

JOSH KOLBO

1984 born in Philadelphia, PA / Works in Brooklyn, NY
2007 BFA Pratt Institute / School of Art & Design / New York, NY

Solo Exhibitions

2016
CONDO Project / Hosted by Project Native Informant / London (with Jeanette Mundt)

2015
A Simulated Future amid Collapse / Soci  t   / Berlin

2014
God / Primetime Space / New York (with Jeanette Mundt)

2013
Josh Kolbo / Soci  t   / Berlin

2012
Josh Kolbo / Soci  t   / Berlin

2011
Josh Kolbo / Soci  t   / Berlin
Josh Kolbo / Tony Wight Gallery / Chicago

2010
Josh Kolbo / Max Hans Daniel / Berlin
Josh Kolbo / Max Hans Daniel / London

Group Exhibitions

2017
pic.london / London

2015
DIDING, An Interior That Remains an Exterior? / K  nstlerhaus KM- / Graz

2014
Fixed Variable / Hauser & Wirth / New York

2013
Lens Drawings / Curated by Jens Hoffmann / Galerie Marian Goodman / Paris

2012
Josh Kolbo / The Mews Project Space / London
Schach Matt / M  rkischen Museum Witten / Witten
Josh Kolbo & Ned Vena / Soci  t   / Berlin
Monochrome / Salts / Basel

2011
Groupshow / ICI / New York
NY: New Perspectives / Brand New Gallery / Milan
RE: Empire / Team Gallery / New York
Belief and Understanding / Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery / New York
Untiteld Document / Tony Wight Gallery / Chicago

2010
Tide Pool / Sara Meltzer Gallery / New York

Projection / Curated by Cleopatra's at Canada / New York
 All the Splendors of the Earth II / In collaboration with Ned Vena / Cave Gallery / Detroit
 Big Apple / Apartment Show at Clifton Benevento / New York
 Reel Worlds: A James Cameron Retrospective / PS.1 / New York
 Guilty Feet / Curated by Tova Carlin and Colby Bird / 179 Canal / New York
 Projection / Curated by Cleopatra's / Cave Gallery / Detroit

2009

Free Spirits / Apartment Show / New York
 If the Dogs are Barking / Artists Space / New York
 Apartment Show: HUGS N' KNISHES / NADA County Fair / New York
 All the Splendors of the Earth / Center Galleries / Detroit
 Mayflower / 310 Broadway / New York
 Materialism / Real Fine Arts / New York
 Apartment Show / Envoy Gallery / New York
 Purple #'s / Organized by Arnd Seibert / Five Thirty Three / Los Angeles
 Junk Shop / NADA County Fair / New York
 Happy House / Apartment Show at Printed Matter / New York
 Gruppenausstellung / Organised by Max Hans Daniel / Autocenter / Berlin
 Projection / Curated by Cleopatra's / Autocenter / Berlin
 Projection / Curated by Cleopatra's / ICI New York / NADA Miami

2008

Friends + Family / Anton Kern Gallery / New York
 Episode 5 / Untitled TV Show BCAT / New York
 Episode 7 / Untitled TV Show BCAT / New York

Bibliography

2016

Josh Kolbo | A Simulated Future Amid Collapse / Kaleidoscope / Issue 26 / February

2015

„Josh Kolbo - A Simulated Future Amid Collapse“ at Société / Review / Spike Art Magazine / September
 Spiel mit der Täuschung: die simulierten Bilder Josh Kolbos / Tageszeitung Berlin / September

2014

Heinz, Emily / New York – “Fixed Variable” Group Show at Hauser and Wirth / Artobserved / July
 Fixed Variable / New York Times / July
 Sniderman, Alisa / Independent Art Fair 2014 / The Last Magazine / March

2013

Boris Pofalla / Jugen-bonus: Künstler für die Zukunft / Josh Kolbo / Monopol / September / p 89

2012

Lancia Trendvisions / Josh Kolbo Photographs the Folds of Progress / October
 Katsof, Alhena / Brooklyn-based artist Josh Kolbo / Meet / Kaleidoscope / Issue 16 / Fall
 Interview with Achille Bonito Oliva / Lancia Trendvisions / July

