

SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

Art US
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Anthony Pearson BY ELIJAH BURGHER

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Anthony Pearson's latest exhibition of photographs and sculptures at Shane Campbell appears congruent with the current art world zeitgeist and recognition value of grieving, groovy anxiety. Unlike so many artists trafficking in the gothic, however, Pearson's practice is determinedly abstract. Instead of sensational references to death metal, ritual murder, and teenage suicide (e.g., Bank Violette's *Church* [2005]), Pearson exhibits a predilection for the paler end of the grayscale with a playfully destructive attitude to high modernist precedents and processes.

The untitled installation consists of two large-scale C-prints and three discreet tableaux of two or more photographs paired with a sculpture (all works 2007). The C-prints, both untitled and measuring 38 by 96 inches, show what could be images of the night sky with small dim moons at their centers. Although color photographs, they are insistently devoid of color, all murky dark grays with only the barest suggestion of hue. In one, the small orb hovers above the horizon of the photograph's lower edge, appearing to glow weakly and at a great distance in an otherwise lightless atmosphere. The orb is larger but no brighter in the second photograph, enshrouded in a near-invisible haze of silvery atmospheric interference. The first is hung low to the floor (the artist's preferred way of installing these prints), which, combined with its scale and monotonous surface, emphasizes its objecthood. The other is hung away from the main installation, above a sofa in the back of the gallery.

The photographic tableaux are less referential and far more inscrutable than the large prints. Both *Arrangement (North)* and *Arrangement (Central)* comprise two small framed photographs hung on either side of a bronze sculpture on a concrete base and wood pedestal painted black. The last of them, *Arrangement (South)*, adds a third photograph to the display. These selenium-toned solarized silver gelatin prints are comparable to corroded metal surfaces, the product of natural processes rather than authorial invention, while the accompanying bronzes have gnarly, almost floral reliefs embossed on their faces, like architectural decorations that have been melted into formless disarray and charred black.

All the visuals in these arrangements are intensely non-referential and also somewhat opaque in terms of materials and method. In his artist's statement, Pearson indicates his interest in willfully mishandling traditional processes of reproduction, like molds and negatives, although such an argument scarcely supports a purely formal investigation. The cryptic photographs and mute bronze slabs have an inhuman quality, connoting natural forces of deterioration like corrosion, putrefaction, and discoloration. The absence of color and total predominance of darkly shaded surfaces also contribute to a general sense of morbidity, while the altar-like symmetry of these configurations yields occult overtones.

If Pearson's work does harbor specific allusions, these would almost certainly be modernist ghosts of the monochrome, color-field painting, Constantin Brancusi, and László Moholy-Nagy. Such nostalgic and allegorical gestures are common enough these days, but here the frame of reference holds up to the equally common testing that would put all aesthetic self-reflection and historicization to rest.

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