

FOSTER/WHITE GALLERY

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Perspectives Review

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'Perspectives' at Foster/White looks at our world through photographers' lenses

Photographs as documents; photographs as fine art those two possibilities, and certain gray areas in between, are explored to felicitous effect in "Perspectives," a strong show of work by four photographers at Foster/White Gallery.

While curator Phen Huang sees all four photographers as "preoccupied with ... the temporary and temporal qualities of fleeting lives and the lasting change that we exert on our habitat," the artistic visions on display couldn't be more varied.

Itinerant Canadian Ed Ou's shots of street life in Yemen wouldn't look out of place in National Geographic, while Englishman Toby Smith casts environmental issues in a most unusual light. Work by Canadian Luce Pelletier and Houston artist Cara Barer, by contrast, hews closer to art that looks as if it's aimed straight at the gallery scene.



Barer's archival inkjet prints on rag paper are particularly striking. Initially inspired, she says, by a "random encounter" with some discarded Yellow Pages on a Houston street, she devises mandala-like images from phone books, road atlases and obsolete reference volumes. Generally battered, they're viewed from the top down, with their pages folded, foxed, splayed or wadded.

Still, bits of their text are in sight. In "Yb," the words "spot," "studio" and "two-legged" are visible and self-explanatory on the top corners of the index pages. But "Yb" will send the average viewer to the dictionary: It's the symbol for the chemical element ytterbium.

In "Road to Robinhood Bay," the place names from the curled, spiraling pages of a road atlas raise the question of what country is being navigated (England â€” thank you, Google Maps!). "Manhattan" (more Yellow Pages) captures the flavor of the city more handily than you'd think, with "Hotels," "Investigators," "Restaurants" and "Escort" crinkling into view.

Pelletier shoots even more perishable items. Her beech-leaf skeletons, reduced to mere tracery, are "sculpted" into the shapes of human hands or torsos (she uses corn husks, too). Her focus, she says, is on "the fragility of life." The images are strange, striking and a little chilling.

Smith is the figure here who falls most ambiguously between art with a message and art for art's sake. His images of English power stations and their environs are done, he says, using "colour exposures ranging from 5 minutes to 5 hours." He stresses that "no digital post-production" is involved.

In "Ratcliffe on Soar 1," a squadron of cooling towers appears to be marching toward the viewer, leaving a sickly aura of pink and violet light in its train. His aim, he declares, is to "hold the viewer's gaze and force a battle between the beauty of the image surface and the hatred of the subject matter depicted."



He succeeds uncannily.

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