

matthew porter

THE SHEEN, THE SHINE

Exhibition from January 18th to March 2nd 2019
Private view on January 17th from 5 pm to 8.30 pm
Rue des Sablons 6 & rue Bains 61, 1205 Geneva

Xippas Gallery is pleased to present, for the first time in Switzerland, an exhibition by the New York photographer Matthew Porter.

Matthew Porter's work often features historical mash-ups, collapsing disparate events and cultural references within single frames, or spreading them out over a series of tightly edited photographs. He moves between digital and analogue processes freely, engaging equally with studio experimentation and representational straight photography, creating both fictional narratives and process based works.

The title of the exhibition, "The Sheen, The Shine", conveys the fundamental importance of light in Matthew Porter's photographs. The shine: that which reflects, reacts, and the sheen: that which illuminates, or comes from within, are the two luminous actions in the two series presented in the exhibition. Whilst light enables the existence of every image, here, Matthew Porter pushes this principle to its paroxysm by using light to show the world differently. Light is the composite element of all of his images, which sets the tone and guides all of his experiments. Like a sculptor, the light hollows out, sinks in, burst forth, revealing reliefs, defining spaces, solid areas, voids, and volumes.

The first room in the exhibition presents a series of photographs with compositions of matter on the floor. These photographs were created in the studio of his father, a sculptor who was influenced by modernism. The images take as their subject the debris of the making of his work, "remains", unused materials, which take on a new life in front of the camera lens. These constructions are firstly mise en scènes, arranged on the shop floor, then further objects are added, through multiple exposures, in Porter's own Brooklyn studio. The light dazzles these materials, its shine reacting differently on each surface: a mirror reflects a nearly invisible space off camera, a whitened metal blinds us, and its black shadows create areas of absolute emptiness, a kind of vertigo within the image. The action of the light reflecting on their surfaces brings us closer to a mutation of the objects, towards a new imaginary, like utopian cities or Bauhaus constructions.

These images also call to mind the Cubist aesthetic of Braque or Picasso, creating a kind of temporal loop. Matthew Porter sheds light on this aesthetic, which signalled the beginning of modernity in painting, whilst simultaneously revealing it with the most modern medium available: photography. This dialogue of techniques reveals a dialectic between tradition and modernity, paying aesthetic tribute to all artistic mediums.

The second room in the exhibition presents a constellation of thirty pictures of nature, portraits and landscapes. It consists of a series of color and black & white photographs, depicting a fictional place that centers around the construction, abandonment, and rediscovery of a series of dome structures. The location is a tropical island, and several discrete characters make appearances. They are seen performing tasks, but their roles, and the timeline of their involvement, is never clear. Their collective goal seems aspirational—the construction of dome related structures has a history with close ties to utopian idealism and futurist problem solving. Part science fiction, part fantasy, and part narrative riff, the work is a nod to both the real and literary tradition of placing stories of post colonial hubris in tropical locations. These images, made from stylised explorations of light and colour, lead us to another place. The light shines, illuminates, sometimes to such an extent that the subject disappears in a kind of luminous and colourful abstraction. In a way, these photographs release the viewer from a gaze constrained by the history of art, enabling them to enter into a more nostalgic dimension. These images, between historical references and modern sensibilities, compel us to think about the result of the image and what it represents in a figurative sense, as opposed to considering photography as a concrete work of art. Only a discreetly woven narrative thread is present. Matthew Porter seeks to tell us a story, or invites us to develop our own, based on the imagery he confronts us with.

Matthew Porter was born in 1975 in State College, Pennsylvania, in the United States. He graduated from Bard-ICP in 2006 and has since taken part in a number of institutional shows: “After Photoshop” at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, 2012), “Perspectives 2010” at the International Center of Photography (New York, 2010). He recently took part in collective exhibitions at the George Eastman Museum in Rochester (New York, 2016), and the Fotografiemuseum (Amsterdam, 2014). His first monograph, “Archipelago”, was published by Mack Books in 2015. His work is part of the permanent collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art (New York). In 2016, Matthew Porter was invited by Christian Dior to design a line of bags and accessories for the Dior Lady Art project. Matthew Porter is represented by the M+B galleries in Los Angeles, Invisible Exports in New York and Xippas.