

TITLE MAGAZINE

To Labor With Love

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FJORD

Through May 31

To Labor With Love is initially overwhelming: an eclectic assortment of sculpture, video, images, mixed media, and augmented machinery from more than a dozen artists.

Yet curator Elisa Gabor has managed to achieve both a thematic and a visual consistency in the exhibition. *To Labor With Love* is an intimate look at the artist's process; a visual narration of making that ultimately turns the maker into the subject and creates the unusual (and somewhat uncomfortable) circumstance for the viewer of looking at both the art *and* at its maker as the object. Gabor has created an exhibition that is akin to reading a stranger's diary, looking through an album of old photographs of a person you never knew, or stepping inside the artist's studio while he or she is absent.

This sensation is unabashedly presented in the film *Artists at Work* by the Finnish artist Elina Brotherus, around which the exhibition was curated. Brotherus' film is both a voyeuristic self-portrait and a documentary, as she films herself filming the painters for whom she models. *Artists at Work* is subversive, as Brotherus presents to the viewer the artist(s) as both maker and object; the art object as the film itself, but also the paintings created in its filming; the male artists who view their female model, who is actually viewing them. In the realm of portraiture, who is the maker, the laborer: the individual who creates the gestures, or the artist who records them?

The art objects in the show do not necessarily address the notion of "craft" in the making of an art object. Rather, the works represent a more instinctive nature to the process of creating—an almost existential labor that manifests itself in the work.



The photographic objects created by Micah Danges, Kelton Bumgarner, and Matt Giel challenge the notion of traditional photography, asking us to unlearn what we associate with the very idea of a “photograph.” Danges’ *Wall Writing* is a literal representation of his labor: a photograph that has been bent, twisted, cut, and physically manipulated by the artist. What the viewer sees is both presentation and evidence of labor; of a visceral relationship between artist and object. Bumgarner’s work also presents the viewer with an image that has been destroyed and recreated in a process that is harshly poetic. His work *there isn’t much left there at the bottom* is the evidence of time and the ordinary nature of decay in a beautifully abstracted image, leaving the viewer to question the subject and process in Bumgarner’s work. As can be seen in much of his other work, Matt Giel’s photograph is a chemically-created response to the over-prevalence of digital photography. In both his process and his subject, Giel presents a contemporary disconnect between experiencing, seeing and making.

Other photographs in *To Labor With Love* document the artist’s tangible experiences: of looking, seeing, and documenting. Joe Bochynski’s unsettling film is a visual irony; a gritty document of his own amusement at recreating the opposite of the viewer’s expectations of reality. A diptych created by Brittany Carmichael is a hauntingly familiar portrait that documents the process of a loved one aging. Similarly, Michelle Wallace’s snapshot of a woman on the beach provides an intimate glimpse of the relationship between the artist and her subject. Carmichael and Wallaces’ works are as much about the labors that humans put into love as they are about the love that an artist puts into his or her craft.

Anthony Bowers further explores the notion of the artist’s dedication to craft in his darkly humored painting *See me*, over which “Needs Improvement. See me.” has been scrawled. His is a not-so-subtle reference to the relationship between student and teacher, artist and critic. The former is dedicated to the process of creation, mark-making, and meaning; the latter sometimes given to the process of destruction. Andy Giannakakis’ *Tell me again about Capitalism again*, a scrawling ode to de Kooning, is similarly a smart—yet grimly cynical—comment on the relationship between artist and patron.

Almost hidden in the rafters, Jay Muhlin’s *Guilty Pleasures* is a whisper of solace. Recalling a collection of photographs, Muhlin’s work explores the innate human need to seek comfort and pursue happiness. Although a bleak sentiment, Muhlin’s work suggests that sometimes hiding in the open is the only way to seek refuge from the outside world. Thomas Pontone’s sculpture is visually at harsh odds with Muhlin’s work in *To Labor With Love*. Sharp and imposing, Pontone’s work is violently still and unnerving. It is a balancing act, much like the act of making. Anna Neighbor echos this with delicacy, in a seemingly discarded object that requires the viewer to look twice.

To Labor With Love is uneasily intimate: a public viewing of private lives; a final presentation of an unfinished process of looking, seeing, and making. An ode to the courageous gesture of making, *To Labor with Love* is both an answer and a question.