PETER BLUM GALLERY

MILES COOLIDGE

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Born 1963 in Montreal, Quebec, Canada
Lives and works in Los Angeles, CA

EDUCATION

1994 Kunstakademie Düsseldorf (class of Bernd Becher), Düsseldorf, Germany
1992 MFA, California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA
1986 AB, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2016 Coal Seam *redux*, Peter Blum Gallery, New York, NY
Chemical Pictures, ACME., Los Angeles, CA
Photographs and Chemical Pictures, Franz Josef Albers Museum Quadrat, Bochum, Germany
2015 Coal Seam *redux*, kunstwerden, Essen, Germany
Coal Seam, Bergwerk Prosper-Haniel, NADA Art Fair, New York, NY (curated solo booth/ACME)
2014 ACME, Los Angeles
Safetyville (selection), ACME, Los Angeles
2011 *New Projects*, ACME., Los Angeles, CA
2008 *Street Furniture*, ACME., Los Angeles, CA
2007 Casey Kaplan, New York, NY
2006 *Juncture*, ACME., Los Angeles, CA
2005 *Drawbridges*, Galerie Ilka Bree, Bordeaux, France
Drawbridges, Galerie Lisa Ruyter, Vienna, Austria
Mound Postcard Posters, Harwood Museum of Art, University of New Mexico, Taos, NM
2003 *Drawbridges*, ACME., Los Angeles, CA
Drawbridges, Casey Kaplan Gallery, New York, NY
2002 *Traffic*, ACME., Los Angeles, CA
Majestic Sprawl: Some Los Angeles Photography, Pasadena Museum of California Art, Pasadena, CA
Observatory Circle, Galerie Gisela Capitain, Köln, Germany
2001 *Miles Coolidge: Central Valley*, Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita State University, Wichita, KS
ACME., Los Angeles, CA
2000 Galerie Jennifer Flay, Paris, France
Orange County Museum, Newport Beach, CA
Mattawa, Casey Kaplan, New York, NY
1998 *Central Valley*, Casey Kaplan, New York, NY
Central Valley, ACME., Los Angeles, CA
James Van Damme Gallery, Brussels, Belgium
Moundbuilders Golf Course, ACME., Los Angeles, CA
1996 *Elevator Pictures*, Casey Kaplan, New York, NY
Garage Pictures, ACME., Santa Monica, CA
Garage Pictures, Casey Kaplan, New York, NY
Safetyville, ACME., Santa Monica, CA
1994 *Elevator Pictures*, Los Angeles Center for Photographic Studies, Hollywood, CA
1992 *In Its Place*, Main Gallery, California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA

TWO-PERSON EXHIBITIONS

2013 *Double Helix (with Amy Russell)*, Jose Druidus-Biada Gallery, Mount St. Mary's College, Los Angeles, CA
Josh Peters & Miles Coolidge, HUGE, Los Angeles, CA

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2020 *Recent Acquisitions Of Contemporary Art*, Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara, CA
2019 *Energy: The Power of Art*, Nassau County Museum of Art, Roslyn Harbor, NY
2018 *Forsaken Utopias: Photographs from the OCMA Permanent Collection*, Orange County Museum, Santa Ana, CA
Selected Affinities, Christopher Grimes Gallery, Santa Monica, CA
Kunst und Kohle.Schwarz, Kunstsammlungen der Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Bochum, Germany
Uncanny Valley, Vin Vin Gallery, Vienna, Austria
2017 *First Annual SoCal Teachers' Exhibition*, Los Angeles Center of Photography, Los Angeles, CA
By the River, ACME., Los Angeles, CA
2016 *Things Themselves: Salvatore Arancio, Jeff Baij, Miles Coolidge, Alice Ewing, Jesse Greenberg, Angus McCullough, Paul Salveson, Jessica Sanders*, curated by Zully Adler, Vernon Gardens, Vernon CA
Passage, ACME., Los Angeles, CA
Some Lifestyle Options, Richard Telles Fine Art, Los Angeles, CA (curated by Jan Tumlir)
2015 *Reconstructions; Recent Photographs and Video from the Met Collection*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
2014 *20 Years of ACME.*, ACME., Los Angeles, CA
Road Trip: Photography of the American West from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Musée des Beaux-Artes de Bordeaux, Bordeaux, France
American Scene Photography, NSU Museum of Art, Fort Lauderdale, FL
2013 *Symbolic Landscape*, University Art Gallery, UC Irvine, Irvine, CA
Landscape into Abstraction, Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, CA
2012 *Making Sense*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia
2011 *WP9*, Night Gallery, Los Angeles
2010 *Reflection: 15 Years*, Casey Kaplan Gallery, New York, NY
Der Rote Bulli, NRW-Forum Düsseldorf, Germany [catalogue]
2009 *Surface Tension: Contemporary Photographs from the Collection*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY
2008 *Lure*, Galerie Frank Elbaz, Paris, France
Los Angeles Now, Las Vegas Art Museum, Las Vegas, NV
2007 *Sweet Bird of Youth*, World Class Boxing, Miami, FL
Visiting Faculty Exhibition, Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
Been Up So Long It Looks Like Down to Me, Presentation House Gallery, Vancouver, BC
Art in America Now, Shanghai Museum of Art, China
Eloi: Stumbling Towards Paradise, California Museum of Photography, Riverside, CA
Imaging + Imagining California, Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, CA
Re-SITE-ing the West: Contemporary Photographs from the Permanent Collection, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA
From Close to Home: Recent Acquisitions of Los Angeles Art, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA
Now Is the Winter, Projekt Fabrika, Moscow, Russia

Hidden in Plain Sight: Contemporary Photographs from the Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY

2006 *First the Artist Defines Meaning*, Camera Austria, Graz, Austria
Modern Photographs from the Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Studio City, Tal Ester Gallery, Tel Aviv, Israel
Studio City, Contemporary Photography from Los Angeles, Pescali & Sprovieri, London, England
Artists of a Class, Dunster House, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA

2005 *The Party*, Casey Kaplan, New York, NY

2003 ACME. @Inman, Inman Gallery, Houston, TX
Miles Coolidge, Kevin Hanley, Darcy Huebler, & Aaron Morse, ACME., Los Angeles, CA
Sightseeing: Austrian Triennial of Photography, Graz, Austria
Imperfect Innocence, Contemporary Museum, Baltimore, MD, & Palm Beach Institute of Contemporary Art, FL
Incidence urbaine, Galerie Beaumontpublic, Luxembourg

2002 *Majestic Sprawl*, Pasadena Museum of Contemporary Art, Pasadena, CA
Out of Place: Contemporary Art & the Architectural Uncanny, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL
Strolling Through an Ancient Shrine and Garden, co-curated by Chip Tom and ACME., ACME., Los Angeles, CA
Global Address, Fisher Gallery, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA
New Acquisitions, New Work, New Directions 3: Contemporary Selections, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA
Faculty Exhibition, University Art Gallery, University of California at Irvine, CA

2001 *The Wedding Show*, Casey Kaplan 10-6, New York, NY
Trade, Fotomuseum Winterthur, Köln, Germany
New Settlements, Nikolaj Contemporary Art Center, Copenhagen, Denmark
Phigment, Irvine Fine Arts Center, UC Irvine, Irvine, CA
OUTLOOK earth scaped, Sam Francis Gallery, Santa Monica, CA
Beyond Boundaries: Contemporary Photography in California, Friends of Photography, San Francisco, CA

2000 *Beyond Boundaries: Contemporary Photography in California*, California State University Long Beach, Long Beach, CA
Beyond Boundaries: Contemporary Photography in California, Contemporary Arts Forum, Santa Barbara, CA
Made in California 1900-2000, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA
Flight Patterns, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA
Supermodel, MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA
Escape_space, Ursula Blickle Stiftung, Kraichtal-Unterowisheim, Germany

2000 *Unapocalyptic: The Future That Never Was*, Fisher Gallery, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA

1999 *Photography: an expanded view, recent acquisitions*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, Spain
Photography: an expanded view, recent acquisitions, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY
City of Los Angeles Individual Artists Grants 1999, Barnsdall Art Park, Los Angeles, CA
Tomorrow Forever - Photography as a Ruin, Kunsthalle Krems, Krems, Austria
Sliding Scale, curated by Ron Platt South Eastern Center for Contemporary Art, Winston Salem, NC
Thinking Aloud, Camden Arts Center, London, England
Thinking Aloud, Cornerhouse, Manchester, England

1998 *Thinking Aloud*, Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, England
June/July, Casey Kaplan, New York, NY
Urban Landscapes, Victoria Miro Gallery, London, England
New Ways of Living, Royal College of Art, London, England
Sightings, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, England
Selections from the Permanent Collection, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA
Landscapes, Meyerson & Nowinski, Seattle, WA

1997 *Stills: Emerging Photography in the 1990's*, curated by Douglas Fogle, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN
Elsewhere, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA
Inside Story, Rena Bransten Gallery, San Francisco, CA
Defamiliar: Julie Becker, Miles Coolidge, Thomas Demand, Regen Projects, Los Angeles, CA
The Big Picture: Recent Acquisitions in Photography, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY
Angel Hair - EX.LA., Dogenhaus Galerie Leipzig, curated by Michael Kapinos, Leipzig, Germany
Transport, Post, Los Angeles, CA
World Speak Dumb, Karen Lovegrove, Melbourne, Australia

1996 *The Lie of the Land*, University Art Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA
Location Location, curated by Marcia Tanner, Institute of Contemporary Art San Jose, San Jose, CA
Skin Deep, Thomas Solomon's Garage, Los Angeles, CA
Left of Center: New Art from L.A., 10 in 1 Gallery, Chicago, IL

1995 *Redevelopment*, Victoria Room, San Francisco, CA
Hollywood Boulevard is Sinking, Three Day Weekend, Los Angeles, CA
Late Photography, Food House, Santa Monica, CA

1994 *Rundgang*, Kunstakademie Dusseldorf, Dusseldorf, Germany

1993 *LACPS Member's Exhibition*, curated by Ann Goldstein, Santa Monica Museum, Santa Monica, CA

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

2018 Shaw, Michael. "Selected Affinities", Visual Art Source, wwwvisualartsource.com, August, 2018

2017 Köhler, Myrta. "Miles Coolidge: Coal Seam redux", afterimage, Vol. 44 no. 5, 2017
Meagher, Patrick. "Miles Coolidge: Coal Seam Redux at Peter Blum", Art Observed, February 3, 2017
Wolkoff, Julia. "Lookout; Miles Coolidge at Peter Blum", Art in America [online], January 20, 2017
Riley, Charles A. "ART REVIEW: Miles Coolidge Melds Art and Science in Coal Seam redux", HamptonsArtHub, January 10, 2017

2016 Miller, Nicolas J., "Things Themselves at Vernon Gardens", Contemporary Art Review.la, October 5, 2016

2015 Schwendener, Martha. "Review: Metropolitan Museum Looks at Photos That May Last", New York Times, December 31, 2015

2014 Tumlir, Jan. "Angel of History, or Canary in the Coal Mine", X-TRA, Fall 2014
Knight, Christopher. "Miles Coolidge Digs for Meaning", Los Angeles Times, January 31, 2014
Harcourt, Glenn. "Miles Coolidge at ACME./Los Angeles", March 2014 (illustration)
Hudson, Suzanne. "From Landscape to Lacan; On 'The Symbolic Landscape: Pictures Beyond the Picturesque'", Texte Zur Kunst, March 2014

