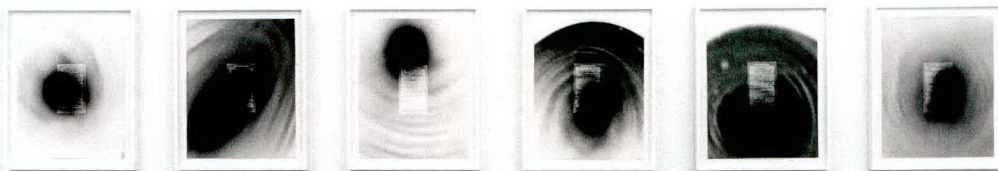


WHERE THE OCEANS MEET Museum of Art and Design at Miami Dade College, USA



BRITTANY NELSON PATRON Gallery, Chicago, USA

The scent of fresh ink permeates Brittany Nelson's '10,000 Light Years from Home' at Chicago's PATRON Gallery. Scrape marks demarcating the edges of the print *Greely Haven* (2019) recall the tracks left by the palette knife in both intaglio and monotype processes. Yet the work's tarry blacks and hazy grisaille are produced instead through a method of exposing paper prepared with sensitized gelatin to photographic negatives first pioneered in the 19th century. *Greely Haven* is one of three prints in the exhibition produced using the Bromoil process, a 20th-century refinement of this method; at more than 1 × 1.7 metres, they are likely the largest Bromoil prints ever produced.

The trio might be easily mistaken for works of pure, moody abstraction, but the vision they afford is a celestial one: the Richmond-based Nelson has represented three of the scores of images taken by the Opportunity Rover, which surveyed the Martian landscape from 2004 to 2018. In *Tracks 1* (2019), the rover has turned its gaze backwards towards its own tracks in the dust. What compels a machine designed for documentarian purposes towards such an act of self-reflection, with startlingly melancholic results? Or is this anthropomorphic interpretation driven by wishful empathy?

Sharing the space of the gallery's bright front room are a series of six small silver gelatin prints entitled 'And I Awoke and Found Me Here on the Cold Hill's Side #1-6' (2018). Each presents a page of a book, printed in the negative and photographed to reveal the text on both sides of the page, backwards and forwards sentences merging into white smudges. Dark nebulae produced by the flashbulb Nelson used to create each image further obscure the already largely illegible text. Though eerily similar to the translated version of the Opportunity Rover's last message to NASA – 'My battery is low and it's getting dark' – the series shares

its title with the 1972 James Tiptree, Jr. story the pages purvey.

Nelson's exhibition is both a rumination on and a contribution to a tradition of animating the queer imagination through science fiction. Writers such as Octavia Butler and Samuel R. Delany employed the genre to envision alternative sexual and social structures that more canonical literary forms would not allow. 'And I Awoke ...' is a tale of forbidden passions between human and extra-terrestrial beings; Tiptree was the pseudonym of Alice Sheldon, a prolific lesbian science-fiction writer who spent her entire life in the closet.

A darkened room at the gallery's rear isolates the six-part series 'Tiptree's Dead Birds' (2019): the hellish glow of each work comes not from within, but from holograms of Sheldon's notebooks trained on the glass surfaces from six red beams above. Marginal annotations and scribbled-out words betray the revisionism to which Sheldon was likely well accustomed in maintaining her multiple personae. 'Dead birds' was her grim term for women who had rejected her. Remarkably, Sheldon chose to write even these private pages under her male pseudonym. As she observed of Tiptree, 'His pen was my prick.'

In utilizing nearly extinct 19th- and 20th-century photographic techniques to reframe the dispatches of a solitary robot on a barren planet, as well as those of a brilliant woman deeply uncomfortable in her own body, Nelson performs the dynamics of projection and surrogacy upon which both science fiction and 'hard' science rely. Science fiction is famously prescient in imagining what technology is not yet sophisticated enough to realize – or, in the case of authors like Sheldon/Tiptree, what society cannot yet accept. The Opportunity Rover is a human surrogate in a place no human has ever been. Nelson succeeds admirably in conveying the urgency of these yearnings without romanticizing the desperate sense of nonbelonging that often spurs them.

Lauren DeLand

This page

Brittany Nelson, 'And I Awoke and Found Me Here on the Cold Hill's Side', silver gelatin prints, installation view

Opposite page

Above

Anthony Hernandez, *Screened Pictures #7*, 2017/2018, inkjet print, 1.1 × 1.1 m

Below

Wifredo Lam, *Midnight*, 1962, oil on canvas, 1.3 × 1.1 m

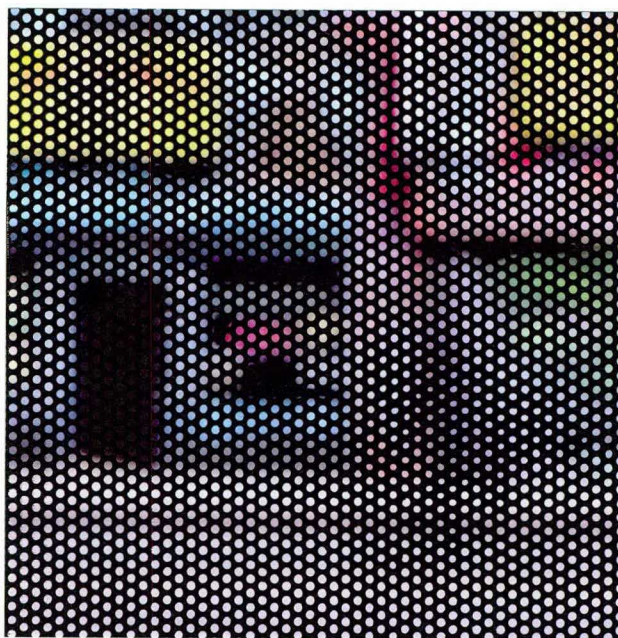
the unknowability of the Other. Glissant believed in the right to opacity, or the right to withhold one's identity as a way to evade authoritarian control. Appropriately, though Simone Fattal's diminutive bronze sculptures *By the Hearth* (1988/2017) appear frail, their abstract features are serenely withholding.

