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COLLECTOR
DAILY

Matthew Brandt, Excavations @Yossi Milo

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JTF (just the facts): A total of 21 large scale photographic works, alternately framed in white and dark brown and unmatted, and hung in the two main gallery spaces and the smaller viewing room. 10 of the works on view are from the Dust series and are gum bichromate prints made from dust swept from the pictured locations. These works range in size from roughly 12×9 to 59×44 (or reverse), are unique, and were all made in 2014. 9 of the works are from the series La Brea and are heliographs made with tar from the La Brea Tar Pits. These works are single images and diptychs, with panels ranging in size from 54×45 to 72×43 (or reverse); these works are also unique, and were all made in 2013. The final 2 works are from the Clippings series are made from rhinestuds and caviar on linen. Both images are sized 72×42, are unique, and were made in 2014.

Comments/Context: Matthew Brandt's ever-growing list of photographic projects exhibits a consistent sense of conceptual clarity that is satisfyingly straightforward. In nearly every series he has made over the past few years, a similar underlying formula can be used to describe what is taking place: Brandt makes (or appropriates) images of a place (or thing), and then includes physical manifestations of that place (or thing) in the chemical process used to generate the image, thereby infusing the image with tangible evidence of what it depicts, collapsing the photograph and its subject matter into one intermingled whole. With this innovative structural idea as a foundation, it's now become a question of turning the crank and changing the variables to produce insightful and unexpected combinations, where the personality of the subject can come forth via its tangible presence.

The works in the back room of the gallery revive the antique heliograph process developed by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce in the 1820s, using the black tar of the La Brea Tar Pits as a coating mix. Negatives of the skeletal displays of long extinct animals and birds in the research facility at the museum were placed on top of the coated aluminum plates and allowed to bake in the sun for several months, the area exposed to light hardening, leaving dark silhouettes when the plates were ultimately washed. The results are something akin to massive cave paintings or petroglyphs, with skeletons rearing up or poised for action against murky, seemingly charred brown backgrounds, like dioramas gone feral.

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The images from Brandt's Dust series are more subtle. These works begin with found photographs of now demolished New York locales drawn from historical archives (often with stamps, measuring lines, or other markings), which then form the basis for contemporary excursions to those spots. Brandt visited each place and gathered up dust, incorporating it back into a unique gum bichromate process used to reprint each archival photograph. Here the physical remnants are less visible and more ephemeral - dust from the Rose Reading Room at the New York Public Library is imbedded in the gently dappled image of the old Croton Reservoir (which occupied that location in the late 1800s), the imperfections of the process creating a further layer of patina. The same approach is applied to a few images of the construction of the gallery, collapsing time and place more obviously, especially when the photograph depicts the very wall on which it hangs.

As Brandt continues to riff on this structured methodology, while it would be easy to place him in a long line of process-centric photographic tinkerers,

his works are starting to bear some larger conceptual kinship to the work of Vik Muniz and his pictures made of various sculptural inputs (garbage, diamonds, chocolate syrup, shredded magazines etc.). While Brandt is investigating different facets of the alchemy of photographic processes and the nature of physicality, their common reliance on an underlying formula makes their works easily unpacked and understood.

In the end though, the conceptual cleverness of this process needs to be overshadowed by the specific artistic results, the how and why being trumped by the more immediate visceral experience of the art on display. When Brandt gets it just right, his best works resonate with a rich kind of synchronicity, the physical informing the visual in intricate, layered, time-collapsed harmony.

Collector's POV: The works in this show are priced as follows. The works from the Dust series are generally \$14000 each, aside from one smaller image of the gallery space itself at \$2500. The works from the La Brea series are either \$20000 (single panel) or \$38000 (diptych). Brandt's work has very little secondary market history at this point, so gallery retail is likely the best option for those collectors interested in following up.