2011 Knight, Christopher. "Monuments to a Modern Blueprint", Los Angeles Times, June 10 2011 (illustration)

2010 Storm, Brian. "Familie Becher", Kraut: Magazin Für Angewandte Kultur, pp. 18-19, Issue #1
2009 Coolidge, Miles. "Response to Abstracting Photography", Words Without Pictures, pp. 320-323, Alex Klein, ed., Museum Associates/LACMA, Los Angeles, 2009
2008 Knight, Christopher. "A Surprising Slant on Street Trash", Los Angeles Times, January 25 2008
2007 Valdez, Sarah. "Miles Coolidge at Casey Kaplan", Art in America, October 2007
Shier, Reid (ed.), Been Up So Long it Looks Like Down to Me [Exhibition Catalogue], Presentation House Gallery, North Vancouver, B.C. (color illustrations)
Kung, Samuel (ed.), Art In America Now [Exhibition Catalogue], Museum of Contemporary Art, Shanghai (color illustration)
Coggins, David. "Miles Coolidge", Time Out New York, February 8-14, 2007, Issue 593, p.76
Chernisheva, Veronika. "Contemporary Art is Gradually Becoming Apolitical", Nezavisimaya Gazeta [The Independent Newspaper, Moscow], June 1, 2007.
Lindberg, Anna. "Winter Depression," Utro, Moscow, June 6, 2007.
2006 Niegelhell, Franz. “Kunst Kurz,” Falter Steiermark, Vienna, November 30, p.S06.
Seidl, Walter. “Sichtweisen des Konzeptuellen,” artmagazine (online), August 11.
Titz, Walter. “Idyll und bittere Fallstudie,” Kleine Zeitung, Vienna, August 7, p. S47.
Behr, Martin. “Witz, Zitat und Recherche,” Salzburger Nachrichten, Salzburg, July 12, p. S12.
Schmidt, Colette M., “Zuert vermisst der Künstler den Raum,” Der Standard, Vienna, July 11, p. S32.
2003 Knight, Christopher. “Stopped in the Face of Progress,” Los Angeles Times, Oct. 3, p. E29, illus.
Wilson, Michael. “Miles Coolidge’s ‘Drawbridges’ at Casey Kaplan,” Contemporary, Issue 49, p. 84-85, illus.
2001 Colpitt, Frances. “Miles Coolidge at ACME.,” Art in America, October, 2001, P.171.
Rottner, Nadja. “Miles Coolidge,” Camera Austria International, 76/2001, pp 3- 15.
Bonetti, David. “The Modern California Photographer: Not Just a Pretty Face,” San Francisco Chronicle, Thursday, January 25, p. E7.
Myers, Holly. “Horizons, Photography (mostly) at MOCA and the Getty,” LA Weekly, December 22-28.
2000 Pagel, David. “ ‘Flight Patterns’ Ventures Far,” Los Angeles Times, Art Review, p. 61 & p. 63.
Exley, Roy. "Distant Landscapes,” Contemporary Visual Arts, No 27.
1999 Butler, Connie. "West of Everything,” Parkett, no. 57.
McGovern, Thomas. "Riding the Beast,” afterimage, July/August.
Boxer, Sarah. "The Guggenheim Sounds the Alarm: It Ain't Necessarily So,” The New York Times, March 19.
Molesworth, Helen. "Nowheresville,” Frieze, February.
1998 Haines, Gordon. "Miles Coolidge,” Art Issues, November/December.
Smith, Roberta. "Art in Review: Miles Coolidge,” The New York Times, September 18.
Pagel, David. "Miles Coolidge,” The Los Angeles Times, September 11.
Newhall, Edith. "Preview: Art/Photography,” New York, September 14.
Fogle, Douglas. "Stills,” Camera Austria, no. 62/63.
1997 Hennessey, Deborah. "Art Lover's Lost Highway,” Broadsheet, vol. 26, no. 2.
Shearing, Graham. "Exhibit takes viewers 'Elsewhere,” Tribune-Review, Friday, October 17.
Koop, Stuart. "World Speak Dumb,” Art & Text, August - October.
Magnan, Kathleen. "Space Probes,” World Art, May.
Kim, Soo Jin. "Some Models,” X-Tra, Spring.
1996 Scarborough, James. "New Art from Los Angeles,” art press, April.
Cash, Stephanie. "Miles Coolidge,” Art in America, October.
Aletti, Vince. "Deep House,” Village Voice, March 19.

Long, Andrew. "La-La Land," The New Yorker, March 18.
Darling, Michael. "Miles Coolidge," Art Issues, March/April.
Wilk, Deborah. "Left of Center: New Art from Los Angeles," New Art Examiner, March.
Servetar, Stuart. "Miles Coolidge, Garage Pictures," New York Press, February 21.

1996 Stein, Lisa. "Left of Center: New Art from Los Angeles," Chicago's New City, February 18.
Camper, Fred. "Seeing is Believing," Chicago Reader, February 9.
Auerbach, Lisa Anne. "Safety in Pictures, Miles Coolidge's Model Neighborhood," Los Angeles Reader, January 19.

PUBLICATIONS

2003 Imperfect Innocence: The Debra and Dennis Scholl Collection. Palm Beach Institute of Contemporary Art, Lake Worth, Florida, 2003: 3, 48-49. Texts by Nancy Spector, James Rondeau and Michael Rush.
Sightseeing: Austrian Triennial of Photography, Exhibition Catalogue, Graz, Austria.
2001 Beyond Boundaries: Contemporary Photography in California, Exhibition Catalogue, Friends of Photography, San Francisco, CA.
2000 Escape_space, Ursula Blickle Stiftung, Exhibition Catalogue, Kraichtal- Unterowisheim, Germany.
1999 ZOO, Purple House Ltd., London, England, issue 1, March
1998 Sightings: New Photographic Art, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, England.
1997 Stills: Emerging Photography in the 1990's, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN.
1996 Art & Design #51: Central Valley, Art and the Home, London, England, November.
1988 The Affordable Housing Challenge (with Ann Gelbspan), Boston Society of Architects, Boston, MA.

FELLOWSHIPS

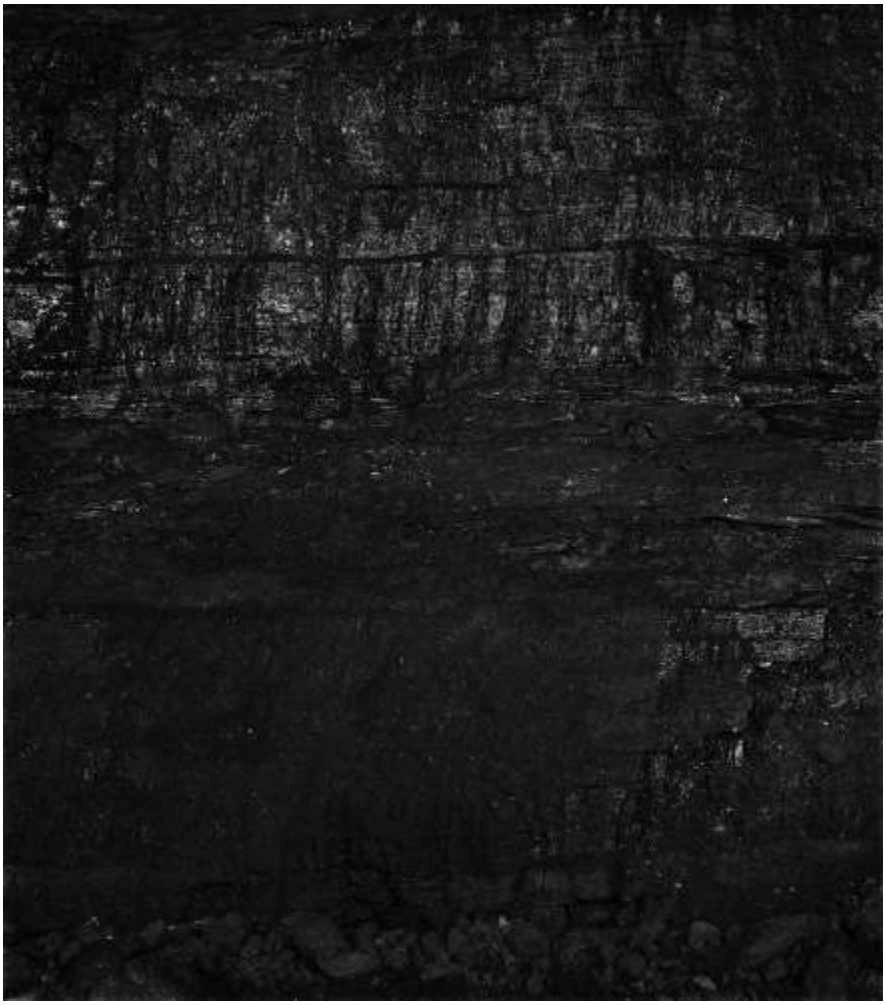
2015 Guggenheim Fellowship in Photography, John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation
1993-94 DAAD Annual Grant, Traveling Fellowship, Kunstakademie Dusseldorf, Dusseldorf, Germany

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Albright-Knox Museum Buffalo, NY
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia
Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD
Edwin A. Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita State University, Wichita, KS
Guggenheim Museum of Art, New York, NY
Henry Art Gallery, Seattle, WA
Lannan Foundation, Santa Fe, NM
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY
Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA
Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, CA
Perez Art Museum Miami, Miami, FL
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara, CA
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY
Weatherspoon Art Museum, Greensboro, NC
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY

ARTOBSERVED

NEW YORK – MILES COOLIDGE: "COAL SEAM REDUX" AT PETER BLUM THROUGH FEBRUARY 4TH, 2017
February 3rd, 2017

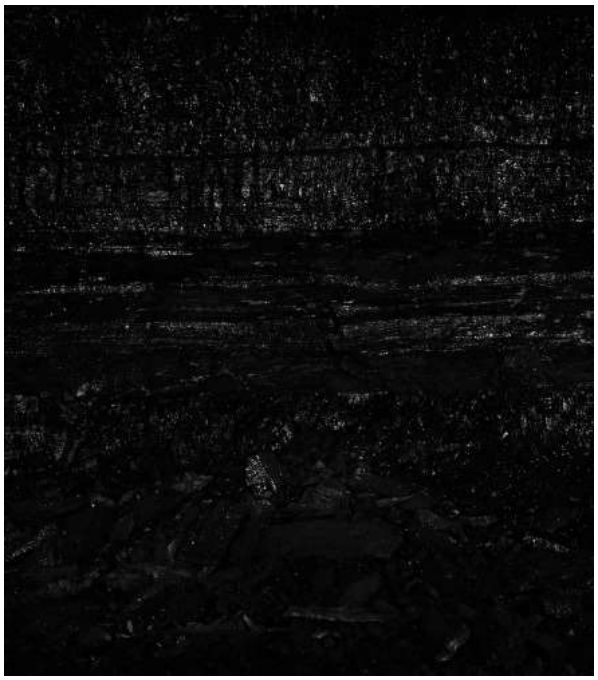


Miles Coolidge, *Coal Seam, Bergwerk Prosper-Haniel #3* (2013), via Peter Blum

A pairing of large photo works of coal mine walls with smaller photochemical pieces, Peter Blum's exhibition of works by Miles Coolidge reinvigorates a dialogue around 20th century inquiries into chemistry, art production, and process imagery, presenting shared sensations of something physically visceral, all realized via inkjet pigment or liquid chemicals, realized in a manner evoking the sublime.

Miles Coolidge, *Coal Seam redux* (Installation View), via Peter Blum

At the forefront of the exhibition is the imagery and materiality of Coolidge's inkjet prints, which possess a lush blackness specific to their subject and medium – large format closeups of a coal mine wall rendered in an ink that has only become standard within the past two decades. The matte depth and palpable texture of inkjet pigment in these works directly overlaps with their subject matter, as Coolidge renders carbon with carbon. This alchemical poetic, spread throughout his series, draws viewers into Blum's space while underscoring the physicality, as well as the variations in shade, of coal as a substance, as a fuel, and as something bringing goods and warmth, not to mention climate change, to the world. Coolidge evocatively presents these pieces, iconic of a smelting furnace industry, as a driver of a bygone era.



Miles Coolidge, *Coal Seam, Bergwerk Prosper-Haniel #5* (2013), via Peter Blum

The material sentiment of Coolidge's coal photographs links them to a second body of work in the exhibition hanging in the rear gallery, one that also functions as an elegant office, which helps viewers imagine situating Coolidge's work in a parlor or a study. Such an environment is apt for these smaller works, as it highlights their place within the process of scientific inquiry. With these pieces, Coolidge documents the continuation of a chemical experiment by Runge that leads to art dialoguing with the history of photography, biochemistry and a broader movement to plumb the chemistry of photography as a materiality and subject matter in and of itself.

