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Citer ce compte rendu
Lonelessness, existential or otherwise, has been the informing condition of twentieth-century society, and it looks as if it will continue to be so in the twenty-first century. Penny Cousineau-Levine’s recent two-gallery exhibition, Alone, was a vivid, surprising, and ultimately troubling presentation of carefully selected modalities of aloneness.

Of course, Cousineau-Levine meant considerably more by “Alone” than aloneness. The exhibition(s) not only presented essentially incarnations of the struggles enacted by the eight emerging photographers featured (d. Bradley Muir, Lori Newdick, Mackenzie Stroh, and Chih-Chien Wang at Gallery TPW; Jennifer Campbell, Kate Greenslade, Dawit Petros, and Marisa Portolese at Gallery 44) against what she termed the “culturally dictated restraints” that confront any entry into the agon of self-definition, but were also photo-manifestations of that asymptotic approach to the hard-won stability of self-presentation offered as “solitary performances and pursuits, bereft of social context or support.” As she points out in the catalogue essay (“Alone: Fitting In”) that accompanied the exhibition(s), these photographers offer the viewer access to their “private observances” played out along their particular roads to a constantly adjusted sense of individuation.

Some of the work, such as d. Bradley Muir’s “autobiographical yet not biographical” (as he characterized it during a panel discussion at Gallery 44) Artist as Worker photo series, involved multiple layers of rather thinly accessed experimentation with the self-as-surface (what Cousineau-Levine calls the “tropes of masquerade”). In his version of desperate dressing-up, Muir not only donned and doffed the uniforms of various identifiable occupations (“Artist as Corporate Courier,” fire-fighter, doctor, cook, executive, etc.), he photographed himself in this multilayered drag while folding into the poses, gestures that referenced images found in works by Jeff Wall, Gregory Crewdson, Donigan Cumming, Wolfgang Tillmans, and the other usual suspects. What I liked most, though, about Muir’s photographs—whether it was deliberate or not I don’t know—is that in all of his “incredibly temporary” self-tableaux, he kept his sneakers on—as if they were some sartorial given, some low common denominator of being (feet of clay), the saving index to his own focus-less selfhood.

Considerably more effective as an exploration of forced self-erasure recollected in tranquillity were the wrapped portraits and, juxtaposed against them, the icy photographs of landscapes and glass vitrines by Boston-based artist Dawit L. Petros. To call Petros’s bleached portrait “wrapped” is a bit misleading, of course, in that what Cousineau-Levine calls the “tropes of masquerade”). In his version of desperate dressing-up, Muir not only donned and doffed the uniforms of various identifiable occupations (“Artist as Corporate Courier,” fire-fighter, doctor, cook, executive, etc.), he photographed himself in this multilayered drag while folding into the poses, gestures that referenced images found in works by Jeff Wall, Gregory Crewdson, Donigan Cumming, Wolfgang Tillmans, and the other usual suspects. What I liked most, though, about Muir’s photographs—whether it was deliberate or not I don’t know—is that in all of his “incredibly temporary” self-tableaux, he kept his sneakers on—as if they were some sartorial given, some low common denominator of being (feet of clay), the saving index to his own focus-less selfhood.

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