

FALL GROUP SHOW

CHIAROSCURO
702 ½ CANYON ROAD, SANTA FE

CHIAROSCURO HAS A STRONG GROUP SHOW FOR THE FALL.

The quality is consistent over a range of work comprising photography by Renate Aller, Bonnie Bishop, and Walter W. Nelson, paintings by Lawrence Fodor and by native Australian artists Kalaya Tjukurpa, Wayiyul, Mina Mina Jukurpa, and Kapi Kutjara, textiles by Rebecca Bluestone, and sculptures by Kay Khan.

No single aesthetic is shared by the photographers in the show, but what is common to their work is the choice of the particular medium of archival pigment ink print. The dye method of these stable and durable images can be reproduced in any size as an exact match of a traditional print, without limitations of resolution and sizing. The latter effects of the archival pigment ink print are most apparent here in the work of Renate Aller, whose work features mostly large prints of forty-seven by sixty-eight inches. Aller is best known for her ocean photography, in particular for their views of the Atlantic Ocean captured over the last fifteen years from the same vantage point—but with shifting camera height yielding different horizon lines—on Long Island's east shore. Aller cites as one influence the seascapes of the nineteenth-century German Romantic painter Casper David Friedrich. In recent years Aller has taken to photographing desert landscapes, whose shared aesthetic with her seascapes is the subject of *Ocean/Desert* (Radius Books, 2014), represented by her eight prints in the show. The mutual effects of her juxtaposed views of ocean and desert, “simultaneously spectacular and calm” (*New Republic*, October 6, 2014), are due in no small part to the archival print's capacity to maintain high resolution in large-scale prints such as #79 *Great Sand Dunes May 2013*.

Equally rich and subtle results are achieved on a smaller scale in the show's six pigment prints by Walter Nelson from his series *The Black Place: Two Seasons*. The title refers to a desolate high-desert plateau frequented by Georgia O'Keeffe over the course of twenty years and recorded in her paintings and drawings of the remote locale on the Navajo Reservation some one hundred miles northwest of her Ghost Ranch. Nelson's subtitle refers to his description of its “visual extremes of aridity and snow”—where ferocious winds drive the desert's black sands, a tangible legacy of its distant past as an active volcanic field.

Bonnie Bishop's four photographic prints are rich chromatic abstractions whose virtual impastos and striated surfaces serve as a visual bridge to the fourteen oil-based, mixed-media paintings in the show by Lawrence Fodor, the

four acrylic-based canvases of the Australian artists, and by extension, to the two narrow weavings by Rebecca Bluestone and to Kay Khan's four festive sculptural forms shaped by stitched fabrics, silk, cotton, and bamboo.

The digital photography dominates the group show—almost irrespective of the comparable quality of the painting, textiles, and fabric sculptures. Perhaps it is simply a matter of taste, but I would submit that the visual dominance of the photographs over the other art mediums has to do with a fundamental dichotomy that seems to have set photography apart from the traditional “fine arts” almost from its inception as an art form.

Perhaps it is best explained by comparing photography with painting, whose descriptive and narrative function it displaced early on. Both photography and painting, as art forms, rely upon the viewer's suspension of disbelief, which requires viewers to enter into the vicarious experience that each medium intends to convey. But the virtual immediacy of the verisimilar photographic image overwhelms any fictive claims by an actual painted image, much as, say, the Tim Burton film version of *Alice in Wonderland* induces a far more compelling suspension of disbelief in the viewer than any stage production could conjure. Photographic prints in a gallery immediately transport the viewer to the place whose appearance is experienced very much the way viewers would experience it directly. And large-format prints like Aller's *Ocean/Desert* views are virtual windows through which

viewers enter an extension of their own space.

Thus when a large abstract painting like Lawrence Fodor's *Without Gravity X* is displayed within sight of any of Aller's ocean or desert prints, the effect is reversed: Any allusive reference of the painted abstract image yields to its material status as a pigment-brushed canvas on a stretcher hung on a wall in the same physical space occupied by the viewer.

In Chiaroscuro's lower gallery, a similar metamorphosis happens with Walter W. Nelson's *Black Place* photographs on view in a space adjacent to the area occupied by the Australian paintings and by Khan's fabric constructs. The *Black Place* prints become windows onto a distant high-desert plateau, and by their proximity they reduce the paintings to tapestries and the fabric sculptures to beautiful craft.

Given the enormous immediacy of photography's capacity to invoke a convincing suspension of disbelief, the task of displaying photography together with other allusive art mediums is formidable. I suspect that even a Casper David Friedrich seascape such as the menacing *Monk by the Sea* would be hard put to hold its spell if hung within sight of Aller's lowering #60 *Atlantic Ocean*.

—RICHARD TOBIN

Walter W. Nelson, *The Black Place, Untitled 16A*, archival pigment ink print, 25" x 33", 2013