There's a salience to revisiting experimentation with chemical media today, as the largely completed crossover to digital inkjet from c-prints has been thoroughly vetted as equal standing with traditional photographic development processes. Blum's pairing of Coolidge's series situates the exhibition within a larger discourse around the nature of photography itself – a vein that a range of contemporary artists are working in with novel combinations of paper and chemicals – Walead Beshty, Liz Deschenes, Matthew Brandt, and Eileen Quinlan, among others who explore the substrate and activations of photographic media, some of whom were featured in the Getty Museum's seminal "Light, Paper, Process" show in 2015.

Miles Coolidge, *Coal Seam redux* (Installation View), via Peter Blum

Beyond using his studio as (both analog and digital) laboratory, Coolidge ventures into the field in pursuit of scientific inquiry: he engages with a working mine in Germany in its twilight. The mine in which he made the pictures- Bergwerk Prosper-Haniel will be the last operating underground coal mine in Germany when it closes in 2018. This is where Coolidge's work can be linked to the Becher's, whom he studied with at the Kunstakademie Dusseldorf. Bernd and Hilla Becher have talked about how the shift to buying cheaper and cleaner natural gas from the East removed the economic incentive to mine coal in the Ruhr, leading to social and economic upheaval in the region- and how their work's focus on obsolescent industrial architecture was directly inspired by these observations. Robert Smithson's work *A sedimentation of the mind :Earth Projects* also comes to mind as a historical anchor. Coolidge's coal and chemical reaction 'portraits,' if you will, also continue the narrative of his own studio process over the last 25 years: mappings of landscape, water bodies, and now underground terraforma in relation to the chemical heritage of its mining.

Miles Coolidge, *Coal Seam redux* (Installation View), via Peter Blum

— P. Meagher

Art in America

Miles Coolidge
at Peter Blum, through Feb. 4
20 West 57th Street

Five large black-and-white photographs greet visitors to "Coal Seam *redux*," Miles Coolidge's first solo show at Peter Blum, immersing viewers in the shimmering, textured abyss of a coal mine. The large scale of the images conjures the mine's crushing depth. The long-exposure photographs, from the 2013 series "Coal Seam, Bergwerk Prosper-Haniel," were shot in the Ruhr Valley in Germany, at a site that lies beneath an industrial structure once captured by Bernd and Hilla Becher. Coolidge, who currently lives and works in Los Angeles, studied under the Bechers, best known for their black-and-white typologies of disappearing industrial buildings.

In a second gallery are Coolidge's "Chemical Pictures," paper chromatographic experiments based on written instructions by nineteenth-century German scientist F.F. Runge. The various combinations of chemicals create rings of color on the saturated off-white paper, the small, gemlike images seeming to suggest precious minerals. Coolidge adopts the role of artist as scientific explorer; continuing his teachers' work, he digs further. —*Julia Wolkoff*

Pictured: Miles Coolidge: *Coal Seam, Bergwerk Prosper-Haniel #4*, 2013, pigment inkjet print, 57 by 50 inches. Courtesy Peter Blum, New York.

HAMPTONSARTHUB
ART UNRESTRICTED

ART REVIEW: Miles Coolidge Melds Art and Science in "Coal Seam redux"

January 10, 2017 by Charles A. Riley II

A strange and subtle show of works by **Miles Coolidge** at the **Peter Blum Gallery** on 57th Street in Manhattan digs deep into the relationship between science and art. The exhibition, "Coal Seam *redux*," combines large-scale photographs of a coal seam at an active mine in the Ruhr valley with a series of small works on paper that replicate a landmark chemical experiment by F.F. Runge.

These seemingly disparate ideas, resulting in dramatically different visual presentations, actually share a number of hidden connections. The works on view are also full of satisfying surprises, such as the glints of light that sparkle in the mine, flashing white facets that glimmer in the darkness of the shaft in *Coal Seam, Bergwerk Prosper-Haniel #1*. Who knew that coal—that bête noire of the energy industry—could be so elegantly beautiful?

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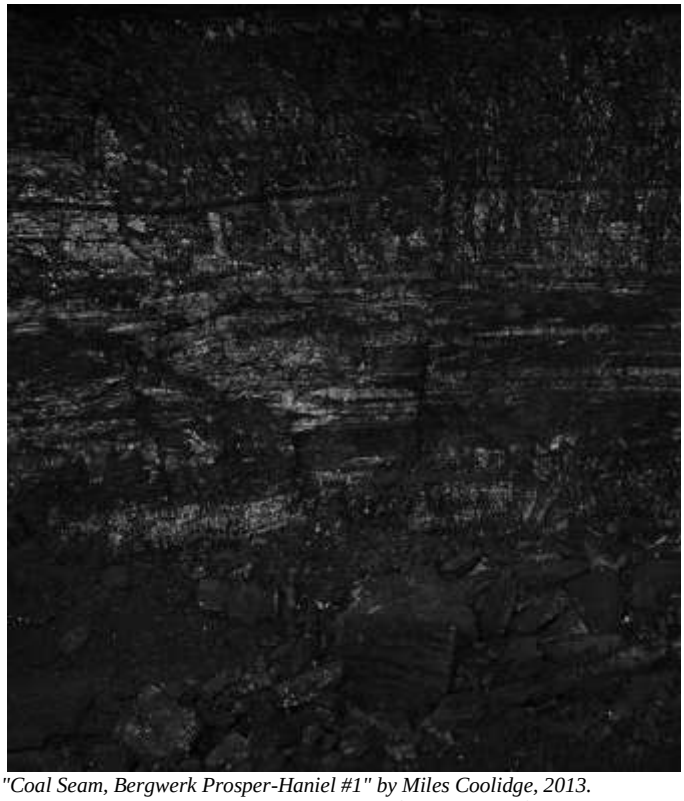

"Coal Seam, Bergwerk Prosper-Haniel #1" by Miles Coolidge, 2013.
Pigment inkjet print, 57 x 50 inches. Edition of 5. Courtesy of Peter Blum Gallery.

Miles Coolidge photographed the mine with an 8x10 camera, using long exposure times to collect an extraordinary range of textural detail. The works also explore the different ways that these textures deflect what must be minimal light on surfaces that are printed at times in a velvety matte black-on-black and at other times with a diamond-like white, as in the radiant oval just below the center of *Coal Seam, Bergwerk Prosper-Haniel #5*.

"Coal Seam, Bergwerk Prosper-Haniel #5" by Miles Coolidge, 2013.
Pigment inkjet print, 57 x 50 inches. Edition of 5. Courtesy of Peter Blum Gallery.

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The "highlight" of each of the five large-scale images, which measure 57 by 50 inches, is the jagged crack that runs like a scar across the three works on one wall and cuts across the other two that are side-by-side on the next wall. Like the set for a production of Richard Wagner's Ring cycle, these images convey the epochal duration of geological time, millions of years of compression. They also capture the somber blackness of the ancient ore that is responsible for a choking smog in Beijing, which even the local officials (known for their bald-faced lies on climate change) are calling a "meteorological disaster."

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"Coal Seam Redux" by Miles Coolidge, on view at Peter Blum Gallery.
Courtesy of Peter Blum Gallery.

Another operatic comparison comes to mind: The alluring glimmer of striations in the rock evokes the ribbons of LED lights used to conjure the Mediterranean in the stage set for a contemporary opera that recently made its debut at the Metropolitan Opera House, the Finnish composer Kaija Saariaho's "L'Amour de Loin." I'd even go as far as to compare Coolidge's undulating forms to the arpeggios of the composer's mesmerizing score. The illumination, the layering of blacks, and the patterns remind me of some of the best prints (usually grey on grey) of Jasper Johns or the untitled back-lit sculpture made in 1966 by Bruce Nauman, given to the Museum of Modern Art by Joseph Helman (who was connected to this space when it was known as the Blum Helman Gallery).

There are so many subtexts below the surface of these works, both art historical and scientific, that the in-depth experience is a matter of historical digging. The series has art historical roots, because the Ruhr valley is best known in photographic circles as the stomping grounds of Bernd and Hilla Becher, Coolidge's teachers at the Düsseldorf Kunstakademie. Their elegiac images of industrial structures are now considered classics. Like the Bechers, Coolidge's work is now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum, as well as the Albright-Knox Gallery, Guggenheim Museum and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Better known in Germany and on the west coast than in New York, Coolidge is a Montrealer (born in 1963) who studied in Dusseldorf but earned his MFA at the California Institute of the Arts and lives in Los Angeles.
Although it sounds a bit like a ruse, another twist on these works is that they are printed by an inkjet method using pigments derived from coal. The conceptual click of this knowledge of the material link between subject and object is part of the signal sent by the word "*redux*" in the exhibition's title.

In a new book on the epistemological challenge posed by abstract art, "Reductionism in Art and Brain Science," the Nobel laureate Eric Kandel offers a compelling case for the "top-down" processing of abstract art, a splendid key to the painterly impact of the five large works, richly printed in their luscious range of mineral blacks.
The bridge from the photos printed with carbon to the second part of the exhibition—the little works on paper that are as airy as the mines are dense—can be seen in the studio process of using a coal-based chemical to start these "self-grown pictures." The descriptive title was assigned to the process by F.F. Runge (1794–1867) who pioneered the major breakthrough in analytic chemistry that made the process possible.

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"18.3 1) 32 Theile schwefelsaures Mangan 1:8. 1 Theile schwefelsaures Eisenoxydul 1:4. 2) 1 Theil rothes Cyaneisenkalium 1:8. 1Theil Kalilauge (siehe no. 12." by Miles Coolidge, 2016. Chemical solutions on chromatography paper, 12 x 9 inches. Courtesy of Peter Blum Gallery.

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A correspondent with Goethe during the period of the great author's research into color theory, F.F. Runge should not be confused with the painter Otto Runge, another friend of Goethe and significant figure in the history of color research. F.F. Runge (best known for discovering caffeine) began using filter paper for carrying out chemical reactions. He identified the first coal tar dye (aniline blue), depositing it with other chemicals to create reactions on the surface of the paper, where the water-soluble compounds would seep into rings of delicate colors.

The best of Coolidge's small works on paper have blue at the core, morphing into ambers and oranges that shimmer like the iris of an eye. Following Runge closely in the creation of the chromatographs, as they would be called later, Coolidge combines chance and choice in an operation that looks almost too biological and faint to hold its own with the industrial pressures of the mine photographs. Like the watercolors of Emil Nold or Paul Klee, they let the tints run at will to edges of saturated paper, where the interaction of color is a matter of chemistry.

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"26.2 1) Chloralumium 60 B. -2) Gelbes Cyaneisenkalium 1:16. - 3) 1 Theil schwefelsaures Kupferoxyd 1:8. 3 Theile Chloralumium 60 B." by Miles Coolidge, 2016. Chemical solutions on chromatography paper, 12 x 9 inches. Courtesy of Peter Blum Gallery.

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I admire the way Coolidge avoids bashing the viewer over the head with an overt protest against the extractive industries, as mining is called in corporate circles. The missing color in this show is green, and its absence is a strength. As with corporations that make as much as they can of sustainability efforts in their corporate social responsibility reports, art that makes carbon emission into propaganda can rapidly turn into excessive "greenwashing," which in turn can be counter-productive because the ear and eye naturally blot it out along with other political rhetoric.

Even the geographic context of the works is loaded with irony, as Germany today leads the world in its commitment to replacing fossil fuels in its energy grid. By contrast with the usual type of overstatement for effect, Coolidge slips his message in with nuance, a superb example of art's role in shaping consciousness when it comes to the issue of the environment.

This approach reminds me of Oscar Wilde's observations about the atmospheric paintings of J.M.W. Turner and the literally lethal fogs of Industrial Age Britain: "Before Turner there was no fog in London. There may have been fogs for centuries in London. I dare say there were. But no one saw them, and so we do not know anything about them. They did not exist till Art had invented them. Now, it must be admitted, fogs are carried to excess. They have become the mere mannerism of a clique, and the exaggerated realism of their method gives dull people bronchitis. Where the cultured catch an effect, the uncultured catch cold. And so, let us be humane, and invite Art to turn her wonderful eyes elsewhere."

BASIC FACTS: "Miles Coolidge: Coal Seam *redux*" is on view December 16, 2016 to February 4, 2017 at the Peter Blum Gallery, 20 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10019. www.peterblumgallery.com.

