

M+B

photograph

Phil Chang: Studio, Affect. Pepin Moore Gallery, L.A.

July 31, 2012

By Catherine Wagley



Phil Chang, Peel on a Wood Table. Courtesy Pepin Moore Gallery

Douglas Huebler, the conceptualist with a good heart and a sharp, hungry mind, said many quotable things in the years he was active, from the 1960s through 1980s. But the one quoted most often is this: "The world is full of objects, more or less interesting; I do not wish to add any more." He wished to add ideas and possibilities instead, presenting these through typewritten letters or documentary photographs. But this was before digital cameras, laser printers and the Internet, with its video banks and social networks. It was also before images, documents, and all their various permutations began to seem as overwhelming as things. Phil Chang's exhibition at Pepin Moore Gallery through August 11 straddles this very problem: Which is more oppressive? The excess of things or the excess of information?

Called *Studio, Affect*, Chang's exhibition is his third this year to fixate on how one thing affects another. The first, a group show Chang curated at Pepin Moore called *Affective Turns?*, mostly included process-oriented photographic work by artists interested, at least loosely, in the issue of "how." How does a picture get made, then what can it do once it's in the world? For his second, *Cache, Active* at LAX Art in Culver City, he improperly developed images on expired photo paper and, once the exhibition was hung, it took three to five hours for the gallery lights to turn them into brownish monochromes. This latest exhibition includes images related to an artist's studio, pictures of actual studios and evidence of studio processes.

One of the show's most striking works, Chang's series of three prints called *Peel on a Wood Table*, show a peeled-up leaf of photo-paper that angles across the frame from left to right and lays on a roughed-up surface. The exact same scene appears in each print. The first is an archival pigment print, the second a gelatin silver, and the third a composite of one-color stencil prints on vellum. You don't doubt for a moment that these photographs, framed and tastefully composed with shadows so rich they recall Irving Penn's still lifes, are objects—they take up real physical space. Nor do you doubt that they give information, suggesting the multitude possibilities available to an image-maker. But they don't add to this multitude. Instead, they impose on it some semblance of concision and subtlety, which is no small feat.