

Art LTD

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LOS ANGELES

Melanie Willhide: "to Adrian Rodriguez with love" at Kaycee Olsen Gallery

When Melanie Willhide's life intersected with that of Adrian Rodriguez, what could have been the beginning of the end turned out to be a new beginning. Willhide came home to her Altadena house to find it had been robbed and her computer and back-up files with all her images gone missing. The thief—Rodriguez—was eventually caught, and the computer recovered, yet when Willhide tried to access her images she discovered all her files had been corrupted. Rather than abort the projects she was working on, Willhide embraced the new files after discovering that the distorted works offered something that perhaps was missing from the originals.



"BEEFCAKE AND BETSY," 2011, **Melanie Willhide**
INK JET PRINT, EDITION OF 5
PHOTO: COURTESY KAYCEE OLSEN GALLERY

Allowing her ideas to be subsumed by the fragmentary nature of the new images, Willhide let chance enter into in what had been a controlled process and approach to image-making. She began working with the corrupted images, fine-tuning and finessing their compositions and color. The resulting pictures fuse photographic veracity with abstraction, foregrounding patterns that could only be created by software glitches. The new pieces are surprisingly beautiful and evocative. They radiate ambiguity and mystery. In *Beefcake and Betsy* (2011), between the striations of colored lines and shapes the fragmented image of a man lifting a woman above his head appears. *Mike in Hula Hoop, 2010* (2011) is a B&W photograph of a scantily clad man hula hooping in a paneled room with a shag rug. His right arm extends out from the edge of the original image, fusing with its mirror image in a succession of five stripes suggesting the awkward movement of the hula hoop. Similar mirroring and fragmentation in addition to unusual colorizing occurs in many of the other images.

That the new images present a more jarring fragmentation of bodies than originally intended is something Willhide had to grapple with and, ultimately, decide to accept. This distortion and fragmentation gives the images a new power. Blurring the boundary between abstraction and representation, it adds an otherworldliness and interjects a stuttering that becomes a strong compositional element. The mechanical aspect of the images cannot be denied. Gone is the soft light and any relationship between the subject and the maker, replaced by uncanny doubling. An unknown highlight now enriches an image *My Trick #2, and Trick #4, Palm Springs, June* (2011), by drawing attention to what might not have been seen. Photographic truths are often distortions and in this body of work Willhide fuses chance digital processes to create the possibilities of new and enriched memories.

—JODY ZELLEN