The New York Times

Review: Metropolitan Museum Looks at Photos That May Last

By MARTHA SCHWENDENER DEC. 31, 2015

"Last of the Dreadnoughts" (2011-12), a photograph by Thomas Bangsted.
Credi tThomas Bangsted, Metropolitan Museum of Art

It is contemporary photography roundup time in New York, with major exhibitions appearing concurrently at the Museum of Modern Art ("Ocean of Images: New Photography 2015") and the Guggenheim ("Photo-Poetics: An Anthology"). The Met's contribution, "Reconstructions: Recent Photographs and Video From the Met Collection," is not framed as a showcase of what's new, hot or trending, but it relates both subtly and significantly to these two exhibitions. The show includes 18 works by 15 artists acquired during the past seven years – work that Met curators think will endure historically.

While there are no overlaps with the artists in the MoMA and Guggenheim shows, the correspondences between those exhibitions and "Reconstructions" are telling. Moyra Davey, whose practice combines writing and photography and feels like a template for the Guggenheim's formally rigorous "Photo-Poetics," is included in that show as well as the one at the Met. Her work "Kevin Ayers" (2013) consists of photographs of record store patrons and vinyl record bins, printed on fold-up mailers addressed to a curator at the Tate Liverpool, which commissioned this work, and arranged as a grid on the wall. The work pays homage both to a founding member of the '60s English psychedelic rock band Soft Machine – Mr. Ayers, who died in 2013 – but also the end of an era of vinyl records and its counterpart in the photography world, the death of so-called analog chemical photography.

Erica Baum, who is also included in "Photo-Poetics," looks back to the analog world of paper books, using them as raw material and photographic subjects. Ms. Baum is represented here by four photographs of books from the "Dog's Ear" series, with pages folded down such that new texts and meanings are generated by the images.

If “Reconstructions” overlaps in places with the solemn, serious “Photo-Poetics,” it also channels some of the brash, mass-media-savvy of MoMA’s “Ocean of Images,” too. Lucas Blalock, who has several works in that show, is represented at the Met with a chromogenic print, “Both Chairs in C W’s Living Room” (2012), which has also been used to publicize the Met show. An example of post-Internet artists who demonstrate a simultaneous respect and irreverence for digital media and editing tools, “Both Chairs” looks like a cross between a classical still life and an upscale home-furnishings advertisement. It contains perverse passages in which the artist has digitally “corrected” the floor, chair and curtains to create visual jokes reminiscent of how Cubists hijacked painting’s system of illusionism a century ago.

What the Met can add powerfully to any conversation on photography is a sense of its deep history – that is, how new styles and techniques are often rooted in forgotten or submerged traditions. (This is also played out in the installation, through Jan. 18, called “Grand Illusions: Staged Photography From the Met Collection,” which uses both 19th-century and contemporary photography to make its claims.) Within “Reconstructions,” several works draw from and mimic early photography. Thomas Bangsted’s black-and-white photograph, “Last of the Dreadnoughts” (2011-2012), features an American warship that was once painted with “dazzle” camouflage, which was invented by a Vorticist painter to confuse German optical range-finding devices. Mr. Bangsted’s digital manipulations – including the ship’s dazzle effect and reflections in the water – partially recalls Gustave Le Gray’s 19th-century photographs, which used different negatives to achieve the desired effect of placid sea and expressively cloudy sky.

“Carnival Ball” (2011) by Sarah Charlesworth. Credit Sarah Charlesworth, Metropolitan Museum of Art\

Miles Coolidge’s dark, nearly monochrome image from inside a German coal mine – made with an inkjet printer that uses coal products – harks back to photographers like Aaron Siskind, who approximated the painterly abstraction of his midcentury peers. But it also pays sly homage to the German conceptualists Bernd and Hilla Becher, Mr. Coolidge’s professors at the Düsseldorf Kunstakademie, who documented the industrial machinery that brought the coal to the surface of this very mine. Meanwhile, Shannon Bool’s black-and-white silver gelatin print “Nadja” (2014) looks like an example of African photography but is actually a collage made from culturally disparate sources: a Surrealist-era mannequin from the 1925 Decorative Arts Exposition in Paris and a tribal motif on a ceremonial house from Papua New Guinea.

There is another narrative quietly threading its way through “Reconstructions.” This is the enduring influence of the Pictures Generation from the ’70s and ’80s, which helped put photography at the center of contemporary art. Doug Eklund, the Met curator who organized this show, also organized the benchmark exhibition “The Pictures Generation, 1974-1984” at the Met in 2009. That show examined the first generation of artists to grow up with television and subsequently appropriate mass-media images for their work, undermining modernist claims to originality.

Clegg & Guttman's "Our Production, The Production of Others: CD Cover Version II" (1986-2012), a portrait of a German classical music group that was used for one of its album covers, is emblematic of this lineage in which the image is a simulacra: a copy with no original; an artwork put into commercial, promotional use. Similarly, Roe Ethridge's "Double Ramen"(2013) is a perfectly deadpan, post-Pictures diptych juxtaposing two close-up photographs of uncooked ramen noodles.

But the most telling image in the exhibition is a photograph by Sarah Charlesworth, a leading member of the Pictures generation, which included many women (among them Cindy Sherman, Louise Lawler and Sherrie Levine) who "used" photography for art-making rather than for identifying themselves as photographers per se. Ms. Charlesworth's chromogenic print "Carnival Ball" (2011) does not derive from, or comment on, mass-media imagery. Instead, using only the light available in her studio, she photographed a crystal ball against a striped background to achieve what looks like a magical effect. The photograph hints at advertising displays and the "magic" of special-effects photos, creating a nice link to a younger generation of artists that consciously celebrates the "magic" (rather than the "culturally constructed" nature) of photographic imaging.

Ms. Charlesworth serves as a kind of patron saint at the Guggenheim: the frontispiece of the catalog for "Photo-Poetics" includes a dedication: "In memory of the life and work of Sarah Charlesworth," who died of an aneurysm in 2013.

Museums are a challenging place to test out contemporary theories of art history, which, after all, is the product of consensus: groups of artists, critics and historians agreeing, even provisionally, on who and what is important at a given moment. While the Guggenheim and MoMA offer largely divergent narratives of the current era, leaning toward the Internet's circulation and dissemination of images and the rigorous legacy of conceptualism, respectively, "Reconstructions" functions like a gentle mediator, offering a perspective rooted in the long history of photography that already exists within the museum itself.

"Reconstructions: Recent Photographs and Video From the Met Collection" is at the Metropolitan Museum of Art through March 13; 212-535-7710, metmuseum-.org.

A version of this review appears in print on January 1, 2016, on Page C25 of the New York edition with the headline: An Eye on History When Seeing Photos. Order Reprints| Today's Paper|Subscribe

REVIEWS ● (continued)

underlying pattern.

Not long ago, Street's work was very much about surfaces, playing exuberantly with bright colors and patterns on sprawling canvases. In 2011, her painting method took a decidedly inward and experimental turn when she devised her now signature method of wrapping herself in layers of nylon and recreating her own sleeping positions in a pool of paint, then using those same streaked nylons as compositional materials.

Her 2012 show at Carter & Citizen, titled *Portraits and Ropes*, featured streaked fabrics that were draped on canvases like shawls, and two dramatic pieces in which the fabric was twisted into skeins and hung. For *A Vulgar Proof*, Street has discarded the outward expressiveness of those works in favor of holding back and developing a deeper interior dialogue. The result is a richer and more sophisticated body of work that smartly evokes the histories of abstract painting, conceptual art and feminist performance work, but imitates none.

Cassiopeia Loves Grimaldi, a pair of wall-mounted bronze Elizabethan collars, continues Street's manipulation of the residual associations we bestow on articles of clothing. Named after two historical members of the ruling class, the sculpture isolates and objectifies a symbol of their rank, rendering it odd and specimen-like. More sweeping is *Carving 100, Six in my bed*, a ceiling-to-floor installation in which waxed silk threads hang from meat hooks and are weighted to the ground by pieces of soap stone, a traditional carving material from Street's native Appalachia. One set of threads is further embellished by weaving in 100 bronzed birthday candles. Again, Street plays with the emotional and social charge of objects, deftly weaving personal associations with historical ones.

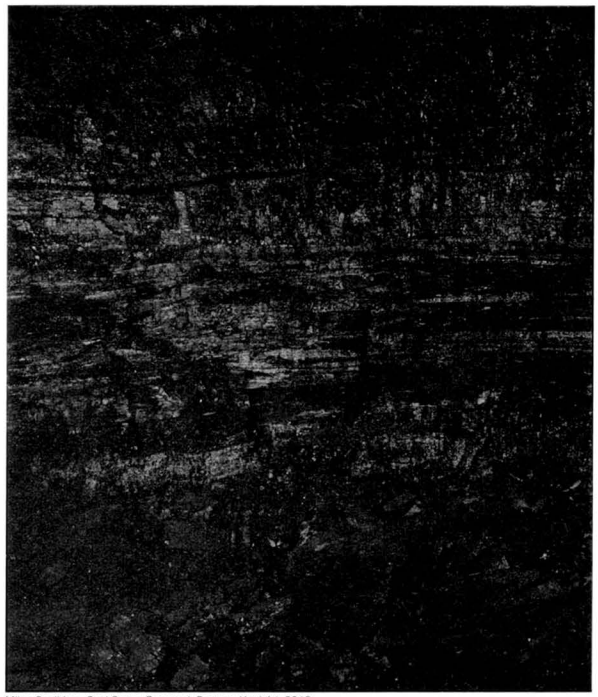
A few years ago, some might have referred to Street's paintings as decorative. Now, she is more likely to pull elements of decor from culture and history and uncover the darker, dirtier and more complex impulses that hide in their corners.

MILES COOLIDGE
ACME.
BY GLENN HARCOURT

THE PHOTOGRAPHS BY MILES COOLIDGE RECENTLY ON DISPLAY at ACME, Los Angeles, are magnificently beautiful examples of the photographer's craft. Simply as aesthetic objects, the photos are compelling: composed according to simple underlying geometries, they nonetheless display an inexhaustible wealth of infinitesimal detail.

Aside from two recent examples of the ongoing series of UC construction mock-ups, the work in the current show includes a single monumental mural and four sizable black-and-white prints that make up a sequence: *Coal Seam, Bergwerk Prosper-Haniel*. Shot with an 8 x 10 view camera in a single day-long session, the four prints comprise studies of an "active working face" (the actual exposure of the coal seam) in a Ruhr Valley mine. Approaching the work is curiously like a descent into the mineshaft. The images at first are inscrutable abstractions. Then, suddenly, a narrow foreground space appears, strewn with rubble that abuts the vertical face of the seam, where work lights play over an extraordinary geography, every little rise and fall, crack and fault picked out to evoke a ghostly otherworldly terrain. About 75% of the way up from the bottom, each print shows a deep crack in the face of the seam, a pitch black horizontal mark that ties all the images together, and cuts each image with a crooked axis that suggests the lateral extension of the mine's geography into a potentially limitless darkness.

Formally and geologically rich, Miles Coolidge's *Bergwerk Prosper-Hamiel* series is deeply embedded in the complex history of mining technology, German industrialization, and more general history of attempts to understand, control and exploit the environment. It also resonates with the history of photography at its very point of origin: the oldest surviving "photograph," produced by Joseph Niépce in 1826/27, employed a bitumen-coated plate—while, thanks to the brilliance of German analytical chemistry, the off-the-shelf Epson inks used to print the current series employ pigments likewise derived from coal.



Miles Coolidge, *Coal Seam, Bergwerk Prosper-Haniel 1*, 2013

Although comprising only a single colossal 92 x 221 inch image, *Francis Gate* (2010-2013) is another examination of man's impact on the environment over time. We see spread out as though along the course of a slow cinematic pan, a one-year buildup of debris at the Francis Gate sluice, constructed in 1850 to facilitate control of the Merrimack River and the development of the textile industry in Lowell, Massachusetts. As the eye moves diagonally across the gigantic print, an uninflected jet black ground is increasingly displaced by a chaotic welter of form and color—primarily green and grayish-brown from a distance; the closer one gets, the more complex becomes the play of color accents, as the captured objects (natural and human detritus) are seen in ever-increasing, perhaps incrementally infinite detail.

