

JERRY BIRCHFIELD

A Pale, A Post, A Boundary

February 6 - March 27, 2021

Devening Projects

A Pale, A Post, A Boundary is comprised of a range of works: gelatin silver prints, plaster cast works for the wall and a set of freestanding sculptures—all emblematic of the investigatory approach we find in Jerry Birchfield's practice.

No matter which of these processes the works adhere to, they are all deeply rooted in a concern for the multilayered operation of images and the roles of the components that make them perceptible including representation, materiality and spectatorship. With that in mind, the works invite viewers to trace the source of their origin and the processes by which they were made, purporting that this mental tracing is as pertinent to an understanding of the work as the image-objects themselves.

The gelatin silver prints take various forms. Some are flatly mounted and framed, other gelatin silver works operate as otherwise traditional picture mats for smaller prints. And still others, hinged loosely within frames, appear to have been rescued from some tragic accident within the artist's studio.

The mounted prints, parts of an ongoing series titled *Stagger When Seeing Visions*, function as images in the proper sense. They are photographic, in that they were made by a series of photo-based darkroom processes, but they do not necessarily depict in ways typically attributed to photography. They drift somewhere on the middle of a spectrum between abstraction and representation where content floats behind murky surfaces invoking ghosts (some friendly, some not) of Surrealist and Modernist darkroom explorations. Parts of depicted content remain legible, while others are only nameable as the basics—shape, form, light, tone, texture or mark. Depiction and process here, staples of photography, come dangerously close to running aground and reveal themselves as parts operating with the intent of pointing us to a reflexive set of referents—compositions found in or made from detritus in the artist's studio, the fundamentally photographic language of light and shadow, the photo paper surface and myriad layers of darkroom processes by which they were made, or perhaps in some collapse of time and space we are looking at reflective representations of the other works in the exhibition that surrounds us.

Other gelatin silver works function as rectangular mats that frame and reframe other smaller prints. These works materialize and point to the pictorial framing devices present in the mounted prints and to physical borders cast into some of the plaster works. In another iteration, a tattered print is loosely hinged overtop another that has lost most of whatever photographic image was presented on its surface. The residue of a series of partially knowable processes becomes enlivened as referential. These traces of indexical material procedures connect to the photographic capacity to record and refer.

Although presently material, the plaster cast wall works are images in their own right. They hover between and signify sculpture, painting and drawing processes all at once. However, this multilayered set of media references operates within a world formed by photographic image and material relationships. The process that produces these pieces is as follows: first, a cut gelatin silver print is placed in a shallow mold. Then, plaster is poured onto the print filling the surrounding cubic space. The multi-level surface is formed when the wet plaster causes the print to warp, fix and mount in position as it dries. The surfaces are re-leveled with a flood of enamel paint then treated with graphite. Some pieces are sanded back to reveal these layers of buildup while others might be subjected to this entire set of procedures multiple times.

Finally, a set of sculptures, referred to as *Pales*, are made of plaster and concrete-coated gelatin silver prints. They appear to be made by interrupting the processes described above. Although here, the prints are stood on end to dry and fix in place. These works are presented on glass-topped powder coated steel stands positioned as a divide through the gallery space. In these works, there is a delicate balance between material relationships as the form of the curled prints act as armatures for the plaster that has assisted these photographs in their attempt to stand upright. These works are presented in a range of forms—some left open exposing the front and back of the print in the round while some are closed and others are filled to the brim with material—reminding that images are always operating as vessels engaged in some degree of disclosure and concealment.

Jerry Birchfield (b. 1985) holds an MFA from Cornell University (2014) and a BFA in Photography from the Cleveland Institute of Art (2009). Recent solo exhibitions include *Jerry Birchfield: Asleep in the Dust* at the Akron Art Museum, Akron, OH; *Stagger When Seeing Visions* organized by the Cleveland Museum of Art at the Transformer Station, Cleveland, OH; and *You Are Not, Except As A Joke, Blaming Them* at Angela Meleca Gallery, Columbus, OH. In Cleveland, his work has been included in group exhibitions at Abattoir, the Museum of Contemporary Art, 2731 Prospect; and SPACES as well as Riffe Gallery and ROYGBIV in Columbus, the Print Center in Philadelphia, and Schema Projects and Foley Gallery in New York. He lives and works in Cleveland, Ohio and is a Lecturer in Photography at Case Western Reserve University.