

PRESENTATION HOUSE GALLERY

DREAM LOCATION



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WALKER EVANS

RUNA ISLAM

ERNST LUDWIG KIRCHNER

ELAD LASSRY

SIGMAR POLKE

GERHARD RICHTER

CURATED BY STEPHEN WADDELL

JANUARY 25 TO MARCH 9, 2014

Dream Location begins with the photo essay *Unposed Portrait*, an editorial oddity published amidst the advertisements for perfume, Dior and Bergdorf Goodman in a 1962 issue of *Harper's Bazaar*. The essay comprises a series of black and white portraits of New York City subway riders by the photographer Walker Evans, along with the following text:

The crashing non-euphoria of New York subway life may someday be recorded by a modern Dickens or Daumier. The setting is a sociological gold mine awaiting a major artist. Meanwhile, it can be the dream 'location' for any portrait photographer weary of the studio and the horrors of vanity.

With *Unposed Portrait*, Evans sought to subvert the affirmative demands typically made of photography, and consider the ways in which experience and its depiction have motivated artists. His subway pictures—taken between 1938 and 1941 in the close, uncontrollable

setting of the metro—developed into a provisional, unfinished series of works that provided him a new way of thinking about portraiture and the documentary impulse, as well as a ‘dream location’ for experimentation. Published 20 years later in the context of *Harper’s*, these works appear as a surreptitious intervention within the commercial confines of the magazine, standing in sharp contrast to the kind of editorial aesthetic that Evans himself helped make recognizable decades earlier. These photographs reveal a rupture in how pictures are made and encountered that was unimaginable to audiences at the time. In fact, this body of work retells the story of an artistic practice—the story of how an artist was able to assert his own artistic autonomy.

Evans’ forward-looking idea about the potential of photography informs the central premise of *Dream Location*. Here, the medium is untethered from the obligation to address its history and canons, lest it become mired in predictable journalistic functions. This exhibition argues that seemingly provisional artworks nonetheless manifest an intention to subvert the conventional ontological categories that define much photographic practice. *Dream Location* highlights works that exemplify each artist’s particular aesthetic or poetic sensibility and uses their forays into photography to look within the larger context of their art production.

Runa Islam’s 35mm film projection *Emergence* (2011) presents a red monochromatic field. This surface plays host to the appearance and gradual disintegration of a historical glass negative image from Tehran, showing two dogs feasting on the carcass of a horse. As the development process unfolds over the duration of the

film, we witness the *legerdemain* of photographic tray processing.

Islam's work explicitly demonstrates the hidden alchemy of photographic production, and, more generally, the vagaries of artistic creation itself. Indeed, we experience the intensive labour involved in her practice, from the initial camera work, to the processing, composition and circulation of the film. Echoing the provisional nature of Evans' subway images, Islam's surreptitious camera seems to possess an ambiguous intelligence that depicts what is often experienced but is not visible. She reflects on how we are primarily driven to ascertain the meaning of images before we consider or understand the means of their production.

Not only does *Emergence* divulge the hidden processes of picture making, but it also reveals the fleeting nature of our experiences and the increasingly rarified means of representing those events in film. Like a narrative climax, *Emergence* contains a stasis—a pivotal point of stillness—before the image returns to its fluid, transitory state. The motif inscribed on the glass negative has fully developed; it remains for some seconds without change but quickly begins to overdevelop. The blackening destruction of the image adds to the difficulty of understanding what we have just seen. Islam's projection visually incorporates the monochrome, the performative aspect of the projector, the duration of the transmission, the duration of the act recorded and the image produced, which all come together to create a tableau. To consider the work as a tableau is not a simple matter of locating these elements within the installation but of considering *Emergence* in terms of Islam's tableau 'way of thinking'.

