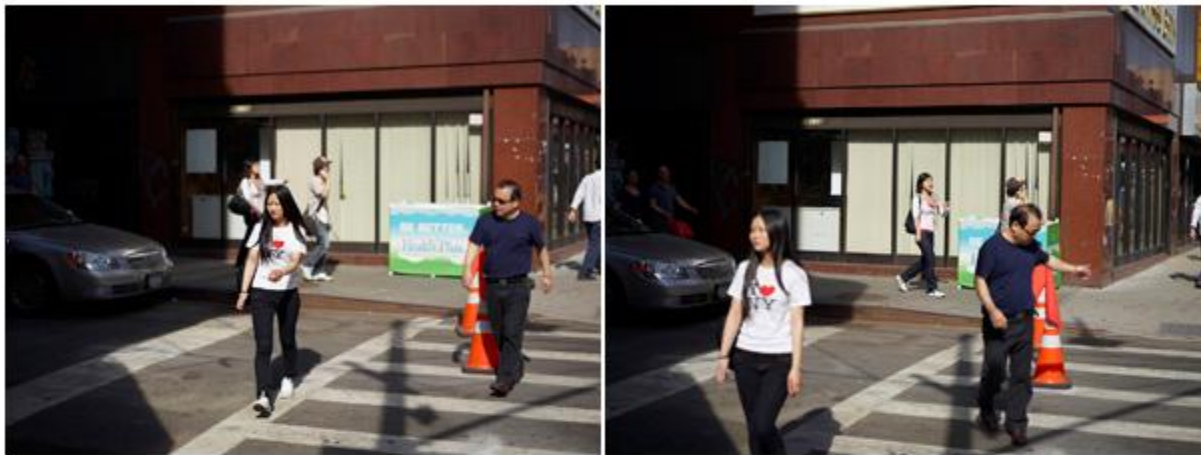


ARTFORUM

Paul Graham

03.03.12



Paul Graham, *East Broadway, 7th April 2010, 4.03.42 pm, 2009*, pigment print mounted on Dibond, each 56 x 74 1/4".

Paul Graham is a British artist based in New York and a recipient of a 2010 Guggenheim Fellowship in the category of photography. His latest body of work is on view in "The Present" at the Pace Gallery until March 24. In conjunction with the exhibition, MACK will publish a monograph of his new work. Here, Graham discusses the sixteen diptychs and two triptych photographs in the show.

THESE ARE NEW YORK STREET PHOTOGRAPHS, that unique genre of photography where you dance with the Brownian motion of life. To photographers, street photography is a Himalayan range that the foolhardy pit themselves against. Or maybe it's a shibboleth, a mystical visual code that only the indoctrinated members of our cult speak and revere. Take your pick.

But this isn't regular street photography: It's not black-and-white or 35-mm; it's not deep focus, not close or confrontational, not wide angle, and there's little drama. I use a normal lens, color, and shallow focus. Nothing is staged. Instead of a single picture, it embraces the before and after moments, so you see the people switching positions across a diptych: Life and its doppelgänger arrive and depart, as you quietly shift your awareness.

Normally, photography offers these frozen shards of time where the world is ossified into a singular moment. I've struggled to get away from that brittle, crystalline notion by inviting time into the work, making it a quality that you feel and experience. You see how events unfold, not only externally but also internally, from the consciousness-flow as we go about our lives.

Photographs usually have this false democracy of deep focus, where everything is sharp and equally detailed. That reading is denied in these pictures by the shallow focus. This is actually truer to how we see: in shallow spot focus. Try it for yourself. So there was a conscious decision to render these images in this way, how we alight upon *this* detail, and then, a fraction later, *this* one . . . and so forth.

There is one surprising diptych of a woman falling over. I don't seek out moments like that, but they do happen, as with life. I do not set up situations or create a tableau vivant—the late 1990s were dominated by that kind of work, so it's interesting to me that there's again space for photographic artists to work in the world, but this time with full awareness of the developments in art photography over the past twenty years. It's great to bring that knowledge into play with life-as-it-is, and close the circle.

Time is present not only in the fractions of a moment contained in the images, but also long term, as decades from now we'll look at this work with the same distance with which we regard vintage street photography today—like the wonderful images by Garry Winogrand or Lee Friedlander from the '60s and '70s. The signage, the cars, the clothing, they will be dated to us. We can't see it now as the glass is too foggy at this point, but it will clear. Hence the title: "The Present." In a way that speaks to how photography works, where every picture you take is of the present but immediately becomes the past. So the title is a reminder of these unique qualities of the medium, and its struggle to deal with time and life. Sometimes I think those are our materials. Not film, not paper, not prints: time and life.

— *As told to Arthur Ou*