2011

Grabner, Michell / Josh Kolbo at Tony Wight Gallery / Artforum / May
 Yood, James / Josh Kolbo at Tony Wight Gallery / Art LTD / May/June Issue
 Wayne / The Imagist / July

Publications

2015

A Simulated Future amid Collapse / Edition Société / Berlin

Photography is magic / Charlotte Cotton / Aperture Foundation / New York
Sarah Charlesworth: Doubleworld / New Museum / New York

KALEIDOSCOPE

Josh Kolbo | A Simulated Future Amid Collapse



Appropriate Base Geometry, 2015



Sharp Details, 2015

Views from Zone A:

Josh Kolbo in conversation with Ned Vena

In early 2013, several months after Hurricane Sandy, the Federal Emergency Management Agency expanded its “Flood Risk” zones to include Red Hook, Brooklyn, as a “Zone A” district. From here in “Zone A,” on a street corner outside of a recently shuttered artisan distillery, a 270-degree rotation encompasses glimpses of Staten Island, New Jersey and Manhattan. The same rotation offers views of Ikea, an urban farm, 1 World Trade Center, another artisan distillery and the Red Hook West Houses, the largest public housing project in NYC. This particular corner is also in view of the flight pattern for helicopters from JFK, which transport people like Barack Obama and Pope Francis over the Brooklyn coastline and into Manhattan. Cargo ships still come into port here in Red Hook, and these ships, stacked with steel containers carrying tons of goods produced outside of the United States, pass by daily.

It is from this sleepy corner in Red Hook, this unlikely crux of neoliberalism, globalism, terror, gentrification, climate disaster and artisanal production, this thoroughfare for world leaders and manufactured commodities entering and exiting New York City, that Josh and I make art, in a studio we’ve shared since 2010.

Ned Vena We’ve talked about the studio and our practice in terms of pre- and post-Sandy. Not only was our ground floor studio and its contents decimated by the storm, but the printing facility where you produced your cascading wall bound “urinal” photographs, among others, was also thoroughly destroyed. It seems to me that Sandy didn’t pause your production as much as it realigned it. In a sense, the doomsday logic of survival utilized by so-called “preppers” has permeated your practice in the wake of Sandy’s “aftermath.” As opposed to the traditional notion of prepping, stocking up on items such as water and non-perishable food, prepping comes for you in the form of a dematerialized studio inventory and practice. Less stuff means less waste, less clean up, less risk of disaster, an economy of labor, an ethic of material frugality. How would you say your studio practice changed after the flood?

Josh Kolbo Like a lot of people, when I was left in the lurch for a few months by the hurricane, I didn’t have the infrastructure I once had to make work, so I had to take a careful look at the things I had left and try to figure out a way to move forward. I had been using simulation before Sandy to help realize sculptures, to look at the ways I could contort photographic paper into stable forms and foresee any construction problems before 196 production. After Sandy, I began to spend more time with these programs, as it was one of the only ways I could continue to think about form while lacking direct access to material production. I thought it might be a good way to anticipate ways I could be innovative once things were back to normal. Soon, however, I realized that this new way of producing forms, without its analogue manifestation, was a dramatically different process. Instead of looking for ways to produce variations, I began to focus on the nuanced differences within a particular form itself. I also began to spend more time trying to generate realistic images of sculptures that I could use in studio visits.

While there were some interesting ideas that came out of that relationship, I really never got to make many of those sculptures. I realized, though, that there was a more dramatic experience in making those photographs than in making the sculptures themselves. The simulated photograph embodied an aesthetized political dimension of our use of technology that is becoming increasingly present in our lives and culture. Despite pandering to a consumerist desire for innovation, these photographs also presented me with a new trajectory in photography—one that holds onto its representational form while positioning photography's new algorithmic nature as itself, a political actor.

Ned Vena So, when you started to rely on simulation to make your work, you felt like you began to see more and more homogeneity in your practice?

Josh Kolbo Yeah, pretty much. It was through the process of simulation that I began to think about the ways that technology was being used to conflate rather conservative, normative values with an idea of philosophical radicalism. I felt like I was seeing a lot of people trying to ascribe liberatory values to systems that have historically been used as methods of control. Even if I can theoretically identify with a new conception of political agency distributed through these emerging technologies, what I feel like I'm seeing in a primary sense is the continuation of a harsh trajectory of older forms of societal domination.