The photographic works by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and Sigmar Polke—two artists best known for their paintings—suggest their experimental studio practices. While Kirchner is known mainly for his paintings of urban scenes, his photographs often document a bucolic location near Davos, Switzerland, where he founded a studio in 1917. Throughout the 1920s and 30s, Kirchner committed himself to experimental assemblages of his paintings and sculptures, and playing host to invited guests—subject matter he would explore and develop through photography. This provisional approach to studio practice is evident in the photographs taken at his rural domicile. Kirchner's images recall the atmosphere evoked by the photographs of sculptor Constantine Brâncuși that also influenced the early conceptualization of this exhibition. Brâncuși's pictures from the 1920s and 30s—taken in his Paris studio on the Impasse Ronsin—represent an epic project of staging and restaging his sculptures, an opportunity to both recontextualize his work and discover a new way of art-making in itself. Like Brâncuși, Kirchner was in constant avowal of the studio. His photographs reveal ways in which he perceived and assembled his working method, allowing us to see into his well-known work as a painter, and also providing evidence of an emerging awareness of the unique creative possibilities of the camera. Kirchner's largely unknown photos seem to reside in a space of uncertainty, of unrealized potential or impending disappearance, something made all the more salient for the persecution he would suffer upon the rise of National Socialism. Labeled “degenerate” by the German authorities, an enormous amount of Kirchner's work was confiscated and destroyed by Nazi hordes, and he committed suicide in 1938.

Sigmar Polke's photographs share this transitory quality; in his works, notions of intention and neglect are indistinguishable. His subjects range from early studio object studies to experiments with uranium traces, from x-rays of Goya paintings to strange elemental lumps that allude to capitalism, light, chemistry, gold and crystals. On exhibit here is *Untitled (Green)* (1992), a series which were generated by exposing slabs of uranium to photosensitive film, produced initially by Polke in 1982 under the title *Uran*. These photos suggest a tension between the camera's ability to capture and fix an image, and the knowledge that all documented moments are fleeting. Something was indeed present, but now we are confronting an absence. These alluring, green compositions are formed at the whim of radioactivity, as documented shadows. Polke's alchemical impulses converged in reactive properties that would have not otherwise been brought together. The potentially sinister presence of uranium encounters the blind insistence of photographic emulsion's ability to represent. An x-ray image reveals something hidden in the same way that photographs effectively allow a long lost moment to resurface.

Gerhard Richter's overpainted photographs relate to his ongoing project, *Atlas*. Using source snapshots as a starting point, Richter applies paint to the images with techniques reminiscent of his smeared abstract paintings. Careful not to completely obfuscate the picture, the compositions seem unfinished and reveal the painting process through fingerprints, drips, kinks, and tears. As with the paintings of Francis Bacon before him and Rudolf Stingel after him, Richter's photographs emphasize the disruptive relationship between

photography and painting. We must not forget that it is Richter's *Bäder Meinhof Cycle* 1977 of photo-paintings, made in 1988, that argue for history painting while appearing as politically ambiguous, journalistic snapshots of the German Red Army Front political group.

While Elad Lassry is well versed in the appropriation techniques of the influential Pictures Generation artists of the 1980s, he does not view his works as photographic. Rather, he understands photographs as material for compositions and a medium for engagement with pictorial history and tangible sensory encounters. He makes liminal objects that question the nature of photographs. Central to his work is the vacillation between an image's life in a magazine or archive and its status at the center of an aesthetic unraveling. Similar to Islam's tableau of pictorial idioms, Lassry's work stages and layers certain historical pasts. While Evans worked through the documentary approach and Islam repurposes it to talk about the ephemerality of a singular image, Lassry disrupts the documentary character of photography. Through techniques such as re-photographing, colour frame matching, illusionistic *trompe l'oeil* effects, alternative printing and sculptural presentation methods, he entertains the possibility of art's interstitial spaces. The actual appearance of a photograph is never enough for him. He demands more than the presentation of an image tethered to a grand narrative or empirical order. For Lassry, transformations are seemingly endless as he pulls tactile elements out of the chosen pictures. His images waver between compelling compositions in the language of commercial photography and a concern with facilitating an immediate physical encounter with the object.

Dream Location is an attempt to create convergences between artworks as well as media. The exhibition is predicated upon an understanding that the hubris effect of photography's history is one of the major impediments to understanding its future. A continual return to the discourse of invention serves to reinforce how photographs have become canonized, sometimes resulting in a monochromatic vision of the medium. *Dream Location* counters this constraint by asking how artworks can emerge from the documentary impulse with their experimental nature intact. Many of the works featured here were likely created to locate and explore ideological and aesthetic voids. Often, artworks that are rejected, overlooked, or deemphasized as marginal gestures have been made as antidotes to over-acceptance. This manner of personal iconoclasm is evidence of a suspension of practice in order simply to be caught up in absorption and investigation. The exhibition foregrounds Evans' struggle with photography's autonomy and Richter and Polke's poetic, interregnum space between painting and photography to assert that the present concern with the ontological nature of photography, and our distraction with abstraction, cannot release the burden of realism. For each of the artists in *Dream Location*, the use of photography is a kind of disruption. For some it functions as an aside to a more dominant mode of practice, but it is primarily the qualities of uncertainty inherent in the medium itself that unifies these artists. Ultimately, this disruption may be just as crucial to the realization of photography's potential as the recognition of its depictive faculty.