In all, this is an extraordinary show, where images of profound beauty are used to ground an artist's photographic practice in a rich if unexpected matrix. Theory, chemistry, industrial, artistic and social history all come together to illuminate the marks that we make both on and under the land.

PETER FISCHLI AND DAVID WEISS
MATTHEW MARKS
BY JOHN DAVID O'BRIEN

FISCHLI AND WEISS ARE UP TO SOME ELABORATE SHENANIGANS. Walking in from the street, under the severe brow created by the Ellsworth Kelly block style building-remake of the Matthew Marks Gallery façade, a viewer might think that they were accidentally let in between shows, since the place is strewn with art debris.

Pallets are stacked against the walls, fragments of drywall, peg board, wood panels and other irregularly-cut flat stock are collected

COOLIDGE: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND ACME., LOS ANGELES

Los Angeles Times

Review: Miles Coolidge digs for meaning

January 31, 2014 | By Christopher Knight

The rich coal deposits at Bergwerk Prosper-Haniel mines in Germany's Ruhr Valley are what lurk beneath the industrial towers shown in many of Bernd and Hilla Becher's classic Minimalist photographs from the late 1960s and '70s. For his most recent series of photographs, Miles Coolidge went down into those mine shafts. Four large, luxurious inkjet prints of the coal seams are at ACME. Gallery.

At first the images are difficult to make out, the sooty blackness yielding a velvety surface flecked with spots of white. As the coal seam slowly comes into view, with its fractured layers of carbonized vegetable matter transformed by intense pressure into potentially combustible fuel, an image deep within the Earth seems to fuse with the exquisite intimation of a star-studded galaxy as remote as the Milky Way.

Coolidge deftly compresses social, scientific, aesthetic and material histories into otherwise banal pictures. Visually, the photographs' horizontal smears of light-flecked pigment echo the squeegee paintings of German artist Gerhard Richter. According to a gallery handout, the standard pigment inks used to print them are almost entirely composed of carbon derived from coal.

Also on view are two new photographs of peculiar architectural mock-ups in empty lots, one for a medical building and one for a university alumni center. As with earlier examples from the series, which Coolidge showed at ACME. in 2011, the strangely fragmentary pictures dismantle photography as a tool that constructs modern knowledge.

Finally, a monumental, four-panel photograph shows detritus piled up at the backwash of canal sluice gates in a faded New England industrial town. On one hand, it recalls a high-tech satellite photograph of a disintegrating Earth. On another, a shadow seems to be descending over a 20-foot-wide skein of tangled material -- nightfall over a heroic Jackson Pollock painting.

ACME, 6150 Wilshire Blvd., (323) 857-5942, through Feb. 8. Closed Sun. and Mon.
www.acmelosangeles.com

X·TRA

Angel of History, or Canary in the Coal Mine

Miles Coolidge
ACME.
Los Angeles
January 11– February 8, 2014
By Jan Tumlir

Miles Coolidge's recent exhibition at ACME. gallery featured a monumental mural photograph of the meeting point of a river and an early industrial power canal system, four photographs of coal taken inside a mineshaft, and two photographs from a series of so-called "architectural mockups." The last of these resume much the same ground the artist has covered for the best part of his working career. As with his *Safetyville* project from 1996, which centers on a scaled-down model city built in the early eighties in Sacramento, CA, for purposes of childhood training in the correct use of the built environment, Coolidge here again points his camera at a simulated architecture that, in his highly refined pictorial treatment, becomes nearly indistinguishable from the real one. Shot at University of California construction sites, the recent pictures, which Coolidge has been compiling since 2010, present head-on views of building facades—in this case, an alumni center and an eye institute. In their detailed construction and generically institutional character, these structures are initially glimpsed as drearily status quo, just more of the same mock-grandiose design that we experience every day in our urban centers. One might be tempted to write them off as object studies in postmodern boredom, and as such basically interchangeable, an inventory of increasingly exhausted signs for the civic that demand our attention only in their rote accumulation as opposed to any particular quality each might want to impart. Certainly, a dismal logic pervades this work and lends it a somewhat cynical edge, but that is not all there is to it. More closely examined, a range of off-putting, uncanny details intrude: Windows that should offer interior views instead peer out at the sky, and objects in the landscape behind the built structures—electrical poles, ornamental shrubbery, streets and cars, as well as the left-behind tools and materials of construction—push in, compressing background and foreground relations to an impossible extent and undermining our sense of scale. The pictures are titled after the buildings that have ostensibly been raised on these sites, as if to corroborate the illusion that they are already there, when in fact these are merely false fronts, two-dimensional tests for a coming architecture. This

element of theatrical artifice is divulged gradually, and only to those who take the time to look carefully.

Miles Coolidge, *Alumni Center*, 2013. Pigment inkjet print, framed; 46 1⁄2 × 58 inches. Courtesy of the artist and ACME., Los Angeles.

Miles Coolidge, *Eye Institute*, 2013. Pigment inkjet print, framed; 50 × 64 inches. Courtesy of the artist and and ACME., Los Angeles.

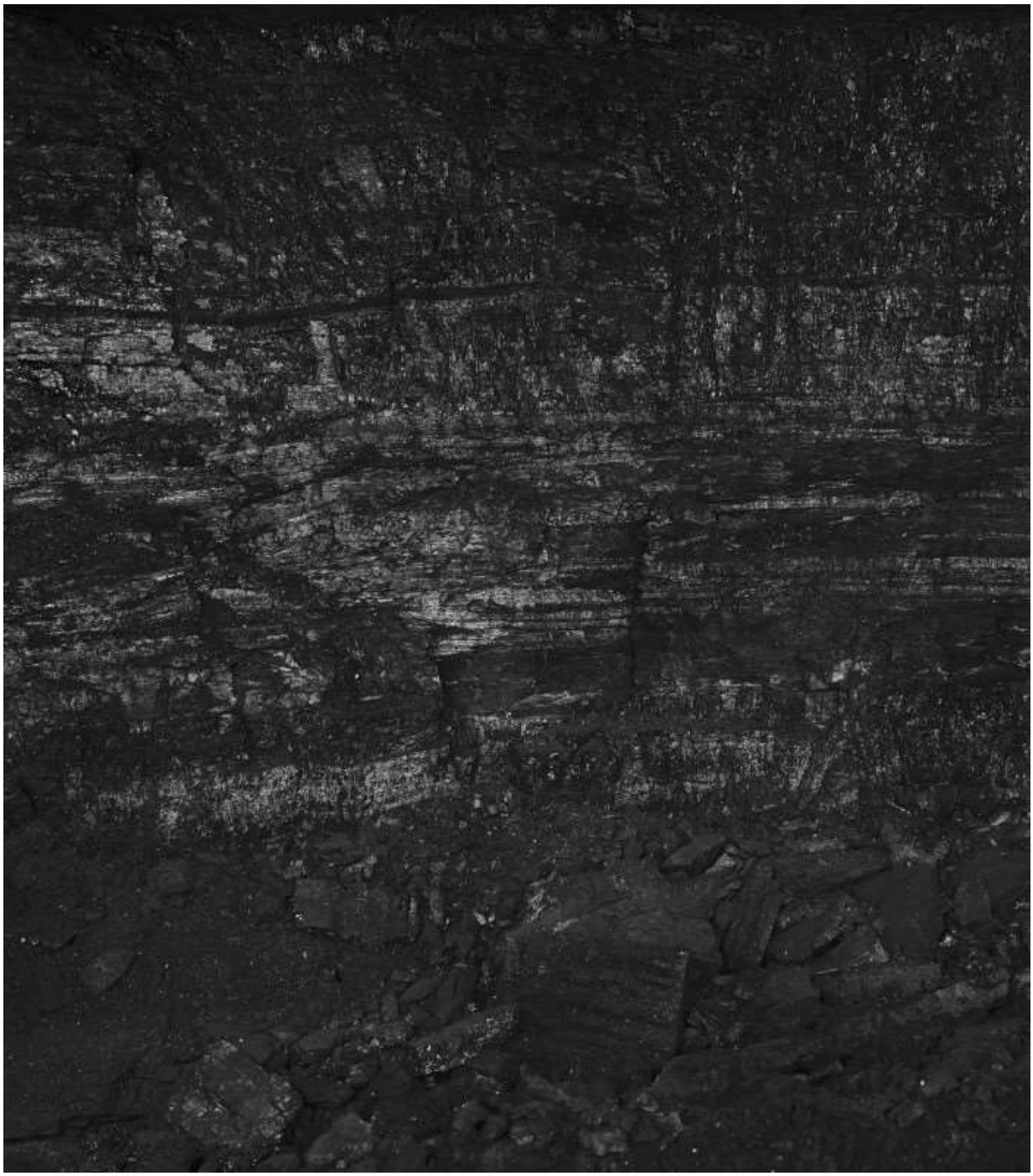
That said, the mockups are instantly recognizable as a certain kind of picture. In their centrality, frontality, and expressionlessness, they are closely related to the New Objectivity movement in German photography, which emerged in the Weimar era and extends into the present largely through the efforts of Bernd and Hilla Becher and then their students from the Dusseldorf Academy of Art—Andreas Gursky, Thomas Struth, and Candida Höfer among them. The typological principle in picture making stresses a clear isolation of the referential object from the distractions of its context, a sharply focused view of its most characteristic side, typically its "face," and a reduction of subjective-aesthetic input on the part of the artist to the bare minimum. The photographs of Coolidge, who studied with Bernd Becher in Dusseldorf between 1993 and 1994 on a German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) stipend, shortly after graduating from CalArts, meet all of these criteria, and yet their aim is not strictly informational. Or rather, what they inform us about is not only the thing in itself, whatever it might be that has come before the photographer's lens, but also the relation between this apparatus and a particular order of things—things that are in some way analogous to photographs. The architectural mockups greet the camera as images already, as things that are one-sided, sheer appearance, all face, and therefore eminently suited to the flat space of the print. And yet, perhaps paradoxically, this perfectly reciprocal fit between substance

and form actively undermines visual understanding. Were we to encounter these structures out in the open, we might find them curious, but not as confounding as they are here. Even if we know from the outset just what they consist of—and the information is generally made available to the gallery-goer, whether by way of the artist's statement or word of mouth—photography provides them with a kind of camouflage, a way to hide in plain sight.

There has always been a historical-materialist side to the modernist demand for medium specificity, although it is often obscured in media with a long human history, like painting. To reduce a medium down to its constituent properties, or in more idealistic terms, its "essence," is also to present it as a material fact, a thing that is made to disclose itself as a made thing. On this point, photography has always had a certain advantage, as it emerged side by side with the artificial "second nature" of the urban-industrial landscape and was straightaway implicated in its productive machinery, as well as all of the critical debates it has given rise to. Here, however, the zero-degree of mediumicity cannot any longer be sought through the gradual elimination of outlying subject matter, since reproduction is precisely the most intrinsic command function of photography. Yet to reproduce something, as the camera does, is not necessarily the same as representing it, and it is largely due to photography's structural ties to the order of mass-production that it was so ardently seized by those artists affiliated with the New Objectivity as a means to familiarize us with an increasingly machine-made world. Since a photograph must always show us something other than what it is in itself, medium-specificity would come down to a choice of appropriate, mutually revealing content. In the seminal work of Albert Renger-Patzsch, for instance, pictures of factories and their output, typically shown stockpiled in identical units, alternate with pictures of landscapes, plants, and animals. The camera serves as a kind of mediator between the endless profusion of organic forms and those of precision-tooled standardization; it compares and contrasts the two in order to explain the one through the other, and this explanation, which cannot be delivered by any other medium, is therefore specific to it. Coolidge cites Renger-Patzsch's book, *Die Welt ist schon* (*The World Is Beautiful*, 1928), a user's manual of sorts of the New Objectivity, as a crucial precedent for his own practice, as he too believes that art can be both aesthetically rewarding and informative. In other words, beauty in art need not be non-purposive, as per Kant; photography shows that it can have educational function.