Raqs Media Collective's *Deep Breath* (2019) is a haunting underwater video that literally evokes the 'oceans' of the show's title, taken from the opening sentence of Glissant's book *Une Nouvelle région du monde* (A New Region of the World, 2006). Scuba divers swim amongst the remains of two shipwrecks on the ocean floor, where the Saronic Gulf meets the Aegean Sea. The divers eventually come upon a series of fluorescent yellow letters that spell out 'Forgetting of Air', the title of Luce Irigaray's 1999 book on the element largely ignored by Western philosophy. In Raqs' work, it is impossible to take for granted the air we breathe and senselessly pollute.

Also on display are Maya Deren's film *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (1985, edited by Cheryl Ito and Teiji Ito) and André Pierre's colourful paintings, such as *Ceremony with Issa and Suz* (c.1960), densely populated with African spirits and Catholic saints of the lwa pantheon. Deren met Pierre while in Haiti, where she became an initiate of Vodou. Although groundbreaking for bringing critical attention to Haitian Vodou dance rituals, Deren's film can be rightly criticized as opportunistic. In contrast, Cabrera's ethnographic work challenged documentary's truth-value, relying self-consciously on oral testimonies that were often embellished.

In the spirit of Okwui Enwezor's landmark Documenta 11 (2002), 'Where the Oceans Meet' makes a strong argument for how creolization might be used as a critical framework to explore other cross-cultural contexts.

Alpesh Kantilal Patel



ANTHONY HERNANDEZ

Kayne Griffin Corcoran, Los Angeles, USA

In her 1973 essay 'Freak Show', Susan Sontag observed that she had gleaned from Walt Whitman's novel *Leaves of Grass* (1855) that 'nobody would fret about beauty and ugliness' if they embraced 'the real, the inclusiveness and vitality of actual American experience'. Documenting the real, particularly the real along the ride, is not a uniquely American trait, of course, but the country's roads have long seduced the photographer's eye. They've given us everything from Robert Frank's *The Americans* (1958) to Danish-born photographer Joakim Eskildsen's series 'American Realities' (2016) – a commission from *Time* magazine that scorched the country's national pride in its mythical ability to deliver abundance and comfort by chronicling those citizens currently living below the poverty line. Photographer Anthony Hernandez catalogs the narratives of surface streets, the avenues and intersections that truly make Los Angeles a city, and not only a web of connection points between the area's freeways and suburban sprawl.

When Hernandez – who spent his formative years in the Boyle Heights neighbourhood of East Los Angeles during the 1950s – picked up a camera, he was less interested in optimizing the horizon than in engaging with the stark realities he encountered in his home town. In 1969, having recently returned from the horrors of the Vietnam War, he found that his 35mm Nikon helped him recover from the trauma, grounding him in the moment as he photographed the

things he saw, the places he went. With the notable exception of his series 'Rodeo Drive' (1984), Hernandez focused his lens on the pedestrians that fill the vastness of LA, its grand driving boulevards and marquee promenades. Working parallel to, but independently of, the Chicano Asco Collective – whose political performance work of the 1970s and '80s called attention to the absence of Latinx people in art and film – Hernandez's images subtly underscored the fact that the city's minority-majority Latinx population, as well as the lower-income communities more broadly, were still marginalized.

Hernandez's most recent series, 'Screened Pictures' (2017–18) captures familiar landmarks: pickup points for the LADOT Transit buses that serve, woefully inadequately, an urban population of nearly ten million people. The works closely echo the artist's early, visual-language-defining series 'Public Transit Areas' (1979–80) – an early series of portraits taken at bus stops, in which he used panels in the enclosures to deliberately obscure the subjects' features. For 'Screened Pictures', Hernandez instead shot through the black, powder-coated, perforated-aluminium panels that flank LA's redesigned bus stops, lending these images the Ben-Day dots appearance of Roy Lichtenstein's work. Yet, while Hernandez may have borrowed from the pop artist's aspirational commercial motifs for his gallery-goers in *Screened Pictures* #23, the gold-rimmed watch face in #37 or the towering new-build complex in #17, the once-vibrant colours of the small, mundane shop facades depicted in #7, #22, #16 and #32, disclosing their well-worn years, shun pop art's gloss.

Considering 'Public Transit Areas' alongside the series 'Automotive Landscapes' (1978–82) could give the impression that Hernandez's key focus is modes of transportation – a not unreasonable assumption for an artist raised in a city infatuated with driving and the autonomy it affords. The artist's true subject during his 50-year career, however, is evidenced most clearly in series such as 'Rodeo Drive', 'Public Transit Areas' (1979–80), and 'Public Use Areas' (1980–81), which depict how alienated people can be from their surroundings despite being part of a crowd. Hernandez exposes this modern condition of mass disengagement, of how individuals become isolated together in the city. 'Screened Pictures' illustrates the bus passenger and pedestrian's commute – one tracing urban anonymity, and within the streets' textures, generally only seen at full speed and framed by the LA car's familiar windshield.

Jennifer Piejko

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