

Art and Cake, October 12, 2017

Christina Fernandez at Gallery Luisotti  
September 16 - November 22, 2017

By Jody Zellen



Since the early 1990s Christina Fernandez has been making photographic works that “examine the intersection between private and public space, personal and historical narratives, ex-urban and city spaces and the cultural border and historical relationships between the United States and Mexico.” For her exhibition *Prospect*, she exhibits two recent bodies of work that continue her explorations of personal and historical narratives through the presentation of a series of portraits (*reflection/project(ions)*) and landscape images (*View from Here*) with ambiguous foreground background relationships.

*reflection/project(ions)* are black and white photographs of former students. Fernandez asked each subject to make an image of their photographic equipment and she subsequently integrated those images into her portraits as projections. Fernandez posed her subjects in generic academic interiors— in front of lockers, offices spaces, doorways or windows and then projected the photograph of the student’s equipment onto the scene to create a layering effect connecting subject and object. The photographs are quiet and contemplative as if each sitter is reflecting on the endless possibilities of photography, and perhaps, the challenges of life as an artist. In *Steve*, 2017, a long-haired male wearing jeans and a white v-necked t-shirt seated in front of a window stares out at the camera. To the right above him is the projection— a Bessler enlarger; light streams in through the window, framing an out of focus landscape. Fernandez’ images are open ended, more suggestive than didactic.

Out of focus landscapes fill much of the picture plane in Fernandez’ color images from the series *View from Here*. Shot through doorways or windows using a shallow depth of field, the images invert expectation— the window or frame in the foreground is sharp while the landscape beyond is out of focus. Each photograph in *View from Here* depicts a specific place and references an absent person or persons. Fernandez traveled to San Pedro, Joshua Tree, Desert Hot Springs, Manzanar and Sodona making photographs that allude to the beauty and aura of the natural environment without clearly depicting it. Rather than document a structure or a landscape, she photographed the scene through a door or a window within an interior space,

using it as a frame. In the photograph *Noah (Joshua Tree)*, 2016 Fernandez focuses on the chicken wire fencing barricading a broken wooden portal. The soft light blue sky and branches seen in the distance become a dreamlike landscape that is ambiguous and inaccessible. Similarly, *Toyo (Manzanar)*, 2016, is shot from the interior of a cabin. The out of focus image of a tree and distant mountains is framed by the window. Fernandez' photograph alludes to what is inaccessible — in this image, freedom to explore the mountains of Lone Pine where Manzanar is located.



The titles ground the works, some more obviously than others. *Noah (Joshua Tree)*, for example, refers to the late artist Noah Purifoy whose funky sculptures can be seen in Joshua Tree at the Noah Purifoy Outdoor Sculpture Museum. *Toyo (Manzanar)* is about the Japanese American photographer Toyo Miyatake, who was interned at Manzanar and while there documented the surrounds and fellow internees. Other people and places include: *Thelma and Juanita (Pt. Fermin)*, *Sinagua (Sedona)*, *Cabot (Desert Hot Springs)*, *CCJ (Leadfield)*, *Earl (Sedona)*, *William (Holcomb Valley)*. Unfortunately, the viewer might not know the specifics of the person or place sited in the title making it difficult to understand her underlying motivations which make the images that much more interesting.

In *View from Here*, Fernandez focuses on interior spaces and what they frame rather than the grandeur of the view. Decaying buildings become cameras, as well as containers of memory. What exists beyond the window or picture frame is out of reach, a distant haze and out of focus. Fernandez calls attention to the history of these places, illustrating what might have been seen by those who stood there gazing out. In both series, Fernandez uses framing devices to create layers within the picture plane encouraging viewers to think about the relationships between locations and memories, as well as past and present.

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