Ned Vena So the digitization of your work post-Sandy has not been without its resistance to digital philosophy. This digital dimension of your practice is approached with caution and skepticism, as opposed to reverence of an icon typically attributed to "the digital" in contemporary art, popular realist philosophies, or pretty much anywhere else.

Josh Kolbo I'm cautious to give so much weight to ideas that have such a strong undercurrent of unaligned politics. I've tried to be careful about this in my own work as well. An image, in particular, contains its entanglements in the world, which to me reinforces the idea that the image is always situated within a set of relations that condition its interpretation. I think my relationship to the image changed somewhat alongside this dramatically inverted "preppers" logic of the post-Sandy studio. In that sense, maybe it was important that Sandy immediately followed New York's Occupy movement. I don't think a lot of people realize how those two events really changed the general political atmosphere in significant ways. People now like to talk about those moments as a redundant example of the deficits of protest culture, or point to specific people who used it as a way to posture radicalism for their own career opportunities, but I actually think those events were very significant to the political imagination of New Yorkers. It really emphasized the different ways people can arrive at political agency.

Ned Vena I think of aspects of your work in terms of a kind of "techno-heresy," meaning when you approach themes such as the Internet and technology in your work, you take action to undermine its authority by conflating it with analogue photographic processes or DIY methods of imaging. Your work is almost iconoclastic, in that it looks to tear down and vandalize these techno-icons by articulating their failures. When you incorporate other imaging methods outside the accepted procedures and thinking of simulation, it is not to work alongside it, but to do violence to it.

Josh Kolbo To my mind, there is quite a lot of continuity between these photographs and some of my other, more three-dimensional work. Both, for example, look closely at the moments where the analogue becomes digitized in an effort to compare the violence of our past and present forms of virtuality. Photography has always had devotees to antiquated processes and esoteric histories, as well as technological acolytes who have looked to it for a more theoretical experience. While this bifurcation has always held a lot of psychological weight for me, it has, in many ways, left me skeptical of both sides. My approach to photography has always been somewhat nihilistic; I've primarily looked to scrutinize systems and frameworks of meaning and the forms of power they generate—not just in an effort to criticize, but to provide access to all of these photographic experiences and find value in them.

Ned Vena In your recent show and publication "A Simulated Future amid Collapse" at Société, Berlin, you invoke questions that concern the role of simulation in contemporary image production. Your photographs are shot in the studio on 35mm film, scanned, paired and layered with computer generated forms or self-produced 3D scans through a gauntlet of rendering and modeling programs, and then printed in a dark room using traditional silver gelatin printing techniques, mixing the chemicals yourself. The resulting photographs are a non-traditional black and white mesh of the rendered and the captured, the photographic and the virtual, the synthetic and the mechanic. They are made physical through traditional printing processes involving rare earth metals. The consideration of the "photographic object," familiar to your pre-Sandy practice, is very much intact, but the post-Sandy work operates above the flood lines, prepped for disaster, anticipating being after collapse.

Josh Kolbo When I began to produce simulated photographs, I wanted to emulate traditional analog photographic processes in an effort to connect the historical critique of image production to contemporary methodologies and practices. I thought if I could locate these simulated photographs in a more traditional printing process, I might be able to convey a double relationship. Theoretically, the simulated photograph is a new way of making an image, yet that image still aligns and functions within a historical system of representation. While there may be new relationships that this type of image can create, the historical relationships must also be relevant, if not prioritized. So, in other words, whatever new political agency can be theoretically determined, it may also be eclipsed by its use within the more “mechanical” processes of society. I’m trying to show that there are protological elements to every system that determines what it is capable of actualizing.

Josh Kolbo (American, b.1984) is an artist who lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. He is represented by Société, Berlin. An upcoming exhibition with Jeanette Mundt is on view at Project Native Informant as part of the CONDO project through 13 February.

Ned Vena is an artist based in New York City. He is represented by Société, Berlin, and Real Fine Arts, New York. His exhibition “Paintings Without Borders 2” is on view at CAM St. Louis through 3 April.

