



David Gilbert: House & Garden at Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery

Barry N. Neuman
February, 2019



David Gilbert, "Lit," 2018, archival inkjet print, 39 x 20 inches. Courtesy of Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery, New York.

What kind of an exhibition makes a legend most? One is the kind that lingers in a viewer's mind well after its conclusion and prompts reconsiderations of one or more artistic genres. "David Gilbert: House & Garden," presented at Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery, New York, from October 26 to December 23, 2018, was an example of one such exhibition.

Upon viewing this show, one asks, "Does photography depict matter or light?" and ultimately concludes that what matters is that Gilbert's work shines a new light on the act of regarding color photography.

Gilbert's works ostensibly depict common objects and sculpted materials, combined to function, along with the environments in which they are placed, as subject matter that is simultaneously recognizable and inscrutable. Man Ray's photographs of enigmatic objects come to mind, but Gilbert's works are in no way surrealistic. Likewise, one would not necessarily categorize these photographs as still lifes, as the content of each work is too inextricably intertwined to be teased out and

KLAUS VON NICHTSSAGEND GALLERY

54 Ludlow Street, New York, NY 10002
Tel 212-777-7756 www.klausgallery.com

seen as scenes or displays. Likewise, neither the items nor the settings are merely light-catchers. They are, perhaps, McGuffins - subjective distractions that a viewer might focus upon while taking in follow-up looks at what are first-glance knockouts of luminosity.



David Gilbert, "Three Trees,"
2018, archival inkjet print, 47 x 55
inches.

Courtesy of Klaus von
Nichtssagend Gallery, New York.

It's hard to witness a miracle twice, but the way to see "House & Gardens" is to wander into the venue's rear gallery, be stunned by the work, take a look at the details of two or three works that draw one in most, walk out of the space, look at something else in the gallery, and stroll back into the rear gallery. It will happen again; the light will jump out and be startling.

It would be logical to explain what is going on with Gilbert's work, but that would be like trying to explain what happens when one takes a sip of champagne for the first time. Explanations could be offered about its unique and bubbly qualities, but the sensuality of it all would be denatured, and a description of the phenomenon would not act as a substitute for the experience itself.

One's wonderment at Gilbert's accomplishments is palpable, and his works may draw one in for a closer analysis of what they do for a viewer.

Surface and subject matter are both significant here. As one might - with a Giorgio Morandi painting - go from looking at a bottle to looking at brushstrokes and back again, one finds oneself going from looking at a sculpture or a surrogate sculpture in Gilbert's work to looking at the all-around uniformity of the surface of the work itself.

KLAUS VON NICHTSSAGEND GALLERY

54 Ludlow Street, New York, NY 10002
Tel 212-777-7756 www.klausgallery.com



David Gilbert, "Indoor Branch,"
2018, archival inkjet print, 86 x
58 inches. Courtesy of Klaus von
Nichtssagend Gallery, New York.

It's the kind of thing one might do while contemplating "Pastrycook," by August Sander. In Gilbert's "Three Trees," three table-top sculpture, the table, the walls, the windows, the Venetian blinds, and the sunlight shining through the blinds (which, themselves, bear cast shadows) are all made of different materials, but one can't help but notice that they exist on an admirably consistent plane - that of the archival inkjet print upon which they inhabit. In the Sanders work, the chef's pate and the cooking vessel echo each other, but, for a viewer, they don't exist, respectively, as human flesh and metal; they singularly exist as a silver gelatin print.

The back-and-forth engagement is what one may experience upon closely inspecting a Morandi or a Diego Velázquez. The effect of being in the presence of something real that is also a representation is exceptionally stimulating to both the mind and eye.

In Gilbert's "Lit," an arrangement of one-by-one-inch lengths of lumber, painted and encumbered with rough strips of white fabric and a strand of wire with turquoise insulation and light sockets (filled with small, illuminated, transparent, globular bulbs), leans against the side of a house in what appears to be an alleyway in a suburban residential area. The items are not junk, not decoration, not natural, and certainly humanmade. They were not haphazardly placed; perhaps, they were intentionally allowed to appear poised. Peculiarly, these items call attention to themselves, the space in which they exist, and the paneling and the house upon which they co-habit within a visual fulcrum of an arrangement. While the house itself may not physically fall if the wooden shafts were moved, the composition would.

KLAUS VON NICHTSSAGEND GALLERY

54 Ludlow Street, New York, NY 10002
Tel 212-777-7756 www.klausgallery.com



David Gilbert, "Gone Girl," 2018, archival inkjet print, 42 x 27-1/2 inches. Courtesy of Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery, New York.

As a museum visitor to an Édouard Manet exhibition might investigate the kindred nature of Velázquez, James A. M. Whistler, and Thomas Eakins, a visitor to Gilbert's exhibition might comparatively evaluate the experience of engaging with actual works of abstract sculpture by viewing other concurrently-held exhibitions. The illusory power of Gilbert's work very effectively stands up in the memory, as one views Zac Hacmon's exhibition of tiled sculpture in the courtyard space at LMAK Gallery and Sarah Bednarek's exhibition of polychromed works at Tiger Strikes Asteroid. Interestingly, Gilbert, Hacmon, and Bednarek all appear to share an interest in objects, the light they emit and reflect, and the spaces they inhabit, and, in doing so, they call to mind Barbara Kasten's works of the 1980's.

At Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery, there's an actual installation that's comparable to what may be seen in Gilbert's photographs, as there had been at Kasten's exhibition at John Weber Gallery in 1982. Kasten was, however, working at a time when color photography was still considered a new phenomenon in academic art circles. She made her work specifically about the range and intensity of colors that she orchestrated with electrical lights, gels, and reflective materials. Gilbert, however, effects a harmony that often appears to be achieved amidst natural lighting, and, in doing so, attracts the attention of the viewer to the phenomenon but does not call attention to it in a conspicuous manner. To a degree, Gilbert's laid back installation resembles a natural history environment, created by unnatural means.

Another means of comparatively evaluating Gilbert's work comes with a visit to the exhibition of Helmut Newton photographs at 10 Corso Como. After one files past an extraordinary array of displays of the designer world of the day, one encounters a

KLAUS VON NICHTSSAGEND GALLERY

54 Ludlow Street, New York, NY 10002
Tel 212-777-7756 www.klausgallery.com

stately gallery with a selection of vintage, silver gelatin prints of Newton's most notable works. The famous and the fashionable are portrayed in astonishing interiors and exteriors in Newton's photographs, which are comparable in size to Sander's portraits and as impactful in their all-around compositional integrity as Gilbert's works. In disparate ways, Newton and Gilbert stimulate the senses subtly yet pervasively. Gilbert's "Gone Girl," "Indoor Branch," and "Interior Tweet" are more than depictions. They are tableaux – the kinds that one might imagine as counterparts to what Jean-Honoré Fragonard might have done if he lived and worked in Southern California in the 21st century.

With one Gilbert on a wall, a picture window is possible. With an entire room of Gilbert photographs, a pavillion is certainly plausible. WM