Darren Almond

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

For nearly two decades, British artist Darren Almond has demonstrated a fascination with the particular ways in which we chart and divide up time. Some of his earliest and best-known pieces involve retro-style flip clocks, including one the size of a cargo container. He has made films and photographs about trains, which are governed by precisely calibrated timetables, as well as about mines, which operate in unchanging shifts. The sixteen large-scale landscape photographs in this exhibition seem to exist outside the choreographed nature of much of Almond's other work. The pictures are part of his "Fullmoon" series, 2000–, and their varying exposure lengths are determined by the available moonlight. Yet they, too, are subject to a particular cycle: As Almond has noted, "every four weeks, there's another chance to make a photograph."

To create the images, most of which were made in the past three years, Almond traveled to all seven continents. Filled with the tropes of Romantic painting, the photographs demonstrate his preference for dramatic landscapes and are rendered with an expertness that betrays their careful construction. *Fullmoon@N. Sea*, 2009, for example, an enormous wide-screen view of snow-dusted peaks receding into the distance, has a vantage point that seems impossible. The land drops off so sharply beneath Almond's camera that you suspect he has taken the image from a helicopter—before remembering that each of these photographs must be exposed for at least fifteen minutes to gather the moon's light.

Darren Almond, ***Fullmoon South Pacific*, 2012,** C-print face mounted on Perspex, 55⅛ x 119¾". From the series "Fullmoon," 2000–.

Almond has been at work on this series for some time. Early pictures mimicked the formats and trod the same ground as Paul Cézanne, Caspar David Friedrich, and J. M. W. Turner. In recent years, the artist has suggested his environmental concerns, which one can intuit obliquely with the works presented here. The show included several photographs taken at locations near where land meets water, including a somewhat disorienting, horizonless view of Cape Reinga on the northwest coast of New Zealand that is a lush rejoinder to Frederick Sommer's 1940s pictures of the Arizona desert. This subset of the show's images—made in Hawaii; the Orkney Islands; Wester Ross, in the northwest Highlands of Scotland; the mouth of the Yenisey River on Russia's Arctic coast—might hint at the precariousness of our position in these liminal spaces, a subject that is certainly at the forefront of public consciousness, given the ever-increasing threat of hurricanes and rising tides.

Yet is such interpretation overinterpretation, a form of wishful thinking? In an art world that cherishes "criticality," one often attempts to look through artworks in search of confirmation of one's own rightful thinking. The extended exposures of Almond's pictures smooth over what might be roiling waters, creating a sense of serenity that is best exemplified by *Fullmoon South Pacific*, 2012, and that might repel political readings. Here it is useful to understand the "Fullmoon" photographs in the context of Almond's other bodies of work. Many of his videos and installations, in particular those made around Auschwitz and the nickel mines in Norilsk, Russia, address the human pain absorbed by the land, and the atmospheres they create are appropriately melancholic. While these photographs do not conduct as explicit an inquest and might tempt us simply to marvel, as Almond obviously does, at the splendors of the landscape, in 2013 such sustained attention inevitably has a political dimension.

—Brian Sholis