Stephen Waddell

EXHIBITED WORKS

*reproduced

EAST GALLERY

Runa Islam *

Emergence, 2011

35mm film loop

2 min 54 sec

Courtesy of the artist and White Cube, London

CENTRE GALLERY

Stephen Waddell

Study for Dream Location, 2013

inkjet print

Vitrine:

Walker Evans

Labor Anonamous, Fortune, November 1946

Unposed Portrait, Harper's Bazaar, March 1962

Unposed Portrait, Harper's Bazaar, March 1962

Gerhard Richter *

18.02.01, 2001

oil on photograph

Collection of Robin Vousdan, London

WEST GALLERY

Elad Lassry

Women (055, 065), 2012

5/5, 2 AP

c-print, painted frame

Courtesy the artist and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner

The "sculpture's studio" next to the Wildbodenhaus, 1924

inkjet print

Courtesy of the Archive of the Kirchner Museum, Davos

*Werner Gothein Hugo Biallowons and Erna Schilling
in Kirchner's Atelier, Körnerstrasse 45*, 1915

inkjet print

Courtesy of the Archive of the Kirchner Museum, Davos

Nina Hard, nude, applying makeup, Summer, 1921

inkjet print

Courtesy of the Archive of the Kirchner Museum, Davos

Walker Evans *

Subway Portrait, New York, 1938-1941

gelatin silver print

Collection of Pier 24 Photography, San Francisco

Sigmar Polke

Untitled (Pharmacie), 1986

gelatin silver print

Collection of Elaine and Rick Dubrovsky

Elad Lassry *

Woman 071, 2012

screenprint on offset print on paper, walnut frame

Courtesy of the artist and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles

Sigmar Polke *

Untitled (Green), 1992

ten cibachrome prints

Courtesy of McCaffrey Fine Art, New York

Elad Lassry

Man 044, 2012

5/5, 2 AP

screenprint on offset print on paper, walnut frame

Courtesy of the artist and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles

Walker Evans

Subway Passenger, New York, 1941

gelatin silver print

Private Collection, San Francisco

Jacobs (man on subway), 1940

gelatin silver print

Collection of Pier 24 Photography, San Francisco

Subway Passengers, New York, 1938

gelatin silver print

Private Collection, San Francisco

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner *

Nina Hard in front of the entrance to the Houses in den Lärchen,

Summer, 1921

inkjet print

Courtesy of the Archive of the Kirchner Museum, Davos

Gerhard Richter

Toronto 1988, 1988

oil on photograph

Collection of Robin Vousdan, London

30.DEZ.97, 1997

oil on photograph

Collection of Robin Vousdan, London



Walker Evans (1903 - 1975) remains one of the most influential photographers of the twentieth century. Having taken up the camera in 1928, Evans became a progenitor of American documentary photography. His images for the Farm Security Administration recording life during the Depression era reflect an archeological precision and attention to vernacular details. Between 1938 and 1941, Evans surreptitiously photographed riders in New York subways. These intimate portraits that remained unpublished for 25 years reveal Evans' interest in the dynamics between public and private realms.



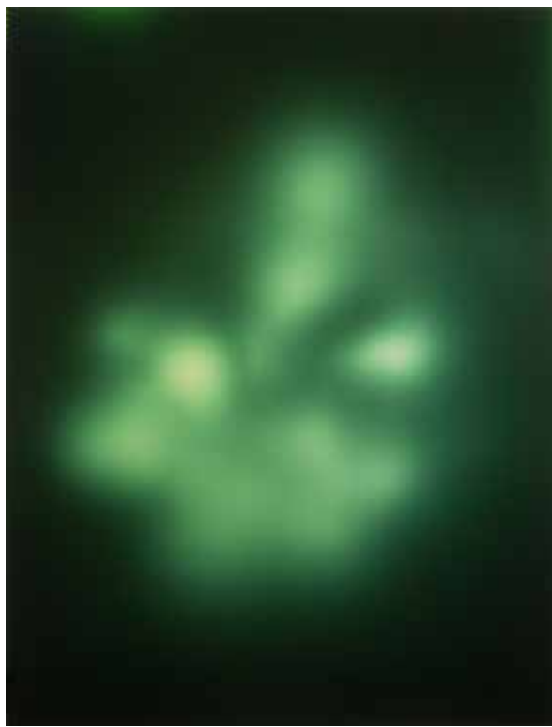
Runa Islam (1970 -) was born in Dhaka, Bangladesh and currently lives in London, UK. Her film installations, designed to transform the white cube of the gallery, explore the structures, materiality and history of pictorial representation and cinema. Her recent work, *Emergence* (2011), a 35 mm film that captures the darkroom processes of developing a photograph, enacts the perceptual tension existing between still images and motion pictures, foregrounding the act of seeing. Islam graduated from the Royal College of Art, London, with a Master of Philosophy in 2004 and was nominated for the Turner Prize in 2008. Her work has been shown extensively worldwide, including the 2006 Venice Biennale.



Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880 - 1938) was a German painter renowned for his association with the loose-knit movement of German Expressionism. As a founding member of the artist group Die Brücke (“The Bridge”) in 1905, Kirchner was instrumental in helping to develop many of the foundational visual characteristics of the movement—flattened pictorial space, deskilled figurations and violent colour contrasts. Kirchner engaged in a regular practice of photography, finding it to be a productive, and direct, counterpoint to the psychological, political and emotional impetus to his painting. In 1917, he moved his studio to Davos, Switzerland, where he began to mix documentary modes of photography with experimental gestures. *Ernst Ludwig Kirchner: The Photographic Work* was published by Steidl in 2006.



Born in Tel Aviv and currently residing in Los Angeles, **Elad Lassry** (1977 -) defines his work as being consumed by the notions of the image whether working in photography, sculpture, film or performance. He often culls from common vintage magazines, film archives and advertisements to later deploy them in his work. His references increasingly blur any clear definition between journalism, commercialism or that which manifests from aesthetic impulses; Lassry claims all methods as integral to his practice. A graduate of the California Institute of the Arts and the University of Southern California, Lassry has had many solo exhibitions including the Kunsthalle Zurich, 2010 and The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 2009.



detail

Sigmar Polke (1941 - 2010) lived as a German painter and photographer well known for his vigorous commitment to, and interest in, optical technologies and perceptual affects, particularly within the confines of the two-dimensional plane. While he largely worked through innovative representational approaches to both subject matter and material, focusing on historical events and their populous perceptions, much of his photographic practice involved radically experimental approaches to darkroom procedures. The abstract works presented in *Dream Location* illustrate Polke's use of chance in chemical processing and developing times, utilizing various materials found in both painting and photography as a means to alter visual reality. The Museum of Modern Art, NY, will present a major retrospective of his work this year, which will tour to the Tate Modern, London and Museum Ludwig, Cologne.



German artist **Gerhard Richter** (1932) has been a pioneer in the field of painting since studying at the Düsseldorf Academy over 40 years ago. In the 1970s, Richter began to undertake a series of “photo-paintings” that conflated the material and visual relationships between these disparate media. Making these works, the artist projected images on canvas that would instigate an elusive interplay between photographic realism and the painterly techniques that render realism impossible. Richter’s work in *Dream Location* has its origins in the late 1980s, when he began creating new works by dragging wet paint over photographs. In this exhibition, the documentary impulse of photographic practice—images of cities and urban environments—is pulled deftly into the aesthetics of abstraction. Richter has exhibited worldwide and in 1997 was honoured with the Golden Lion Prize at the Venice Biennale.



Stephen Waddell (1968 -) is a Vancouver artist whose research often addresses a fundamental tension, or condition, within the medium of photography—its inherent, fixed documentary quality and its competing, more emergent status as an unique art object. For over two decades, Waddell has used photography, film and video to explore our relationship to the lens and its focal point, as a means of reimagining the social space between them. His recent work finds connections between painterly gesture and depictive realism, an interest that informs *Dream Location*, his first curatorial project. Waddell's works have been shown throughout North America and Europe, and a monograph of his photographs, *Hunt and Gather*, was published by Steidl in 2011.

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JANUARY 25 TO MARCH 9, 2014

Opening Reception: Friday, January 24, 7PM

Curator Tour: Sunday, January 26, 1PM

PRESENTATION HOUSE GALLERY

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Cover Image: Runa Islam, *Emergence*, 2011, 35mm film loop, 2 min 54 sec,
Courtesy of the artist and White Cube, London