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ARTOBSERVED

New York – “Fixed Variable” Group Show at Hauser and Wirth

There was a vibrant buzz around Hauser & Wirth in Chelsea as one of the gallery’s smaller exhibition space filled in for the opening of the group show Fixed Variable, featuring the work of Lucas Blalock, Ethan Greenbaum, John Houck, Matt Keegan, Josh Kolbo, Kate Steciw, Chris Wiley and Letha Wilson, and examining the relationship between the nature of the photograph, the nature of the object, and the intersection between the two.

A fluid mixture of sculpture and photography, Fixed Variable is an energetic and playful show that toys with the notion of truth in imagery, perspective, and context. The context of the work being installed in a gallery, or in a general physical space, is never ignored, and there is the sense that every inch of the room is being brought very consciously into the work. Letha Wilson’s Face Down (Sunset) (2013), for example, is placed on the gallery floor, and could easily be stepped on, if not quickly noticed. There was even a brief discussion at the opening between artist and viewer on whether or not it doing so was appropriate. The answer was no – the object is only for viewing. This in itself created an interesting tension, as patrons to the opening were then forced to delicately step around the object, making it impossible to ignore.

Another such oasis in the crowd was caused by a two-part piece by Katie Steciw. One “half” of the work hung in the corner of the gallery space, quietly suspended far above the crowd, with a chain hanging from its colorful geometric sculpture as though reaching towards the second half of the piece, which stood a few inches above the concrete floors on wheels. The work is easily movable, yet frozen still, untouched, in the context of the art gallery.

What’s perhaps most intriguing about this collection of work is the thread running through the show, the marriage between the physical and the digital: a marriage that has happened so recently in photography and in sculpture respectively. John Houck, for example, created software to create the kind of digital effect he wanted to produce in his artwork. He then physically folds the printed piece, imprinting a physical human artifact into the work, and leaving it suspended between a carefully hand-crafted object and an algorithm driven piece. Letha Wilson’s process involves photographing landscapes in the American West, and then physically altering them in such a way that they become their own landscape. She then adds a textural element by, for example, pouring concrete onto the façade of the newly formed, photographic object.

The result of this survey is an interesting show that doesn’t take itself too seriously, and thus takes ample and engaging liberties with context, space, and color, while approaching very serious and dense questions about the nature of photography and the physical form.

E. Heinz

Originally published in Artobserved, July 2014

The New Yorker

Fixed Variable

Tucked away behind Sterling Ruby's exhibition is a smaller, quieter, and very smart show of works that are based in photography but look a whole lot like sculptures. There are no traditionalists among the eight artists here, and few recognizable subjects (a cactus, a potato chip, a stone wall). Lucas Blalock, Chris Wiley, Josh Kolbo, and Kate Steciw use images as raw material—bits of visual information to be manipulated, collaged, abstracted, and set in 3-D mounts. In the slyest of Letha Wilson's mixed-media mashups, a thin slab of Cor-Ten steel sits on the floor, one corner curled up slightly to reveal her photograph of a blazing sunset. Through July 25.

Originally published in The New Yorker, July 2014

The Last Magazine

Independent Art Fair 2014



Josh Kolbo at Societé, installation view, Independent Art Fair, New York, 2014. Courtesy of the artist and Soci  t  , Berlin.

In the midst of the March madness of art fairs, last weekend's Independent came as a breath of fresh air. Founded by Elizabeth Dee and Darren Flook, the Independent celebrates its fifth year and still resists using the "f"-word to describe itself. In doing so, the Independent participates in the current fashion of the progressive art fair that seeks to find an alternative to the mega-commercial gatherings that have come to dominate the art world. Like gallery shows that promise to think outside the white box of the gallery space, the progressive art fair tries to rethink the framework of the art fair. The Independent is not the only alternative game in town, but it's one of the few to deliver on its promise of the cutting edge. Instead of claustrophobic booths, architects Andrew Feuerstein and Bret Quagliara designed a tangram-inspired layout. The exhibitors are not barricaded from one another. Instead, the spaces in between are fluid, encouraging collaboration and conversation. Spread out on four floors, over fifty international galleries and nonprofit institutions from fourteen countries showcased talent ranging from established names to anonymous artists in the former exhibition space of the Dia Center for the Arts.

