

artspeak

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Matthew Brandt

"River and Sky"

Yossi Milo Gallery

New York, 245 Tenth Avenue

River and Sky is L.A.-based artist Matthew Brandt's third solo exhibition at Yossi Milo Gallery. Before the exhibition opens on November 3rd, our editor Osman Can Yerebakan talked with Brandt about his process-heavy photography practice and his upcoming exhibition.

— Your treatment to photography counteracts its core purpose of 'capturing' the reality as the lens sees it. Do you think you rebel against the essence of this medium?

Matthew Brandt: I don't think it is inherently rebellious. I grew up assisting my dad who is a commercial photographer, but I never thought about pursuing photography as a career until I moved to New York to study. It could even be the opposite of rebellion considering the history of the medium. Photography was invented and initially practiced by a group of scientists. They put different materials together by chance and experimented with them. For example, the difference between salt print and albumen print was that albumen print included egg whites. Moreover, the very first photograph was created using tar on metal, because Niepce's bother was in tar business, and this way he had access to the material. What we now commonly recognize as the photographic process came into existence much later.

— Your *Lakes and Reservoirs* series is about contamination. Once they are plunged into the water they depict, these photographs become contaminated. Is there a self-destructive aspect in this process for the photographs?

MB: There are definitely aspects of contamination and destruction, although I am not sure if the photographs are contaminating the water or vice versa. I am interested in how photography represent the question. The appropriate way to depict the lake is to have the lake in the work. Think of this as kissing the mirror: the result of real meets the image. When I started *Lakes and Reservoirs* I was taking psychoanalysis classes, and I started to think deeply about introspection and contemplation. I started with *Portraits* series in which I photographed people and later used their bodily fluids like semen or spit to chemically create their photographs.

— From bees, to dust to charcoal, there is a tactile aspect in your work. You not only visit these sites, but you also touch, feel, and take elements. While performance is not necessarily associated with photography, you incorporate this element into your process.

MB: I think taking pictures is heavily process-oriented. When the audience sees that fluid, water, or bees, they become aware that someone brought those materials for them.



Making that happen is a big endeavor. When I look at a photograph I always think about the photographer who took it. I try to picture his or her process. In the end someone had to be there to capture that moment. Although this human component is changing now with drones and surveillance.

— Your *Night Skiesseries* in your upcoming exhibition includes cocaine as a material to illustrate cosmic space and our mind-bending relationship with this incomprehensible force. Can you talk about this series?

MB: I first started working on that series in Hollywood where my studio used to be. Cocaine on velvet seemed to make sense—very Hollywood (laughs). I wanted to push the boundaries of what a gallery can show. L.A. gallery consulted with lawyers. I loved that balance between a drug dealer and an art dealer. I think it is an interesting equation. Art market and drug market... Also, I thought about the kitsch, and I wanted to rekindle that old tradition of drapes and velvets. Cocaine represents that nebulous space and our futile attempt to understand our existence in the space. We need a drug to grasp that essence. My Paris gallery didn't want to show the series. I am actually surprised my New York gallery was open to it.

— You studied at Cooper Union and later moved to L.A. Was the challenge of creating work that deals with nature while living in New York a reason?

MB: I was working in New York and I decided to apply to UCLA. I was getting homesick as I grew up in LA. New York is a tough city to live in. I'd make totally different work if I continued to live there. There are certain difficulties related to being an artist in New York such as getting materials into your studio and trying to fit everything in. Even grocery shopping is a hassle. I was one of those people pushing their carts everywhere even on the subway, but here I have a truck and I can carry around whatever I want.

— Last year you made a video piece for MoMA, filming the museum from a very different lens, turning such a familiar space into an eerie and foreign territory. How do you see your video work in comparison to your photography practice?

MB: I did a series of time-lapse videos of melting liquid. I could condense two weeks into thirty seconds, which was great. My work is always about process. There is that moment I decide to pull out the photograph from the water, and that moment determines how the work will look. In the video you can capture the whole process, which is different and fun. I set up the camera and wait to see what happens. On the other hand, video has limitations. It doesn't give that much opportunity. I can't really soak a video into water.