

Paul Graham: ‘The Present’

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The Pace Gallery and Pace/MacGill

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The latest series by the British photographer Paul Graham reinvents street photography for an age of perpetual distraction. On view in Chelsea and collected in a new monograph, “The Present” completes a trilogy that includes the bleached-out landscapes of “American Night” and the stuttering vignettes of “a shimmer of possibility,” and brings the fractured, impaired vision of these earlier, countrywide bodies of work to bear on New York City sidewalks.

“The Present” was shot entirely in high-traffic areas of Manhattan (Penn Station, Times Square and 125th Street, among others). Its 16 diptychs and 2 triptychs have a simple premise: They show two or three views of the same intersection, taken seconds apart and from more or less the same angle.

A lot happens within that short time, though seemingly little of consequence. People go out of focus or disappear entirely and are replaced by new pedestrians doing pretty much the same thing. Cabs speed by, cellphone conversations end, attentions are diverted.

In one sequence a woman trips between shots; we see her striding forward and then sprawled out on the pavement. The location, Fulton Street, seems significant, as do the flattened perspective and the row of darkened windows in the background. It’s as if Mr. Graham has disrupted the friezelike rhythm of Paul Strand’s classic image “Wall Street.” Other parts of the series bring to mind Robert Frank and Garry Winogrand, although in place of a singular, searing image Mr. Graham gives us a succession of not-quite-decisive moments.

He also threads “The Present” with a motif of sightlessness. We see figures tapping canes, a man wearing an eye patch, and even a T-shirt with a winking smiley face (worn by a girl wiping away tears). And the series as a whole suggests that New Yorkers have many blind spots in our daily movements through the city, though we may not even know it.