Art works were everywhere: above your head and below your feet, at once disorienting you and forcing you to pay attention to the immediate surroundings. The Approach from London featured Germaine Kruij's 2013 kinetic sculpture Counter Movement (White/Black/Mirrored) that hung from the ceiling, reflecting light and the silhouettes of passersby. Berlin's Mehdi Chouakri displayed Gerwald Rockenschau's lacquered, colored dots on the stairwell. New York's McCaffrey Fine Art arranged Richard Nonas' alphabetic sculptures on the floor. A broad range of artistic mediums and practices were on view. Julia Wachtel's installation at Elizabeth Dee featured sardonic images of an upside-down Kim Kardashian and Kanye West holding hands and Miley Cyrus with her iconic foam finger. Galleria Franco Noero of Turin opted for a quieter and significantly smaller-in-scale commentary on mass media with Kirsten Pieroth's 2010 work Conservation Piece, made up from thirty jars of boiled New York Times newspapers from September 2010. Putting a new spin on gallery representation, the Lower East Side's Untitled decided to rotate the exhibitions of their featured artists every two hours. Among the weekend's highlights were the abstract, gritty assemblages of American Neo-Dadaist Robert Mallary from The Box in Los Angeles; the intimate, haunting photographs by unknown artists from Galerie Susanne Zander of Cologne; Josh Kolbo's glossy, sprawling photographs of commercial material and refuse from Berlin's Soci  t  ; and Nicolas Ceccaldi's portraits of French writer Michel Houellebecq—the great detractor and satirist of contemporary art—from Brooklyn's Real Fine Arts.

Artists Space offered a selection of art books for sale on the roof, which also served as a lovely gateway from the art-saturated labyrinth. Before delving back into the web of art, visitors could take a break in the fresh air, enjoy the finally-warm weather, and gaze at the magnificent apenglow of Chelsea.

Alisa Sniderman

Originally published in The Last Magazine, March 2014

PRESS RELEASE

Josh Kolbo | Société, 2013

The wide black frames with large metal bolts capture the viewer's attention as much as the photographs they contain—calling into question the traditional hierarchy between picture and frame (or, put differently, between image and object) in a way that is paradigmatic for the exhibition. Most of the works in this series depict a wrench—seemingly a self-reflexive image of the one used to bolt them to the wall—and the letter A, which is less an anarchist symbol than a Soviet-looking color and font, perhaps marking a beginning, alpha without omega. The echoes of Constructivism, evoked in particular through Kolbo's technique of photographic montage, also appear in the pedestal-mounted works, with images on heavy Perspex supported by industrial-strength cardboard. One might describe Kolbo's project as deconstructivism, were it not for the fact that it proliferates ever further the longer you think about it: It is less an unwinding or undoing than a hyperlinked site of accumulated triggers of association to an elsewhere less troubled by paradoxes of use and representation.

The untitled works on dollies are again crudely and self-referentially utilitarian. They can seemingly be moved around at will, but to what end? The jerry-built Fleshlight appendages made from Pringles cans offer a clue: The Fleshlight is an onanistic mechanism for the relief of sexual urges, far from human relationships or other structures of social, let alone collective or communal, cohesion. Here the artwork is a stand-in for the imagined human that one presumes usually accompanies the use of the Fleshlight's orifice, as also implied by the piercings in artificial-looking skin in the photographs behind Perspex. "The expense of spirit in a waste of shame is lust in action" is how one Shakespearean sonnet describes male masturbation. Whatever it is for —art and politics are both likely contenders, perhaps the desire for meaning as a whole—the libido is here turned upon itself, and the second gallery makes as clear as possible in the circumstances the result of such an involution, by overtly incorporating conspiracy theories. Such theories are also repositories of desire—a desire for total connection, for everything to mean something. As political theorist Jodi Dean has written, "conspiracy theory manifests a desire to know, to find out, to make links. It also sustains the openness of desire. That is, it secures desire as desire since conspiracy theories rarely have complete answers or solid alternatives."¹ This mirrors the interwoven structure of desire and knowledge at the heart of the Internet itself, where everything really is connected to (almost) everything else.²

Take, for example, the twenty-dollar bill folded to represent the twin towers in *Untitled, 2013: Used as an argument that the 9/11 attacks were long planned from inside the government*, the image here appears as a C-print on PVC, folded impractically in upon itself, as if this would bestow yet further significance. On the one hand, the materials and "look" suggest a competitive engagement with advertising, another vehicle of desire; on the other, it establishes itself as art through sculptural presence. This work, too, is mounted on a distinctive metal frame, clipped into place with perfectly designed shiny steel attachments.