In his decision to photograph a coal seam in the Bergwerk Prosper-Haniel mine just outside Essen, Germany, Coolidge returns to the old stomping grounds of Renger-Patzsch and the Bechers, and does so with a pragmatic-formalist agenda that is related to theirs, while also veering off on new tangents. Certainly, one aim of these pictures is simply to afford us views of an obscure, subterranean world generally hidden from sight, and in this sense they can be considered enlightening. The camera extends the eye into this buried space of labor so fundamental to the workaday standards of life up above, and exposes it to visual scrutiny. However, by focusing strictly on the raw material—the black coal itself, in the absence of any infrastructural detail related to its extraction, transportation, or refinement—Coolidge also departs from the category of documentary photography or reportage to make contact with a whole other, largely antithetical, tradition in painting. On first look, that is, these pictures resemble nothing so much as black monochromes, the emblematic instance of medium-specific reduction to the zero-degree. Like the near-serial works that Ad Reinhardt produced toward the end of his career, these are initially glimpsed as undifferentiated fields of darkness, and only become visible gradually in their unique variegation. Likewise also, in the time that it takes to actually see them, they mobilize our perceptual mechanism

in such an emphatic way as to render it perceptible in turn, so that in the end we see ourselves seeing, but this process of phenomenological sensitization here occurs in relation to a subject that must also be read for its historical, social, and political meaning. Whereas Reinhardt famously described his black paintings in terms of absolute negation—in regard not only to mimetically referential form, but also to expressive, imagined, and constructed form—here instead we are faced with an informational surplus. Accordingly, then, Coolidge's pictures of coal may be understood as problem objects that recapitulate a long-standing argument between these two mediums. As Renger-Patzsch puts it in a 1929 text for the annual journal of photography, *Das Deutsche Lichtbild*: "There is not the slightest doubt that graphic art has been obliged to surrender to the camera much territory in which it was previously absolutely sovereign, and not only for reasons of economy, but because in many instances photography works faster, and with greater precision and greater objectivity than the hand of the artist. Whilst art used often to be concerned with representation…modern artists have drawn the right conclusions from the changes which have taken place, and have logically attempted to fashion art in absolute terms."[1] Painting becomes "about nothing," or nothing but itself, because photography steals from it everything else. Conversely, however, painting also marks the limit of the properly photographic photograph, for medium-specificity here demands a rejection of the painterly, of an imitative pictorialism. "Time and again, people (photographers) have been only too keen *to compete with art*," Renger-Patzsch writes. "They perfect what they regard as high quality printing processes…in order to turn a good photograph into a bad picture."[2]

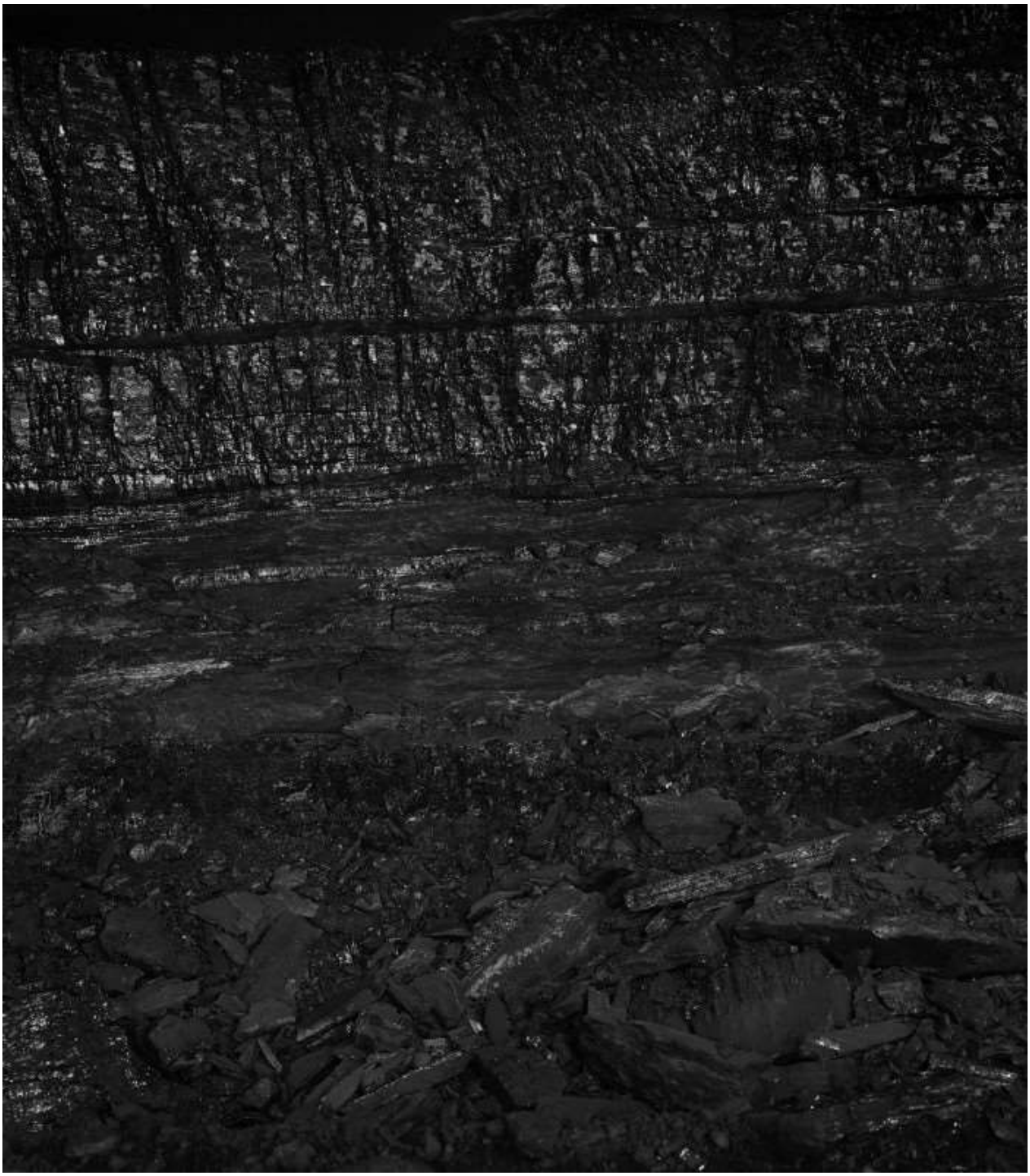


Miles Coolidge, *Coal Seam, Bergwerk Prosper-Haniel 4*, 2013. Pigment inkjet print, framed; 57 × 50 inches. Courtesy of the artist and ACME., Los Angeles.

In citing the monochrome as the terminus point of this drive toward the "absolute," Coolidge would seem to have committed a cardinal sin against the natures of both mediums as defined in strict opposition to one another. But he does so from a perspective where such oppositions no longer hold: Painting today resumes all of its old representational functions right alongside its newer abstracting ones, and photography is no less confined to any one way of working, whether with or without the

given forms of the visible world. Moreover, as a consequence of the so-called "digital turn," photography becomes more inherently painterly at every step of the image-capture, post-production, and printing process, all of which allow the artist endless opportunities for interceding directly into the elementary particles of picturing. For Coolidge, this "turn," which continues to transform photographic practice at present, also begs its historical reevaluation. As noted, the artist became interested in the coal-mining region of the German Ruhrgebiet on the basis of its connection to the New Objectivity, but also because photography was materially dependent on fossilized hydrocarbon from the outset. This is, for instance, the source of bitumen, a chemical compound that was inherent in the composition of the very first light-sensitive print. Obviously, this fact cannot be gleaned simply by looking at the pictures themselves, which are after all the outcome of a newer ink-jet technology, but some evidence of it remains behind as a material deposit layered into their substance, and Coolidge insists on this with his largely analog process. The exposures were made with an 8-by-10-inch view camera onto black-and-white film and then printed on Epson "fine art" paper, which lends them a subtly exotic, antiquated aura. And yet if these pictures point to photography's past, it is not with nostalgia or stubborn insistence on old school technique, but rather a desire to rethink its future program from the ground up.

In the course of his research, Coolidge discovered that his association of photography, coal, and Germany might actually run deeper than he had initially suspected. In Esther Leslie's 2006 book *Synthetic Worlds: Nature, Art and the Chemical Industry*, which was presented on the gallery desk alongside the artist's past catalogs, the author details the breakthrough experiments of German chemists like Friedlieb Runge to extract analine, a material essential to the production of synthetic dyes, from coal tar, a waste product of coal's refinement into coal oil, in the mid-nineteenth century.[3] As it happens, the patented control of this process would insure Germany's dominance of the global market for artificial color right up until the postwar years. One important consequence of this was the foundation of the corporate powerhouse IG Farben in 1925 from the merging of several smaller companies, including the still-extant Bayer, BASF and Agfa, that specialized in pharmaceuticals and plastics (significantly, in this case, celluloid) likewise derived from coal waste. Certainly, this information complicates Coolidge's own use of coal as a trope of the medium-specific considered in the most general sense, as well as a means of revising the materialist history of photography in particular. The gallery press release informs us that the pigments in the coal photographs "are almost entirely composed of carbon derived from coal."[4] From Nicephore Niepce's original positive printing on bitumen-coated paper, we may now proceed swiftly to reverse printing via the intermediary of negative film, and finally arrive at the ink-dye printing of today without at any point breaking the chain of production, as all of these technological stages can be linked to the same material source. In the social and political terms of human history, however, these various transitions are far from seamless.



Miles Coolidge, *Coal Seam, Bergwerk Prosper-Haniel 1*, 2013. Pigment inkjet print, framed; 57 × 50 inches. Courtesy of the artist and ACME., Los Angeles.

IG Farben was dissolved by the allied powers after World War II on the charge of Nazi complicity, notably as a supplier of the Final Solution gas Zyklon-B, and this too must be factored into Coolidge's pictures of coal. Here as well we are dealing with an order of content not immediately available to the eye, but one that is nevertheless *there* in both the represented object and

its material substrate. Whether or not we have been primed to receive this information in detail, we may sense its presence on a more intuitive level as something hidden, invisibly dispersed across the surface of the print and infusing it with an acutely sinister glow. These dark monochromes cast a fatal shadow over the entire course of our modernity, and whatever follows from it. Coal is the first fossil fuel and therefore also the first cause of our modern technology, which is fundamentally a power machinery to maximize our production capabilities for good as much as ill. Of course, today we might be more prone to experience even the most affirmative and celebratory photographs of Renger-Patzsch and company with a sense of deep foreboding, but what Coolidge adds to this equation is precisely the question of how such a negative reformulation of modernist history might impact our understanding of what this medium essentially is. The suggestion that photography not only is directed toward the conquest and domination of the world as image, but also, perhaps even more oppressively, is involved in its selective occlusion, is here made almost palpable.

The vibrant spectrum that Runge distilled from the darkness of coal would appear to support Goethe's argument with Newton's theory of color, in which Newton asserted that color was purely an optical effect of light and therefore not a quality inherent in the object world. By extension, we might say that there is color as well in Coolidge's black-and-white photographs, even, or especially, if we cannot see it. To have color emerge from substance, from the "innermost light" of a thing, is a highly Romantic wish; but it is not entirely erroneous from a scientific perspective, for what we are asked to consider here is the possibility of color rather than the actuality of it. Coolidge frames this ideal of self-disclosure in a negative manner, by technically "inhibiting" it, while simultaneously alerting us to its quality of hiddenness. His antique-looking black-and-white prints make the most of the colorlessness of coal, rendering its uneven surfaces as a sensuous, nearly tactile topology of deep velvety shadows and faintly glinting silvery highlights. But the formal richness that results from this correspondence between the apparatus of imaging and its referent is also vaguely troubling. It shrouds the coal's social-historical dimension in what the Germans call "beautiful semblance," effectively effacing it from the virtual realm of representation, only to have it reappear at the deepest level of reproduction, as a material property of the medium itself. Like the architectural mockups, which are swiftly imported into the flat space of the print as sheer facades, and hidden there as such, the subject of coal allows Coolidge to engage with the discourse of the medium-specific from a vantage of historical collusion. Of course, self-reflexivity has always implied self-criticism as well, and while, in his choice of subject matter, Coolidge clearly points out his medium's deep implication in the power structures it should be directed against, this is not the ultimate aim of his project. Rather, he seeks to question just how this knowledge might be used to expand the scope of a photographic practice.

