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Ishmael Weeks Disturbs History

by Blake Gopnik | Jan 17, 2013 6:29 PM EST

The Daily Pic: The Peruvian artist's slides stand in for his countrymen.



This is one image from a [two-carousel slide installation](#) by the Peruvian-born New Yorker Ishmael Randall Weeks, now on view in the new basement "lab" space at the Drawing Center in New York. Weeks has taken found slides and burned and distressed them in all sorts of ways. He has also, somehow, adapted the auto-focus mechanism on his vintage projectors so that they are constantly bringing his images into and out of sharpness – the first time I've seen auto-focus used to deliberate artistic effect. Weeks says that the installation is "a personalized narrative response to the politically and socially charged moment of 1970s–80s Peru—a period of war and extreme violence", but that's a bit hard for a viewer to get. It could be that, given the politically-inflected history of modern art in Latin America, any formal manipulation automatically reads as having more profound implications. Every attack on an image recalls attacks on people; a failed auto-focus speaks of the blurings of vision and memory.