The "anonymous" text accompanying the exhibition claims: "While art resists conspiracy, images do not, objects to not." The premise appears to be the idea of the bourgeois artwork as "honest"—as in the phrase "a picture cannot lie." Yet Kolbo's exhibition makes the artwork itself a site of projection, refuting art's autonomy and its exceptionalism by interweaving it not only with the real-world language and tools of advertising but also with arguments from a different realm, best summed up in the Al-Qaida–CIA link proposed (or merely depicted) in two of the pedestal-mounted works (both *Untitled, 2013*), where Kolbo brazenly conjoins the words "AL-," "CIA-," and "DA."

It is hard to tell if this is some kind of joke, and if so, at whose expense. The difficulty of testing the truth-claims of conspiracy theories are themselves part of their power, underpinned by the notion of the brainwashed masses who see only what is propagandistically made visible to them by the powers that be. In the art context, this brings things into considerable confusion: I suspect this is partly Kolbo's point. The text accompanying the exhibition signals a wish to break the regime of Photoshop by re-inserting the real into a context made of lies. It speaks of "resistance to a typical approach to abstraction within photography, a breach of the fourth wall of image making and an initiation of the image into real space." But is the "reality" of the sculptural objects on view in this exhibition strong enough to withstand the critique of reality for which they are the vehicle?

Are conspiracy theories operating here as part of the realm of images, or are they part of the reality on the other side of the fourth wall?

Kolbo's works are open to questioning, yet as with conspiracy theories, there is no way to test them because each such attempt is answered by unanswerable fragments of another reality, whether the CIA's role in 9/11 or the world of ripped denim (another motif in the pedestal-mounted works). The old apparatuses of meaning-production in both art and politics may well be broken—which would, in some ways, be a welcome revelation in the art world, whose organizing structures of white-cube gallery, art fairs, and collector–dealer relationships are widely understood and criticized as a kind of cover-up or conspiracy benefiting the rich and powerful.

Conspiracy theories are always a reflection of powerlessness—or impotence—which is what underpins their libidinal drive. But where does this leave the "autonomous" artwork, other than circling around the ruins of itself in an atmosphere dripping with excess desire and a correspondingly fetishistic investment in the unique, auratic object? And where does it leave the critic, the one supposedly tasked with "understanding," when the structures that (literally and metaphorically) frame this understanding are themselves continually being called into question?

Alexander Scrimgeour

1 "Conspiracy's Drive," online at: http://jdeanitic.typepad.com/i_cite/2006/11/conspiracys_dri.html.

2 Kathleen Stewart: "The Internet was made for conspiracy theory: it is a conspiracy theory: one thing leads to another, always another link leading you deeper into no thing and no place." Quoted by Jodi Dean in "Theorizing Conspiracy Theory," online at: <http://www.nationalism.org/patranioia/deantheorizing.htm#fn7>.

Lancia Trendvisions

JOSH KOLBO PHOTOGRAPHS THE FOLDS OF PROGRESS



CMYK that is cyan, magenta, yellow and black, the 4 hues of the 4-color process at the base of many printed images in circulation. In their mysterious monumentality, even the prints of Josh Kalbo – a New Yorker born in 1984 – use the same model, but with the critical gaze of one who interrogates the sense of his artistic work.

Kolbo's photo-sculptures tell a story made of fragments, still lifes composed and stretched out on curving and stratified surfaces expressing a liquid idea of space and time.

"If we look at the images of the past", he states, "we realize the enormous possibility of inventing more or less elegant artistic recipes. But with what intentions?", the artist asks.

