

ARTFORUM

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CRITICS' PICKS

New York

Chris McCaw

YOSSI MILO GALLERY

245 Tenth Avenue

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View of “Chris McCaw,” 2016.

The first photograph was made in 1825. It is attributed to Nicéphore Niépce, a French inventor who originally dubbed it a “heliograph,” a direct index of the sun. This formulation proved popular into the 1850s, though Charles Baudelaire famously derided photographers as failed painters and “sun worshippers.” In “Direct Positive,” Bay Area–based artist Chris McCaw embraces Baudelaire’s vilification with an array of large-scale works made with handmade view cameras, military-grade optics, and vintage paper found on Craigslist and eBay or donated by friends.

At first glance, many of the works, such as *Heliograph #98*, 2015, appear to be painterly indeed, with gestural marks or cuts into a monochromatic surface, à la Lucio Fontana. But on closer inspection, topographies emerge in the lower register of the frame, and the paper appears to be singed and irradiated. These traces are not from McCaw’s hand but from the sun, to which the positive prints are given over in ultralong exposures amplified by the focal power of an industrial lens. These photographs do not merely capture photons but register the activity of the sun itself, as it makes its way through its varied arcs from latitude to latitude. In the “Heliograph” series, this yields delicate, surreal objects; in “Sunburn,” sublime landscapes. *Sunburned GSP#850*, 2015, draws together twenty-one negatives and a thirty-six-hour shot, marking the sinuous movement of an arctic sphere. It is a majestic composition, and one that extrudes new horizons from unrepentant medium-specificity.

— Ian Bourland