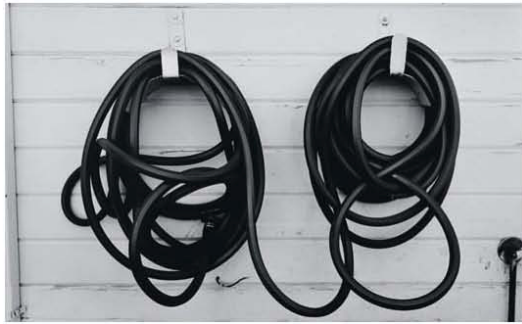


ARTFORUM

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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



"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 *À l'etge* 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