



ARTFORUM

“The Black Mirror”

DIANE ROSENSTEIN FINE ART

831 North Highland Avenue January 19–March 9



James Welling, *Lock*, 1976, chromogenic print, 3 3/4 x 2 3/4".

The polished black face of a Claude glass renders “views” romantic and emotional—though this tool more accurately reflects the viewer’s projections. In “The Black Mirror,” what you see is what you see. This is an exhibition of black stuff—and it’s possible to see nothing else. Yet a sustained look can produce a show more variegated than it initially appears. The viewer first encounters Matthew Brandt’s *George Bush Park, Houston, TX*, 2009–11, a monochrome made of handmade paper and charcoal from wood found at its namesake, reflective only insofar as it indexes that site. Right away, this work offers twin reads of this “dark” exhibition: as an inconsequential formal romp, and as a somber poem on the pathos of the index and of representation in general.

Still, several works make dull use of blackness. In *Dead Day IV*, 2008, Barnaby Furnas deploys “black” to blot out a colorful canvas. Farrah Karapetian’s *Framed Monochrome (Real Estate)*, 2012, a “for sale” sign made of a blackened photograph, confuses overexposure with the housing market. Yet similar indexical caesuras by Brandt and Phil Chang—whose unfixed prints *Woman Laughing; Upright Log, Studio*; and *Man Sitting*, all 2011, are not black but the eggplant-flesh gray of photochemical entropy—question how an artwork might ever represent a complex subject. Meaning becomes a function of the viewer’s reflection, as with Eban Goff’s sphincterlike *Twin*, 2013, where black wax and polished metal polygons are shaped to receive a body; or Rodney McMillian’s three identical photos of a flaking foam bust painted black. Black allows contrast, or the grays of photographic grain, as in the shimmering stream and blotchy rich foliage in Whitney Hubbs’s 2009 photo *Untitled (Reflection)*—blown-out and antipicturesque.

John Szarkowski’s 1978 MoMA survey “Mirrors and Windows” plotted photographs on a continuum of subjective reflection and objective transparency. Never mind the index—for what role does it play after representation? What game is this? Why, it’s the photographic game—one we recognize post-Szarkowski as distinctly subjective. Sure enough, in “The Black Mirror,” there is much of cocurator and photographer James Welling—for whom the photograph represents the photographer above all. Welling’s tiny, slippery silver chromaprint *Lock*, 1976, depicts a two-by-four angled against the back of a door. The piece hangs across a small room from a glossy black John McCracken plank—two leaning, pathetic blacknesses, reflecting one another, propping each other up.

—Travis Diehl