Progress, in which the image holds supremacy over the word, today has precedence over contemplation and experience. The consequence of this can be a superficiality on the part of those who observe only the symbolic patina of the signifier, without entering the depths of the significance.

Kolbo's installations, evocative of certain works by Robert Morris, seem to show exactly this: a universe of seductive images that plunge into folds we dare not confront.

"If the dominating idea of progress were to disappear, what would remain of artistic intent?". This is what Kolbo asked himself in his recent exhibition at Soci t  in Berlin, from which we selected some of the works on display to show here.

Originally published in Lancia Trendvisions, October 2012

KALEIDOSCOPE

Meet Brooklyn-based artist Josh Kolbo



Josh Kolbo, Installation view at Tony Wight Gallery, Chicago, 2011

Courtesy of the Artist, Soci t , Berlin and Tony Wight Gallery, Chicago

Brooklyn artist Josh Kolbo transports his photographs from the print shop to his studio in rolls wrapped in manila envelopes. It is an understated treatment for works produced by means of an extraordinary process. Shot onto 35 mm film, each print is 22 feet long which, as far as printing goes, is a technical feat. Kolbo experiments with the physical boundaries of the medium. His photographs are usually double-exposed and capture discernible but abstracted content from his studio. Images are joined back-to-back. The content of each image is camouflaged by color filters through a process of analog happenstance that nevertheless resonates with the aesthetics of a digital age. Once laminated, the artist exhibits his prints by manipulating them into sculptural forms that often cascade down a supporting wall. Installed, they call into mind the stark monumentality of Modernist sculpture, while echoing the physical mannerism of film itself. Kolbo levels the playing field between content and materiality, treating both with equal importance in what he has long called an act of "horizontal thinking." Check out his work at the Frieze Art Fair in London, where Kolbo will present a Frame project with his Berlin gallery Soci t .

Alhena Katsof

Originally published in Kaleidoscope. N.16, Autumn 2012

Art LTD



"UNTITLED (RATS AND JACKS)," 2011, Josh Kolbo, 12 C-PRINTS, 140" x 110" x 20"
 PHOTO: JOHN HENDERSON, COURTESY TONY WIGHT GALLERY

It's rare for an artist to focus on the sculptural implications of photography, to offer it as not just planar and 2-D but with volumetric and plastic aspects, to make mass out of what seems to most as forever flat. That's what Brooklyn-based Josh Kolbo does, he folds and furls very large and glossy C-prints, he drapes and layers them in ensembles that cascade down walls and onto floors, he makes them columnar and double-sided and subject to the dictates of gravity. This all comes to suggest photography as thing rather than representation, as a specific spatial object. Part of this is due to the sheer size of Kolbo's prints, they usually run 12½ by 5 feet, and as big sheets of thinnish paper they're both flat and limp, easily capable of a kind of focused collapse completely controlled by the artist. Kolbo decides if his sheets of imagery will loosely fold in or out, will drape onto the floor, or pleat and bend like lapels on a trim suit coat. Kolbo prints two images on each of these enormous vertical C-prints, and by twisting and twirling those about somewhat obscures their legibility. Sometimes his subject matter seems a formal exercise, with shiny photographs of some crinkly bit of drapery or vernacular street signage or bits of the body, and these works rarely accrete into narrative but rather into poetic suggestiveness oddly enhanced by their peek-a-boo folds and crevices. They're puzzles, elegant and hieratic with an often brooding aura, and seem finally defined more by their manner of presentation than by the imagery from which they are made. Like those felt sculptures that Robert Morris made in the late 1960s, with the august nature of their display, the way Kolbo's work holds its walls and becomes some kind of visual regal raiment, is its true strength. In *Untitled (Rats and Jacks)*, (2011), Kolbo takes twelve of these huge vertical C-prints and places them back-to-back to create six double-sided limp stele and then carefully drapes three of these over one another (and onto the floor) twice into two mirroring elements. 12 to 6 to 3 to 2, all creating one work, these are Baroque rhythms: doubling and halving, singular and multiple, pushing and pulling, vertical and horizontal, legible and illegible, curvy and flat, forever changeling but finally static. As posited by Kolbo, they suggest what might have happened if someone had given Borromini a camera.

James Yood

Originally published in Art LTD, May/June 2011