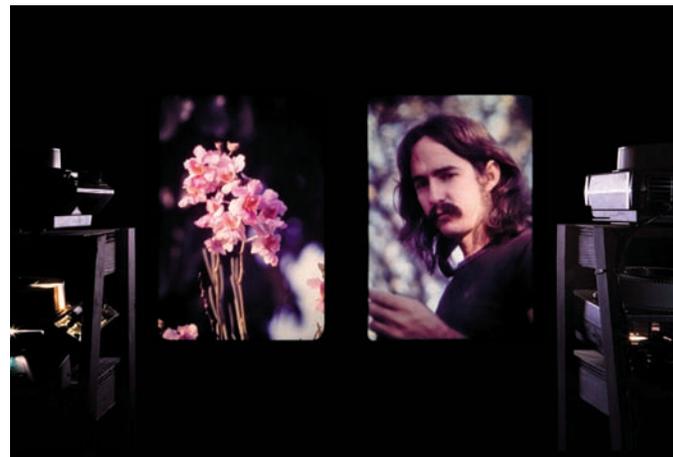
“Hearts of Palm”

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

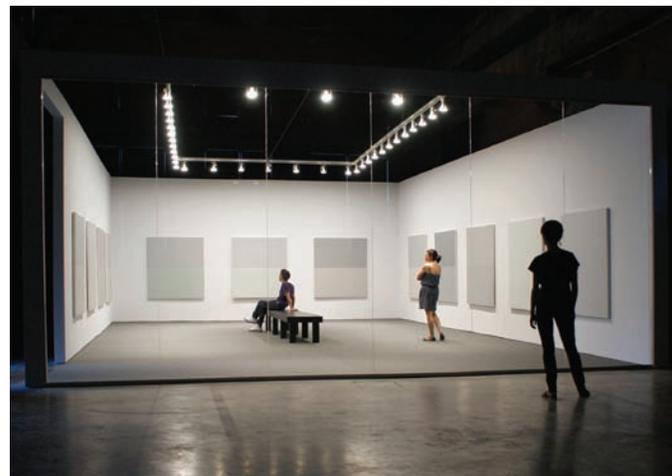
MONTREAL

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.