Miles Coolidge, *Francis Gate*, 2010–13. Pigment inkjet print, framed; 92 × 221 inches. Courtesy of the artist and ACME., Los Angeles.

In the coal photographs, absence of color indicates the potential for invisible presence and draws our attention through the image to a submerged social history, which transitions from the most edenic foretellings of the industrial era to their worst-case fulfillment in the Nazi death camps. In Coolidge's four-part mural, *Francis Gate*, 2014, which measures 93 by 230 inches, this latent content is made somewhat more manifest, for here the blowback—or better, the backwash—of industry is straightforwardly confronted. Shot at the point where the Merrimack River enters the canal system of a textile- manufacturing factory in Lowell, Massachusetts, built in the nineteenth century, this would have to be considered a site of ecological tension by any measure. Water pressure was here employed to power looms and related machinery in the production of broadcloth, suggesting an early mechanical precursor to the hydroelectric plant. In his essay "The Question Concerning Technology," for instance, Heidegger locates the dam as a structure that reveals the "monstrousness" of our instrumentalization of nature, for here we confront its bounty with "an unreasonable demand that it supply energy that can be extracted from it and stored as such."[5] In order that it supply us with a "standing reserve" of energy, as he puts it, the current of the river must be blocked. Coolidge once again crops out the productive machinery so as to focus on the raw material itself, the water, but the bulk of the image is actually taken up with what this system leaves out—the indicting debris (natural refuse as well as rubber tires, plastic bottles, etc.) that collects at the sluice gate. Via an arduous process that involved sending a remote-controlled camera out on a line that he rigged between the river banks, Coolidge shot the water below in minute increments that were then painstakingly composited into one picture. The resulting photograph is astoundingly sharp and unsparingly detailed. Here, the product of industry is effectively returned to it as unusable waste, which also amounts to a surplus in photographic terms. If, in the name of medium-specificity, we choose to align the dam's aperture with that of the camera, then this is precisely the sort of information that accrues on all sides of the lens without finding a way in. This, then, is also a picture of picturing, a mechanical reproduction of how the world mechanically reproduces itself, yet Coolidge reverses the vantage to include its repressed contents, and in this sense expands our view.

Hand-built apparatus for maneuvering a medium-format digital camera over canal at Francis Gate, Lowell, MA. Courtesy of Miles Coolidge.

In order to stress the unbridgeable rift between ancient and modern technologies, Heidegger contrasts the still symbiotic work of farming to that of mining, which carelessly exploits, or as he puts it, "challenges," nature. "[A] tract of land is challenged in the hauling out of coal and ore. The earth now reveals itself as a coal mining district, the soil as a mineral deposit."[6] Similarly, "The hydroelectric plant is not built into the Rhine River as was the old wooden bridge that joined bank with bank for hundreds of years. …What the river is now, namely, a water-power supplier, derives from the essence of the power station."[7] "The Question Concerning Technology" appeared in the early fifties, when this instrumentalization of life as a "standing reserve" of power reached its own zero-degree in the splitting of the atom, an event that is no doubt largely responsible for the philosopher's backtracking, Luddite orientation. For the photographers of the New Objectivity, conversely, modern technology was seized as a means of breaking with the occult idealism of the past and fashioning a new unsentimental culture of mechanically checked clear-sightedness. In hindsight, however, we can make out a lingering Romantic strain in the blind spots of their technocratic empiricism. For these artists no less than Heidegger, the promise of the machine has never been only to deliver us from nature, and thereby also from the limits of our own human nature, but also to reveal those limits to us. In an age where the apparatus of imaging offers scant resistance to our fantasy life, this is worth bearing in mind. Coolidge returns us to these sites of industry's origins as a reminder of what has always exceeded our physical and intellectual grasp, the inevitable gap in perception that opens onto the always accumulating junk-heap of history as informational

surplus. This is the raw material that he mines in his photographs, not to produce a "standing reserve" for the future, but to determine just where we stand now.

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Los Angeles Times

Review: Miles Coolidge at ACME.

June 9, 2011 | By Christopher Knight

Five terrific new large-format photographs by Miles Coolidge use full-scale architectural mock-ups to picture the monumental impact of photographic imagery in constructing modern knowledge. The photographs are imposing, elegant and odd.

Shot at University of California construction sites, the images show models used to test building materials and motifs. Frontal, symmetrical and foregrounded, the fragments of a stem cell research lab, a humanities building, framing for an unidentified structure and more utilize a Modernist tradition familiar from German photographers such as August Sander and Bernd and Hilla Becher. Rather than construct systematic typologies, however, Coolidge dismantles them.

His pictures show facades that are as thin, provisional and temporary as the surface of the photographs that record them. They're also just as imposing -- 6-foot-high pictures of mundane academic temples that strain for monumentality. (Think cardboard Karnak.) Doorways are covered and windows frame

empty sky, while weeds and construction debris clutter the ground. Coolidge injects humility into the best-laid plans.

A sixth bracing work is a mural-size triptych showing a huge wall constructed from stacks of hundreds of telephone books. Some still in their plastic shrink-wrap, they form a back-stop to intercept arrows at an archery range. Shredded near the center from the assault of countless arrowheads, the wall records decay in the face of time's onslaught. Analog obsolescence -- bow and arrow, telephone, photography -- fills the looming pictorial space.

ACME, 6150 Wilshire Blvd., (323) 857-5942, through July 2. Closed Sun. and Mon.
www.acmelosangeles.com

Los Angeles Times

Miles Coolidge: A surprising slant on street trash

January 25, 2008 | By Christopher Knight

In "Street Furniture," **Miles Coolidge** overturns our perception of the ordinary furnishings of daily life. But tables, chairs, bookcases and beds are not the only objects that fit that description. Photographs do too.

Coolidge's exceptional suite of 10 recent photographs employs an elegantly simple device. Used household furniture abandoned on city sidewalks around Los Angeles is photographed frontally and on site, but none of the items is standing upright. Coolidge "fixes" their tilted condition by aligning the rectangle of the camera's viewfinder with the geometry of the sofa or dresser. The result is furniture that appears to hover upright in the center of the photograph, while the world around it is thrown off-kilter and askew.

The pavement rises up to meet a table that's missing a leg, like the looming, shadow-crossed plaza of a Metaphysical landscape by Giorgio de Chirico. A chair balanced on a low retaining wall by a fence floats in shattered Cubist space, while a bookcase shown against a flat neutral wall evokes a stack of Minimalist boxes. An upended desk chair topped by a bicycle wheel is transformed into an orbiting

space station, all while trailing in its savvy referential wake Marcel Duchamp's stool-topped 1913 "Bicycle Wheel."

The visual effect of these art historically informed works is also surprising. Inanimate desks and cabinets are infused with a poignant temperament. A worn and truly ugly sofa, suspended within a topsy-turvy world, suggests a life on the skids. A noticeably stained mattress, wedged against a tree, floats as if in a dream or a sexual reverie.

Most disarmingly, the compositions emphasize the photographic print as a physical object, not just a disembodied likeness of something outside the frame. The specific size of each work -- the sofa picture is about 3 1/2 feet by 4 1/2 feet -- suddenly becomes important, in ways more common to paintings than to photographs. Coolidge actively demonstrates how camerawork mediates between the "abandoned" objects represented and viewers looking at them.

In the process, Coolidge's framed pictures reveal themselves to be akin to furniture, embodying the class of objects represented in the images. It's a disconcerting but quietly thrilling sight, one that forces reconsideration of the way ubiquitous images function in contemporary life.

ACME, 6150 Wilshire Blvd., L.A., (323) 857-5942, through Feb. 9. Closed Sundays and Mondays.
www.acmelosangeles.com

Art in America
The World's Premier Art Magazine

Miles Coolidge: *Wall of Death*, 2006, inkjet prints on galvanized steel, 7 by 70 feet; at Casey Kaplan. (Review on p. 205.)

Miles Coolidge at Casey Kaplan

L.A.-based Miles Coolidge, who studied under Bernd and Hilla Becher at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, has in the past taken a cue from them by serially documenting the interiors of various suburban garages in bright, clear color photographs. His latest show included the ominously titled *Wall of Death*. Less exciting than it sounds, the 2006 work takes its name from the large, vertical wooden cylinders that are used by daredevil motorcycle and go-kart riders in performances in which centrifugal force holds them to the inner walls, above the ground, as they speed around inside the structure. For this project, Coolidge tracked down the traveling carnival act "Don Daniel's Wall of Death Motorcycle Thrill Show," run by the Massachusetts-based group known as the California Hellriders, and set about photographing its wall of death on the grounds of the Iron Horse Saloon in Ormond Beach, Fla., during "Biketoberfest 2006."

Made from wooden panels bolted together and girded by cables for easy transport and assembly, the wall of death in question has many scratches in it and a time-worn white line painted around its middle. Coolidge's work is composed of 20 7-foot-tall photos stretching a total of 70 feet, each photo a full-scale representation of one of the wall's panels. The images are mounted to 26-gauge galvanized steel plates adhered to the wall about a foot off the ground with flexible magnetic strips. Here the piece ran along two gallery walls and suggested the fake-wood wall paneling found in '70s living rooms, hardly evocative of a death-defying stunt.

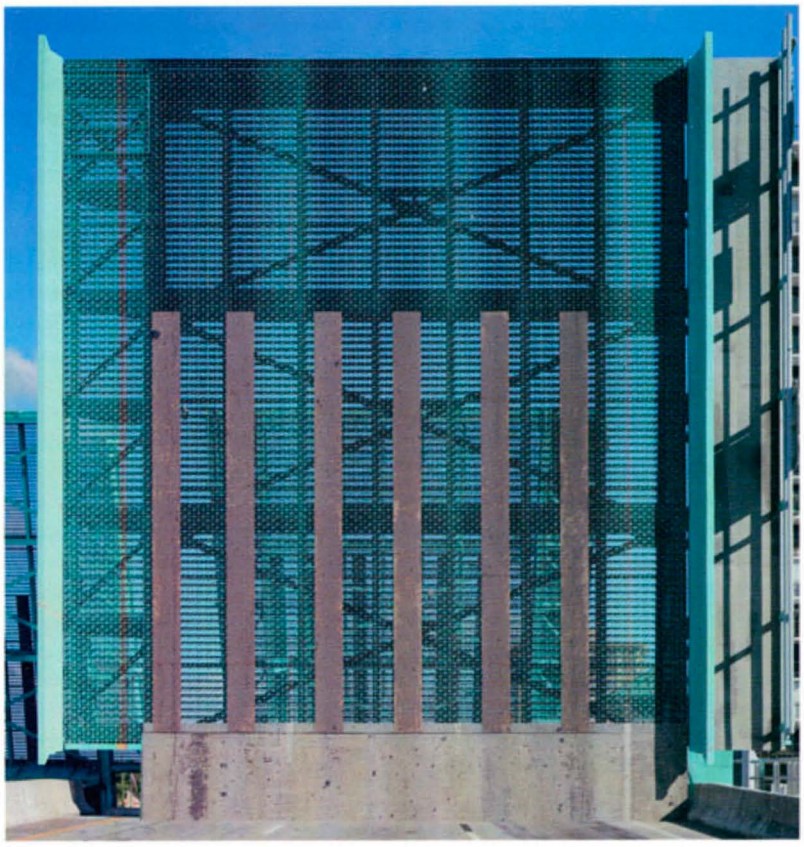
A less labor-intensive, perhaps more Becher-inflected series of C-prints (2006) was also included in the show and had greater resonance. Ranging from 2 to 4 feet on a side, the images depict, at dramatically skewed angles, pieces of discarded furniture that Coolidge has chanced upon in his neighborhood: a table, a mattress, a couch, a desk chair. All tattered and worn, these unwanted furnishings assert a bittersweet and slightly humorous presence in their urban surroundings: they are shown on a sidewalk with a drain, on a scraggly lawn, against a fence, on an asphalt street. These humble images captivate by inviting viewers to investigate the materiality of things and their contexts. And perhaps more significantly, they also encourage consideration of the transformation of waste—which Patti Smith once aptly deemed "the oldest preoccupation of man."

