

M+B

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MATTHEW PORTER: PALE SUBTROPICAL LIGHT

January 7 – February 11, 2012

Artist's Opening Reception: Saturday, January 7, 2011 from 6 to 8 pm



M+B is pleased to present *Pale Subtropical Light*, a selection of new works by Matthew Porter. The exhibition comprises a critical photographic inquiry into the career and legacy of Hollywood icon Jane Fonda, mid-century modern architecture in California and historical locations such as the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument in Montana. *Pale Subtropical Light* runs from January 7 through February 11, 2012, with an opening reception for the artist on Saturday, January 7 from 6 to 8 pm.

The exhibition's six discrete subjects are threaded together to form a reticulated pattern of overlapping subject matter. The title is lifted from "Eureka!," a 1978 essay by John Gregory Dunne. The essay tracks the attitudes of New York City literati toward his decision to move to Los Angeles in 1964 and their unfounded accusations that he traded the cultural capital of opinions for the cultural capital of images. Los Angeles is often described in terms of mirages and dreams, so it is fitting that Dunne uses hallucinatory imagery to describe his attachment to the city: "I am . . . attached to the deceptive perspectives of the pale subtropical light." His description of quotidian beauty is used to counter the observations of others on the city in which he lives. He writes of the chimerical possibilities of "psychic and physical slippage" that a place like Los Angeles can instill in the astute observer, using examples of the disconnect between history and experience. In the exhibition, the various pictures explore the relationship between the vivid imagery of historical American myths and the iconicity of the photographs (or lack of) that represent them.

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In 1972, Jane Fonda traveled to North Vietnam. Like hundreds of other Americans before her, she was seeking to confirm rumors of the deadly effects of chemical weapons and the bombing of civilian targets by the American Military and to deliver mail to American POWs. On her last day there, she was driven to the site of an anti-aircraft gun emplacement (inactive at the time), surrounded by American, Japanese and Vietnamese journalists, and casually directed to sit at the helm of the weapon. Members of the local community sang Fonda a song, and she responded with an emphatic performance of a Vietnamese anti-war song written by students in Saigon. It was a rapturous moment. Everyone applauded, and Fonda, exhausted by the manic pace of her tour, clasped her hands together and thanked her hosts. A photograph from this encounter became the focal point of the 1972 short film titled *Letter to Jane*, a footnote to *Tout Va Bien*, and a pinnacle of Godard pedagogy. Fonda survived her time in the jungle, but the legacy of those photographs continues to stalk her.

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The jungle landscapes were made on the Hawaiian island of Kauai. Kauai has a long history as a location for Hollywood war movies because of the aesthetic approximation of its jungle foliage to Southeast Asia and the Pacific Theater. In recent decades, however, the film industry has largely moved on to more arid climates to address more contemporary conflicts.

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In 1947, architectural photographer Julius Schulman photographed Ayn Rand in her Richard Neutra designed house. Neutra originally designed the house for the Austrian film director Josef von Sternberg (mentioned by Dunne in "Eureka!") in Chatsworth, Los Angeles. The Schulman photographs have been scanned, cropped, overlaid with grass and plants from the Little Bighorn Battlefield, and re-photographed. The result is a layered collage, formed by multiple exposures, depicting the collision of various historical and ideological subject matter.

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In 1876, General George Armstrong Custer, notoriously rapacious, led a doomed but credulous battalion of 210 soldiers along a series of bluffs above an Indian river encampment. When he realized he was outnumbered, his military erudition dictated that he seek further high ground. What was revealed at the top of Last Stand Hill was the vertiginous optical sensation of endless, undulating green hills. Clearly, the preferable perspective on that day was from the denser foliage of the valley below.

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In the exhibition there are three photographs of hornets' nests piled on tables and chairs. The nests have either been seasonably abandoned, or the hornets were exterminated. They are spherical, composed of concentric wrappings of what looks like low-grade cardboard—a material that's been chewed and spit out by the hornets to synthesize into paper. The annual apocalypse affects every colony, but often leaves the nests intact.

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Matthew Porter (b. 1975) received his BA from Bard College in 1998 and his MFA from Bard College and Bard-ICP in 2006. His work often features historical mash-ups, collapsing disparate events and cultural references within single frames or spreading them out over a series of tightly edited photographs. Recent exhibitions include a solo show at Invisible Exports in New York, and he was included in the International Center of Photography's *Perspectives 2010*. In 2010, he curated shows at Mount Tremper Arts in upstate New York and M+B in Los Angeles. Porter lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. This is his second solo exhibition at M+B.

This exhibition is part of *Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A. 1945–1980*, a Getty initiative that brings together more than sixty cultural institutions from across Southern California to examine the history of contemporary art in Los Angeles.

Location:	M+B, 612 North Almont Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90069
Show Title:	Matthew Porter: Pale Subtropical Light
Exhibition Dates:	January 7 – February 11, 2012
Artist's Reception:	Saturday, January 7, 2012 from 6 – 8 pm
Gallery Hours:	Tuesday – Saturday, 10 am – 6 pm, and by appointment

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