

M+B



ARTSY EDITORIAL

A New Chapter for M+B: Staying True to its Photo Roots While Embracing the Best of Contemporary Art

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Jesse Stecklow
Untitled (Variants), 2014
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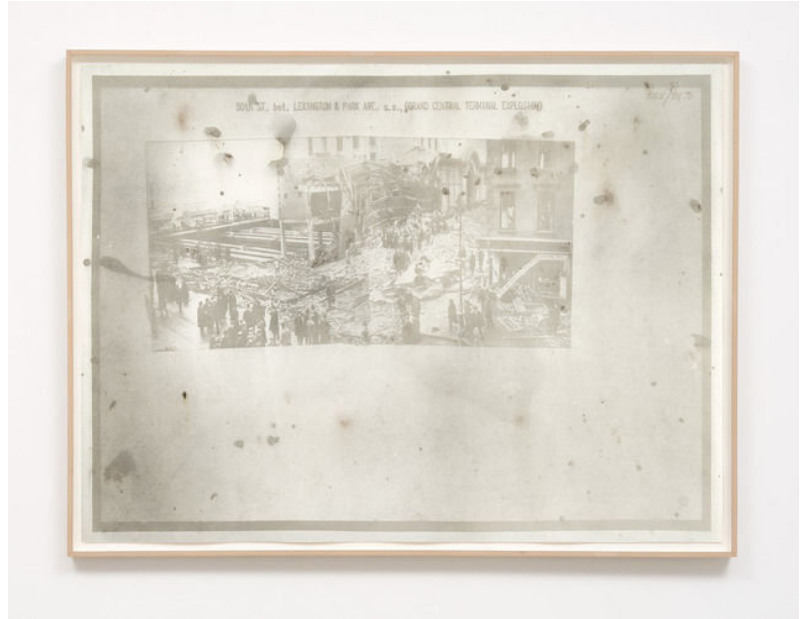
It has become more and more apparent in recent years that photography is a crucial means for a broad range of contemporary artists who would never consider themselves photographers as such. This fact came to the fore recently at Los Angeles gallery M+B, which was once strictly dedicated to photography, and in recent years, through an irresistible roster of top artists—including Matthew Brandt, Alex Prager, and Jon Rafman—who have transcended the limits of medium. “Almost all of the artists that we’ve shown in the past few years are contemporary artists; they don’t see themselves as photographers or particularly tied to that medium,” assistant director Alexandra Wetzel told us. The gallery recently announced that it would further its pursuits, staying true to its roots through M+B Photo, and upholding its newer contemporary approach at M+B. At NADA New York, they’ll show two hot L.A.-based artists who perfectly encapsulate the current M+B program: Jesse Stecklow and Matthew Brandt.

At the helm of the gallery is Benjamin Trigano, who founded M+B in 2008—out of his passion for photography—and has developed a reputation for signing on artists who have never been shown before. It was on a visit to a group show to see works by newcomer Dwyer Kilcollin that he discovered the works of Jesse Stecklow, a 20-year-old who is a current undergraduate student at UCLA, and co-founded design firm Content is Relative at the age of 18. Stecklow takes on half of M+B’s NADA presentation through his complex, multilayered Variant works. For these works Stecklow begins with a clay-and-water painting on canvas, which he photographs before it dries, and then alters the image using Photoshop. He incorporates detritus from his studio, photographs these elements, and merges images, ultimately printing, through dye sublimation, directly onto sheets of aluminum. Wetzel emphasizes that “there’s no indexical nature, everything’s constantly changing.”

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Matthew Brandt
3984846u3, 'Tenement row; demolition site.' 1936, 2014
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Matthew Brandt
713447Fu1, 'Manhattan : 50th Street – Lexington Avenue'. 1910, 2014
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Nearby will be works by Matthew Brandt, which are vastly different, but share the fact that each piece is completely unique. Known for a practice where “the subject matter has a literal tie-in to the way the work is made,” Brandt is one of the artists who, some four years ago, helped M+B open up its program. Wetzel explains, “he became very well known for a body of work called ‘Lakes and Reservoirs,’ where he would go out and take beautiful, informed views of different bodies of water, collect water at the source, return to his studio where he would develop traditional chromogenic prints, and then soak the prints in the subject matter’s actual water.” At NADA, the gallery shows Brandt’s new “Dust” series, sodium gum bichromate prints featuring historic architectural images of New York. He pores over archives to find his subjects, buys the rights to them, and uses them to create negatives. “He then seeks out [each photograph’s] current location,” Wetzel explains, “sweeping dust off of whatever structure might be there now—an apartment building, a grocery store, a bank—and after returning to his studio, mixes the dust, as pigment, with the sodium gum bichromate solution.” After coating the paper in this solution, it is exposed as a contact print, which causes the dust to harden. “You are left with an image of a no longer existing building pigmented with its own dust,” Wetzel affirms. “It’s literally using something in that picture to help record it further. There is something classically romantic and very nostalgic about it.”

M+B, NADA New York 2014, Booth 600, May 9th–11th.