

Malcolm Lubliner: Poetic photos at Togonon

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Thursday, January 21, 2010

Anxious landscapes. Theatrical assemblages of objects that ensue from dream images. Manipulated compositions with a focus on metaphor-building. These are just some of the ideas that are at the core of photographer Malcolm Lubliner's exhibition of photographs

At turns playful and poetic, the 10 pieces in the show were conceptualized over three decades as visual experiments "fueled by a compilation of forces," Lubliner says. While the show is diminutive, Lubliner's compositions - which place disparate objects including candles, beads and model airplanes alongside each other in often telling tableaux - disrupt viewer expectations such that seemingly mundane objects point to the poetry of unexpected moments.

"Much of my early work ensues from an intuitive, gut-level reaction to fringe elements that aren't typical of your usual still-life photograph," Lubliner says. In fact, his photographic inquiries started when he attempted to capture images of reflections on furniture, which led to other experiments, such as "the photography of light itself, just to explore what happens."

Lubliner's early black-and-white work makes use of the now-defunct Translite, a material developed by Kodak in the 1930s that was used in backlit advertising. Because Lubliner didn't want to work solely with backlit forms, he backed his prints with chrome Mylar. "When paired with strong lighting," he says, "the Mylar leads to the effect of a strong reflection and a light shadow, which renders the sense of the overall image being somewhat three-dimensional."

Lubliner's assemblages generally reflect what he refers to as his own ironic view of the world. "There are certain things in the world that will always appear out of place, even when they're in our landscapes," he says. A tongue-in-cheek assessment of common entities in our environment can be found in "Pilot Project," which places a model World War I airplane alongside disparate objects such as a rock and toy soldier to create a cheeky tableau of war.

"Caste Correction" centers on an old-fashioned art lamp, an object that was typically used to light framed works of art. In placing a largely unexamined object at its center, the work subverts viewer expectations and perceptions of what might be considered worthy of attention. "I've always been fascinated by things that act as signposts in our environment," Lubliner says. "We live in the world, largely unconsciously, and follow rules and directions, but we seldom think of the history behind some of the visual directives in our lives."

While Lubliner's newest works blend photography with computer-generated effects, examine the rendition of color and offer ever more creative permutations of composition, the new format doesn't necessarily point to a sharp divergence from his earlier work. In fact, the theatrical nature of the images is taken to a new level.

"There's always a sense of serendipity in the work, similar to characters taking over in a story," Lubliner says. "I don't know if I'm pushing the process or if it's pulling me."

Through Feb. 13. 11 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Tues.-Sat. Togonon Gallery, 77 Geary St., S.F. (415) 398-5572. www.togonongallery.com.

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This article appeared on page G - 13 of the San Francisco Chronicle