

Art in America

INTERNATIONAL • REVIEW

Art in America, Exhibition Reviews: New York, December 2009, pg. 135-136.

TIM DAVIS: Greenberg Van Doren

Tim Davis began the series of color C-prints he titled “The New Antiquity” in Rome, a city steeped in history and art, where what looks to be a pile of rocks might well turn out to be a temple site or ancient ruin. During his stay there on a Rome Prize in 2007-08, Davis saw similar potential in other kinds of apparently ordinary (and often modern) objects: a wall covered with brightly colored auto part labels, or a group of upended plastic swimming pools. (Davis calls this photo, ironically, *Poolhenge*.) Moving away from the city’s famous sites, he trolled through the suburbs with his large-format camera, focusing on what we call “the quick rise and ruin” of contemporary monuments, or rather, monument-like objects. Or else, he diminished, literally, the iconic status of the historic sites, as in the wry *Colosseum Pictures*, showing a scattering of nearly two dozen digital cameras, all with the Colosseum miniaturized in their viewfinders. He later expanded this body of work to include images from China and the United States. Seventeen prints from “The New Antiquity” (all 2008 or ’09) were on view here, and the entire series has just appeared as a book published by Damiani, Bologna.

Discerning unexpected meanings or formal elegance in ordinary things is an established photographic way of looking: think of William Eggleston and Stephen Shore, among many others. But in addition to the fact that Davis has an acute eye for the odd detail, his work is leavened by a sense of delight in the strangeness of the world. *Statue of Pants* shows a statue of upside-down trousers at the center of a parking

lot in a Chinese shopping district. In *Sole Shop*, shelves of brightly colored sneaker soles – not the shoes themselves, just the rubber soles, in many varieties of color and design – are lined up in perfect order. *Fluorescent Green Cleat*, a gorgeous picture of a chartreuse sneaker abandoned in a lush, leafy green ground clover, suggests one possible destiny for those fancy soles.

Other Photographs are slightly more poignant, without being sentimental. The worn plastic pages in *Immigrant Snapshot Album* register the loss of something of real value: light reflects radically off the wrinkled, possibly melted sleeves, nearly obfuscating the faces of the family pictured (and recalling Davis’ interest in the obliterating effects of light in his previous series, “Permanent Collection,” 2005). In *Fresco*, a painting of a saint has been nearly effaced by graffiti – speeding the image’s deterioration as well as its transformation from art into artifact.

- Jean Dykstra



Tim Davis: *Colosseum Pictures*, 2009, C-print, 6 ½ x 21 inches; at Greenberg Van Doren.