

# M+B



## Matthew Porter

May 8, 2014

Matthew Porter's body of work is difficult to place at first sight. But perhaps this is neither surprising nor the point of his photographic style. As he once put it himself: 'I've always wanted to create an exhibition that looks like a group show [...] So you would walk into the space and for a second think there were a bunch of images by different artists.'

Porter initially attained notoriety in the art world with his car photographs. For these images he hunted down miniature models of quintessential American cars. He then meticulously photographed them in his studio, after which he overlaid the shot of the car on a picture of an American urban landscape. With the cars hovering unnaturally high up in the air, the images reference just about any police procedural or Hollywood action film in recent history. For the Burnout series Porter captured candy-colour cars in empty parking lots surrounded by billowing smoke, whereas in the Supercharged he treats us to close-ups of dazzling, glittering, blinding chrome contraptions built into the centre of a vibrant car hood. For his Jane Fonda series Porter re-staged pictures of the actress in a way of trying to investigate photographically the capacity of this pop icon to continually reinvent herself. All of these works are funny, tongue-in-cheek and very carefully constructed.

Fast forward to the High Lonesome series. From the get-go it is obvious that the tone has changed to a more serious one. Porter is toying here with visual tropes established by advertising but also images imprinted on our collective memory. In this project he portrays a prototypically, but middle-aged cowboy. The man is riding his horse crossing the prairie or standing on a ledge overlooking a valley. Occasionally we see him looking up to the sky, where we find a Hindenburg hovering over him. These are followed by more pictures of the Hindenburg drifting over the great American plains, the swastika on the tail clearly visible. These jarring contrasts of immediately recognisable but slightly out of sync imagery shake the viewer up. Are these pictures a subtle reference to Philip K. Dick's novel *The Man in the High Castle*? What happened to the Marlboro Man? What on earth is going on here? The captured scenes do not provide easy answers.

The new works - included in this issue of Foam - are of an entirely different nature altogether. At first sight they seem to be still lifes, showing yet another variant on this centuries-old concept in art history. The images show an arrangement of various objects in crisp, saturated colours and sharp details. But upon further inspection we notice something is off. First of all, the perspective is all wrong. We see bowls positioned on top of a table, but we also see the table legs at an angle that is virtually impossible. Secondly, we are confronted with a mixture of rather mundane objects and geometrical shapes of unknown materiality.

Then some of the objects that should be solid in real life look so sheer in the photo that all the other objects underneath them become visible. The works suddenly start to resemble photograms, those camera-less pictures created by positioning items on top of photographic paper and exposing the paper in the darkroom. Depending on the transparency and the pressure exerted by the objects on the paper, the imprint would be more or less defined. In fascinating contrast to prototypical photograms, these images are made in colour instead of black-and-white. What's more, Porter used multiple exposures shot on film to get these end results, not darkroom trickery.

Matthew Porter (b. 1975, USA) Matthew Porter's work often features historical mash-ups, collapsing disparate events and cultural references within a single frame, or spreading them out over a series of tightly edited photographs. Porter received his BA from Bard College in 1998 and his MFA from Bard-ICP in 2006. He has been profiled in *The New York Times* and included in the 2012 *After Photoshop* exhibition at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, as well as the International Center of Photography Museum's *Perspectives 2010*. His work has been exhibited in galleries in New York, Los Angeles, Paris and London and is held in the permanent collections of The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), and the UBS Art Collection (New York), among others. Porter's curatorial projects include *Seven Summits* at Mount Tremper Arts, *The Crystal Chain* at Invisible Exports and *Bedtime for Bonzo* at M+B. He is the co-editor of *Blind Spot* magazine Issue 45, and his writings and interviews have been featured in *Triple Canopy*, *Blind Spot*, *ARTFORUM.com* and *Canteen*.

