

M+B

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If Walls Could Speak

February 12, 2015

Time has come to a stop. And not by it's own accord. Listen, and try to tune out the thermostat's pacemaker ticking with complete indifference to the late afternoon air breathing naturally. Even the walls hold their breath—but with gallery, office, and “wine cellar” doors open to clear sky, the HVAC at M+B just sighs. Reluctantly uncaged, yet still filing away the at bars, three carbograph 5 air samplers drive through the frosted plastic of a standard clock face. There are no shadows. Hour, minute, and second hands come to rest precisely upon 10:19:30, like a tranquilizing lead weight to mid-calf, demanding we kneel to its silence. Though a sentimental ear-level poem wraps the office interior behind framed photographs, most of Jesse Stecklow's Potential Derivatives reclaim the equatorial desert landscape of electrical outlets, sprung to life without the due ceremony of a wall switch. Listen again, as the fan kicks in and gears whirr behind floodwhite walls and fluorescent hum. Or does the sound come from within his nondescript boxes, anchoring depthless walls to concrete floor?

Either someone forgot to kill the AC or the lapdog-sized varmint traps are alive, rattling away with mini-minotaurs automated along unseen interior mazes, about to unhinge, or explode with the full horror of mechanical animation. Like the (x, y) biaxial controls of the gravity-bound game Labyrinth, ping pong sized escape hatches reveal little of interior, just the clunk of a marble. Scratch.

Memories flood the gray concrete and pool around these aural cornerstones, spinning freewheel sensory loops. Cue the purple scent of our grandfather's garage, autumn-time, at threshold between Erie gusts and heavy pipe smoke. The fan clanks like frostbitten oak leaves dancing across the driveway. We derive no smoke and mirrors here, nor flame, just opaque objects—vented sheet metal panels, empty egg slicer pet cages, and the nondescript doormat delivery of fine cardboard packaging—curio penalty boxes to trap our hyper-active visuality. Listen. Like the myth of sandbags weighing down kilowatt-hours, these architectural ankle bracelets arraign a legacy of automated suburban surveillance, deterring unauthorized eyes from trying hack rusty circuit boxes, where shrubby shrouds whirligig analog utility meters.

Having located our blind spot precisely between two ears, it's worth WeHo window shopping to return elsewhere along Stecklow's 40-minute spin cycle and reclaim hearing, to wring out saturated afterimages from cochlear coil, and hang dry. But with eyes still darting like kamikaze houseflies towards incident sound, Stecklow counts us photographically, like victims on fly paper, in quicksand sentiment—all abuzz yet unable to see more than what is placed directly before us. The experience is intensely satisfying, like Louis Kahn's servant spaces protesting to the ritually served. If walls could speak, would they echo the hive mind of hierarchical partitioning? Stecklow's suspended time allows us to feel heavy opacities feeding off electric atmosphere, the scent of oil and sawdust and blackberries thrown into the heat pump's ornery ventilation fan. Listen. The door to the cube is creaking open.

On view at M+B through February 7, 2015.



Jesse Stecklow
Installation shot of Potential Derivatives, (2015)
Photo: courtesy of M+B