—*Sarah Valdez*

Contemporary, #49, pp. 84-85 (London, 2003) REVIEWS

NEW YORK: CASEY KAPLAN

MILES COOLIDGE: DRAWBRIDGES
17 January – 15 February 2003
www.caseykaplangallery.com



Miles Coolidge, Sunrise Boulevard (detail), 2003, diptych, 2 lightjet prints, each: 103 x 101.1 x 5.1 cm. Courtesy: Casey Kaplan, New York

Casey Kaplan gallery has long been associated with what Jörg Heiser has labelled 'romantic conceptualism'. Regular visitors over the past twelve months will have caught Jonathan Monk layering texts by Lawrence Weiner over faded family snapshots, Trisha Donnelly arriving at her opening reception on a majestic white charger, and Simon Starling giving over part of his installation to house a family of canaries. The photographs of Los Angeles-based Miles Coolidge, however, seem to come from an altogether tougher part of town. Heavily indebted to the deadpan documentary aesthetic pioneered in Düsseldorf by Bernd and Hiller Becher, Coolidge here provides precious little nourishment for sensitive types.

A suite of nine large colour photographs taken in South Florida over the past year, *Drawbridges* depicts each of its eponymous subjects raised upright so that by looking straight ahead, we find ourselves staring directly at the surface of the road. Virtually filling the frame, they suggest monolithic office blocks; totalitarian structures that would, were it not for the partial transparency afforded by their latticework structures, blot out the coastal sun. The thin border of background that Coolidge allows is just about sufficient for us to differentiate one location from the next, but the context they provide is, for the most part, perfunctory and generic. The odd detail – a surveyor's tripod, a sign for jet ski rentals, a dangling stars'n'stripes, a pair of incongruously antique lamp-posts – hints at local colour, but each image remains, ultimately, anonymous. The raised bridges obstruct and frustrate us as viewers just as they call a temporary halt to traffic, teasing us with a partial view of what lies ahead.

In previous work, Coolidge has focused his attention on garages, lifts and car-parks: non-spaces inhabited fleetingly and distractedly *en route* to somewhere else. His 1994 series *Safetyville* documented the eponymous one-third scale model of an American town built in 1984 to educate children about the right way to cross the road. Dotted with miniaturised brand-name signage and uninhabitable buildings, it looks at once immediately familiar and absolutely unreal; the perfect simulacrum. In 1998's *Central Valley* series, Coolidge reduced the panoramic vistas of California farmland to elongated strips in which vast areas become maps of themselves, abstracted charts of natural form and human intervention.

A number of critics have commented on Coolidge's affinity with the Los Angeles urban tradition, as represented in particular by Ed Ruscha's early photographic project *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (1966). *Drawbridges* is consistent with this in its single-minded focus, but expands the field of reference to include Peter Halley's diagrammatic paintings of cells and conduits, in which the structure of society is imaged as a quasi-abstract geometry of power relations. For all their simplicity of purpose, Coolidge's bridges also hint at something larger. Their fragmentation and isolation emphasises their role as components, tessellating pieces of a puzzle that extends, matrix-like, without discernible limit.

As Coolidge is surely well aware, constructing a body of work through the use of such a tightly restricted system is a risky business, requiring enormous confidence in the subject's capacity to point beyond itself. Too picturesque a selection and the work is in danger of becoming a mere catalogue of oddities; too deadpan or nondescript and the visual hook disappears. *Drawbridges* gets the balance just about right; a simple change of perspective constitutes enough of a twist on the structures' otherwise purely functional aesthetic to make them worth looking at, while their consistency with the artist's previous investigations nudges the viewer towards a set of perennially relevant concerns with architecture and social space. *Drawbridges* may not take you anywhere, but could just throw some light on where you're stuck.

MICHAEL WILSON

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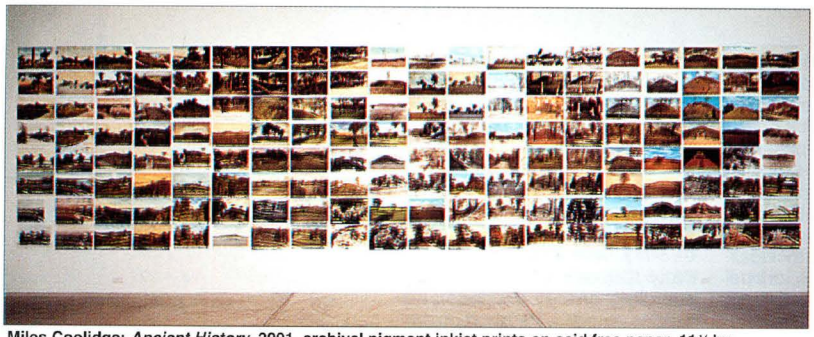
Art In America, October 2001, pp. 171-172



Miles Coolidge: *Ancient History*, 2001, archival pigment inkjet prints on acid free paper, 11½ by 18¼ inches each; at Acme.

LOS ANGELES

Miles Coolidge at Acme

Known for his panoramic photographs documenting the suburban landscape, Miles Coolidge transforms erstwhile banalities into insight-provoking curiosities. His straightforward, pared-down style produces clear but complex, and ultimately compelling, layers of meaning. *Ancient History* (2001), the centerpiece of his recent exhibition, consists of a grid of 160 ink-jet prints on paper that ran the length of the gallery's main wall. The images were scanned from old postcards depicting North American Indian mounds, ranging from the well-known Serpent Mound in Ohio to innocuous-looking hillocks in otherwise untransformed landscapes. The postcards are from the artist's own collection, and each print is three times the size of the original card. During the exhibition, additional copies of the nonedi-tioned prints were stored in a perusable two-drawer file cabinet next to the installation. Available for sale at an inexpensive price, the multiples underscored the issues of mechanical reproduction and collectibility inherent in the postcard format.

Most of the postcards date from the first half of the 20th century and are of the popular hand-tinted type with scalloped edges. A mound's locale is typically identified in print on the face of the card. At the gallery, the arrangement of prints on the wall was roughly oriented to the site's geographic location on the U.S. map, with Ohio's numerous mounds occupying the central section, cards representing Minnesota on the left, and New York, Georgia and Florida on the right. Although each postcard is different, the more popular sites appear in more than one version, just as a tourist attraction today is commemorated on a variety of postcards.

Ancient History evokes a nostalgia for tourism before the era of Disneyland. Now known to have served as cemeteries, platforms for public buildings and other, more obscure purposes over a thousand years ago, mounds such as these were once viewed as mysterious earthworks, incorporating the extremes of nature and artifice. For tourists, they were awe-inspiring sights to be shared through postcards with friends and family back home. Still familiar to residents of the central U.S., mound culture is today scarcely known by people living on the coasts. Thrown into question in Coolidge's work is the exotic nature of the mounds, many of which are no longer preserved, much less visited.

An accompanying series of panoramic photographs depicts golf courses built on mounds in Louisiana and Alabama. Stretching beneath gray, cloudless skies across the distance of two 11-foot-wide C-prints (and one that is somewhat smaller), these verdant landscapes allude to the fact that golf courses and mound sites are the result of the artificial shaping of nature for the purpose of ritual. Evoked as well is the spirit of Robert Smithson, whose earthworks and references to prehistory collapsed the temporal distance between the very old and the very new. Rescuing the mounds from public inattention by bringing them into a contemporary dialogue, Coolidge clearly values these great, strange monuments of America's past.

—Frances Colpitt

The New York Times

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 1998

ART IN REVIEW

Miles Coolidge

Casey Kaplan Gallery
48 Greene Street, near Broome Street
SoHo
Through Oct. 10

Decades of formalist flatness to the contrary, the depiction of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface remains one of art's deepest, cheapest thrills. It's a thrill that Miles Coolidge's new photographs of the flat, seemingly infinite farmlands of California's Central Valley — a major center of American agribusiness — celebrate with a minimum of fuss or pretension, if rather too little imagination.

The images are long, thin slices of landscape: 10 inches high by 10 or 11 feet long. They have been blown up from 8-by-10-inch negatives in a single enlarging process, and at the same time severely cropped, so that only a one-inch strip of the original negative is actually printed.

Centering on the adamantly flat horizons of Central Valley, each image is a dramatically compressed and elongated cross section of scenery, a sandwich of field, road and hazy sky punctuated by passing cars and trucks, telephone poles, hulking pieces of farm or earth-moving equipment, huge sheds and storage bins. An occasional house or barn recalls the more intimate scale of the family farm.

Mr. Coolidge's images provide spatial thrills similar to early photographs of the moon, or 19th-century paintings of the untouched splendors of the American West. But the human, specifically American presence lies heavy on the land, as it does in Dan Graham's photographs of erstaz housing developments; Ed Ruscha's fold-out picture book, "Every Building on the Sunset Strip," and Michael Ashkin's desolate desert tableaux. There's also a touch of a siege mentality, as if one were looking at the American heartland through the artillery slot of a bunker. Call it the paraoid sublime. *ROBERTA SMITH*

Miles Coolidge

at ACME., 5 January–3 February

On the open road, a little sports car can save gas and effort by ducking in behind a friendly semi, freely indulging in the supportive pocket of air that will magically pull it along. In the art world, the related tactic of drafting on the wake of a hearty tradition can prove equally beneficial to an artist's career. With "Safetyville," his first solo exhibition, Miles Coolidge deftly attaches himself to a long convoy of industrial photographers just eminent enough to gather the speed necessary to slingshot past them along an alternate route.

Coolidge's deadpan documentary photographs of a miniature city near Sacramento receives considerable mileage from their close relationship to the work of photographers such as Bernd and Hilla Becher, Thomas Struth, and Lewis Baltz; the pastel colors, subtly scattershot compositions, and droll subject matter of his chromogenic prints, however, undermine the arch objectivity of his forebears. The work of Coolidge's predecessors has steadfastly and unblinkingly shouldered the heavy load of reordering the monumental machinery of capitalism, a task both heroic and freighted with history. In contrast, Coolidge's photographs have a feathery touch, nimbly assembling the flimsy, candy-colored structures of Safetyville into compositions that shirk the serious, straight-on credo of his adopted tradition and allow for frivolous flights of formal fancy. Reduced to about a third the size of normal buildings, the shrunken architectural surrogates of Safetyville serve as superficial stage sets to introduce schoolchildren to the pleasures and terrors of urban life, and also provide Coolidge with a palette of quirky clichés with which to build his pictures.

The incongruities that litter the streets of Safetyville, as captured in the innocuously titled *Police Station*, *Insurance Buildings*, *Gas Station* (all works, 1994-95) slowly infect the photographs with the kind of perceptual jumps more common to painting. As the eye measures details against one another, photographic veracity seems to come unraveled. The red curb that bends around the bright blue and white Chevron station, for instance, works wonders as a compositional device, but hardly matches the scale of the building it borders. The tree that separates the gas station from the bland office building next door appears to be just a sapling, and the two wooden poles that steer it straight confirm the same reading, yet it preposterously stretches beyond the roofline of the two-story complex. What one's eye could swear were redwood chips among the landscaping take on the stature of small boulders in comparison to the window bays, further confusing the believability of Coolidge's photographic record.

The Safetyville pictures also devilishly play with a contrast of slickness and shoddiness that heightens their smart ambiguity. Coolidge has packaged his photos in chunky gray frames and laminated his large prints onto Plexiglas, giving them the look of dazzling commercial signs. The cool, detached style of the photographs and their even, subdued arrangement of elements communicates a seamless, ultra-clean presentation, but the consistently crappy quality of Safetyville's architecture constantly threatens the serenity Coolidge labors to create. *Commercial Building, Capitol, Highrises* resembles a persuasive shot from a real-estate brochure, featuring a tall cluster of shimmering blue glass office towers and a glimpse of a classically domed governmental monument in the background, but the dowdy "commercial building" in the foreground, with its cheap, paper-thin walls peeling apart at the seams, blights the whole neighborhood. Despite being buttressed at every turn by pristinely crafted photo-objects, the slipshod utopian promise of Safetyville cannot shake the reality of its crummy construction. Coolidge's project provides a wry commentary on the dismal condition of much of today's urban and suburban development, and the status of Safetyville as an exemplary city for legions of California schoolchildren only compounds the fear for our future.

Miles Coolidge
***Denny's, Industrial Buildings, Capitol*, 1994-95**
C-Print
31" x 41¼"

Michael Darling is an art historian and critic living in Santa Barbara.