

M+B

LA WEEKLY

Best Art I Saw All Week

Matthew Brandt's Electric Photographs in "Two Ships Passing" at M+B: Don't Touch or You'll Get Shocked

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September 28, 2011



I first encountered Matthew Brandt's work when he was still a graduate student at UCLA. During the 2007 open studios, he had his portrait series tacked up on the wall—photographic images of people he knew, made using the old-timey method of salted paper prints, and incorporating the subject's bodily fluids in the development process.

Thus, the portrait of *Jackie* contained traces of her skin oil, while the portrait of *George* held bits of his vomit. It was a memorable body of work that deftly infected the staid tradition of portraiture

with the poignancy of the abject and the everyday.

Brandt now has a solo show up at M+B through October 29 and it's a stunner, continuing his pursuit of conceptual inquiries and alternative printing methods, and taking them to a whole new level. The image you see above is one of a series of large portraits of the city of Hunan, birthplace of Mao Zedong. They are all printed on circuit boards salvaged from China, which is now the primary manufacturer of this technology. Signs in the gallery warn you not to touch the artworks, as they are alive with electrical currents. Each board in the gallery is connected with hidden wiring that ultimately leads to an original Edison light bulb glowing in the next room.

The show, titled "Two Ships Passing," makes reference to the path of technological innovation and the curious interdependency of the U.S. and China; in a personal twist that seems characteristic of his work, Brandt himself is half Chinese and half Caucasian. The show is conceptually rigorous and aesthetically breathtaking; in person, these images look like tattered cyber-gothic landscapes—beautiful and imposing and filled with the ambivalence of progress.