

M+B

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

Matthew Porter

INVISIBLE-EXPORTS

89 Eldridge Street

March 7 - April 13

By Courtney Fiske
April 5, 2014

Matthew Porter approaches his photographs as one might a canvas. His abstractions accrue from multiple in-camera exposures of generic still-life ingredients—furniture, fabrics, and sundry bric-a-brac—that the artist composes in front of monochrome scrims. Transferred to digital files and printed in ink, the resulting composites are shallow, shadowless, and uniformly in focus. Shot straight on or from above, Porter's studio setups flatten volumes into shapes. Depth is made something vestigial, and everything pitches forward, as if magnetized by the print's surface. The results recall the tangled contours of Francis Picabia's "Transparencies," the plunging perspective of Cubist café tables, and the shrill, saturate compression of Matisse's interiors.

Consider the strangeness of *Plastic Form*, 2013. There's the vertiginous pitch of the table and the clustered seashells that hover above its surface, their flatness incommensurable with the table's residual depth. The vertical zip of a nearby Ionic column promises orientation yet withholds the same: Frontally rendered, it assumes a strictly graphic function. An oblong, organic form, suspended before both table and column, further perplexes, its lattice a seeming metaphor for the composition's unresolved layering, which less produces than evacuates space.

Porter's historical references are self-conscious and somewhat jumbled: *Machine for Living*, 2014, takes its title from Le Corbusier's quip about the modernist home;

Force Lines, 2014, features the dazzle camouflage developed by artists to confound enemy warships during World War I; the press release quotes Matisse. The artist's project further aligns with those of his contemporaries (Michele Abeles and John Houck, among them), who have achieved the cobbled look typical of digital postproduction by analog means. The question for Porter thus arises: Why constellate the present with a moment when the limiting conditions of artistic media seemed suddenly so acute (and, therein, so generative)? If the photograph today is eminently unstable, everywhere made the image's conduit, Porter's relays to a period when media could still claim certain, circumscribed identities oddly comforts. For all their incongruity, there's a familiarity and an assuredness to Porter's telescoped montages. Modernism extends its warrant, and art historians prime their slides. Assimilation is easy, but perhaps that's the work's appeal.



Matthew Porter, *Plastic Form*, 2013
archival pigment print, 58 1/2 x 47 1/2"