

HYPERALLERGIC

Debris After an Artistic Storm



by Allison Meier
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There is something about artistic clutter that I love. The crumpled remains of discarded experiments, the crusts of paint dripped on floors and furniture, the outlines of finished pieces long since removed, frames of overlapped color left like burned shadows after a nuclear bomb. These remnants have a calm, yet chaotic, beauty, similar to debris after a storm, that draws me to visit studios and empty art classrooms. When looking at David Gilbert's art, now on view in his solo show *Angels* at Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery on the Lower East Side, I see this ephemeral aesthetic appreciated in his quiet photographs.

For a show focused on the ephemeral, *Angels* is appropriately fleeting. Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery is a small space and Gilbert's large photographs mean that each wall can only accommodate a single work comfortably. You can stand in the middle of the gallery and see the entire show at once. I'm usually put off by art being pinned to the wall instead of framed and hung, but since Gilbert's subjects are so transient, the anti-archival installation suits the presentation.

The subjects, although they appear like accidental compositions of studio residue, are carefully staged by Gilbert and then carefully lit for the photographs. Rather than captures of the scraps left behind by creating work, the messy scenes are the works themselves.

Ingres and Vermeer are two Old Masters cited for comparison to Gilbert's work in the press release and, while that's a bit lofty, this contemporary artist's photographs do have the same type of radiant interior light. This comes out in a third dimension through the show's installation in the gallery, where a little night light glows under Gilbert's "Cave Skeleton" (2011). (I like that this title made me look at the string of creased paper as if it's a vertebrae.) The light is placed in the same location that was used to illuminate the corner of the staging when it was photographed. There's also another break out of the two-dimensions with "Hung Paper" in one gallery corner, which, as you might guess from its title, is a piece of paper hanging from the ceiling, stained and crumpled, looking like it might have swung out of one of the photographs on



David Gilbert, "Studio" (2011), archival pigment print, 60 x 77.5. (image courtesy of Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery)

the walls. While it didn't feel integral to the show since it seemed to diverge from the whole idea of the assemblages existing only in photographs, I did like that Gilbert was staging a small moment of artistic disarray.

While the twists of fabric and paper in the photographs are depicted as figurative, there's only one human figure in the works: Gilbert himself painting naked in a dark studio. I like to think that Gilbert is presenting himself as being just as ephemeral as the other art objects, something that will someday only exist in photographs. Maybe this is a little morbid of me, although the title of another work, "Blue Angel," and the exhibit itself contain hints at an ethereal afterlife, even if that could just as easily be referring to the elusive and fleeting light trapped in the images.

Gilbert has an active tumblelog, through which it's possible to take a tour of the progression of his art. It made me appreciate how controlled the chaos was, the attentive design in the disorder, and how he has perfected this over time into something that seems so casual.

While you could walk into *Angels* and dismiss the photographs, there is a real consciousness there of how light hitting a wall in just the right way can make even a dirty rag momentarily beautiful. Sometimes the things that are the most temporary, the most disposable, can root themselves in our minds. There is something haunting about the quickness of time in their impermanence.