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Chris Engman, "Prospect and Refuge" at Luis De Jesus, Through December 17, 2016

By Jody Zellen

Chris Engman is concerned with the relationship between nature and architecture. To create many of the works in his evocative exhibition *Prospect and Refuge*, Engman visited national parks and other outdoor settings numerous times photographing the landscape from various angles so that he could reconstitute the natural world in his studio. He remaps the images he shot in situ in his studio (or living room), by adhering hundreds of enlarged photographic fragments to the objects in the space as well as to the walls, ceiling and floor recreating the scene from the original vantage point. He then rephotographs the installation and dismantles it so the final artwork is a document of this reconstruction. It also serves as evidence of his labor intensive process. Engman is mindful of photographic veracity yet uses his camera and the myriad printed images to create complex illusions that envelope architectural spaces.



Engman's process is slow and exacting. For example in *Prospect*, 2016 an image of an expanse of ocean and the horizon line is pictured in the center of a photograph of the interior of Engman's studio where there is a window, a crate, a chair, a ladder and miscellaneous objects. At first glance it seems impossible, how could the ocean be in the artist's studio but upon close examination it becomes evident that the ocean is not a single image hung in the space. Engman has cut and pasted hundreds of image-fragments onto the objects and architectural elements in

his studio to create an anamorphic artwork— then stood in the exact place where the image coheres to create the final photograph.



While in some pieces Engman brings the outside in, he is also interested in bringing the man-made world into nature. In *Shelter* he used trees situated deep in the woods to suspend four banks of florescent lights forming a rectangle. Though the wires are visible, it remains a mystery as to how the lights are powered. The illuminated space offers a kind of shelter from the darkness yet protection from little else within the realm of the natural world. The image has been carefully constructed for the camera and recalls John Pfahl's *Altered Landscapes* (1974-78). Pfahl also created interventions that were only visible when photographed. Engman takes things further by bringing the inside out as well as the outside in. Through the juxtaposition of the natural and the man-made in real settings to create illusions, Engman explores the boundaries of photographic veracity.