

# M+B

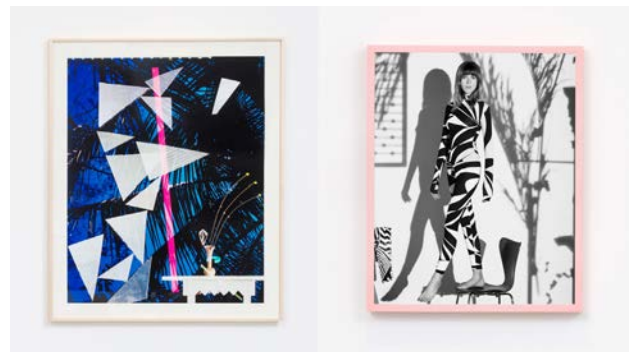
## COOL HUNTING

### Matthew Porter's "Four False Starts" Exhibition

The Brooklyn-based artist blurs the lines of photographic manipulation in his LA show

By Jonah Samson  
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Brooklyn-based artist Matthew Porter is part of a large group of contemporary artists pushing the boundaries of traditional photographic techniques and blurring the lines of digital and film manipulation. What sets Porter apart, however, are his calculated transitions between manipulated and straight photography. His recent book "Archeipelago" (selected as one of our top picks at the New York Art Book Fair) was designed to highlight his versatility in image-making. In his current exhibition "Four False Starts" at LA's M+B Gallery, Porter skillfully weaves influences from the 19th and 20th centuries with classic photographic tropes, illustrating the common threads that tie them together. We spoke with the artist about his wide ranging influences and the state of photography today.



Installation view of *Soft Target* at M+B, Los Angeles  
Organized by Phil Chang and Matthew Porter

**Your show intertwines work from our seemingly disparate sources. Can you talk about these four elements and why you chose them?**

I have five or six things I'm currently working on, but I think the four elements that are in the show represent the strongest, or at the moment the most resolved. That's part of the reason I chose them, the other is that "Five False Starts" would have meant more work than I could have afforded to produce.

I've been working on the color multiple exposures for a while, and wanted to include the next iteration of them—table top still-lives with landscapes and plants added into the background. That kind of foliage shows up in some of the older work, and so acts like a kind of leitmotif. The same is true with regard to the patterned suit—the high difference camouflage appeared in my last show in New York, but this time I think the results are better. I made the other photographs thinking about the specialized art fabricators that are still in business, and the persistence of unitary art objects, like sculpture—useless forms that are in pursuit of aesthetic satisfaction.

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**One of the most captivating aspects of your work is how smartly and skillfully you combine historical references and modern sensibilities. There are traces of Florence Henri's mirrored still life photographs from the 1920s and '30s, mixed with a very contemporary use of multiple exposures. Were you referencing something in particular with this work?**

I haven't looked at Florence Henri in a long time, so thanks for sending me down an internet rabbit hole! I do tend to look at a lot of references, like pictures from the Bauhaus where the students and teachers are photographing each other wearing their designs, or Herbert Matter posters and Stuart Davis paintings. In the past I've tried to create images that look very iconic, like the Hindenburg floating in the sky, but now I'm more interested in developing my own visual language. I'm hoping that when someone walks through the show, they'll recognize visual echoes from picture to picture, that are now part of my lexicon.

**You were included in Charlotte Cotton's recent book "Photography is Magic" and a show at The Met a few years ago called "Manipulated Photography in the Digital Age," and while your work clearly embraces the manipulated image, you also demonstrate a devotion to straight photography. Do you approach these as two distinct ways of working?**

I think Lucas Blalock said it best in response to this question (I'm paraphrasing), "It's all production." I use the tools available, and think less these days about concrete photography than the resulting representational image. The conversation around Cotton's book tends to get bogged down in a discussion of abstraction or production, but she talks a lot in the essay about the importance of starting with an image, a referent, and the work being image based.

The Met show was arguably more of a showcase and included very different work than what's in the Cotton book, but that reflects the kind of artist that I've always wanted to be. I find a varied output exciting, like the work of James Welling, Roe Ethridge, or Tacita Dean.

"Four False Starts" consists of 16 photographs hung as four sets of four and is on now through 12 March at M+B Gallery (612 North Almont Drive) in Los Angeles.

Studio images courtesy of Matthew Porter, all others courtesy of M+B Gallery