



## David Gilbert

'The Secret Garden'

Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery  
54 Ludlow Street  
Lower East Side  
Through Dec. 6

New York at the moment has a glut of good photography shows — not to mention ambitious exhibitions at MoMA and the Guggenheim. What sets some of these shows apart is the strength of their position. David Gilbert, in his third solo show at this gallery, takes the poet's stance: His work argues for photography as allegorical and ethereal, and he makes images that are like dream worlds that never existed in the first place.

To make his photographs, Mr.

Gilbert creates rough sculptural assemblages and installations in his studio in Los Angeles — picking up on the long tradition of photographing constructed tableaus — and illuminates them with spectral lighting. Mr. Gilbert's process links him not just with photography's origins as an index of light, however, but with Baroque artists like Caravaggio and Georges de La Tour for whom light was alchemically symbolic. Mr. Gilbert's lighting ranges from naked incandescent bulbs to the Technicolor sunset of a Los Angeles day.

Like many of his contemporaries, Mr. Gilbert uses digital manipulation sparingly. The work has a raw, slightly scruffy sensibility, which amplifies its personal and romantic character. A recurring butterfly motif, for



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David Gilbert's "Good Night," a 2015 photograph.

instance, recalls the nostalgia of modern authors like Vladimir Nabokov — himself a butterfly expert — except Mr. Gilbert's flat silhouettes of those insects reflect a childhood obsession with butterfly stickers.

Books like "The Miracle of Analogy, or The History of Photography, Part I" and "Photography Is Magic" (both published this year) indicate a move in art away from several decades of photography devoted to revealing the artifice of the medium and its collusion with politics and commerce. (The Guggenheim show is even called "Photo-Poetics.") Gallery shows such as Mr. Gilbert's bolster this shift, offering material proof of photography's mystical and mysterious ways.

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