

Motion Pictures approaches cinema by taking away the very thing that seems to define it: movement. By photographing projections of full strips of 35mm film arranged in loops, coils, curves and overlapping layers, the work transforms a sequence of frames into a single spatial image. The filmstrips are placed between a pin light and a flat surface, producing skewed, blurred and stretched projections that are then photographed on film, making visible the physical material normally concealed by projection. What emerges is less a photograph of a film than a photograph of cinema's mechanism itself: frames, perforations, shadows, transparency and accumulated layers become the subject, while the distinction between one moment and the next collapses into simultaneity. The strips come from two films: Delbert Mann's *A Gathering of Eagles* (1963) and Sydney Pollack's *Three Days of the Condor* (1975).

Bergson's critique of the cinematograph provides a useful lens here, yet the photographs are not merely philosophical diagrams of cinematic time. Their attraction lies in the tension between order and disorder: the precision of the film sequence is confronted by the physical irregularity of the strip, its folds, overlaps and accumulations. Cinema's carefully measured progression becomes something almost tactile, closer to an object than an event. Yet the particular arrangement of each photograph and the images contained within it suggest a different kind of investment—one that is less concerned with cinema as a clearly defined system than with the particular experience and attachment that cinema produces. This is not to say that the work disengages from the cinematic apparatus; rather, its constituent elements are disassembled and abstracted from their conventional functions. Film, light, projection and photography remain present, but their relationships are rendered ambiguous: the filmstrip becomes both object and image, while projection itself becomes something to be photographed and preserved. Perhaps the clue lies in the title itself.

Motion Pictures recalls the early technological promise of cinema—the extraordinary idea that still photographs could be made to move—but, more importantly, there is something distinctly cinephilic in its gestures. To dismantle a film into its material components is to risk losing the worlds those images once carried: characters, performances, gestures, sounds, memories and personal associations, but more fundamentally, the experience of simulated life in one particular arrangement that cinema makes possible. The way in which elements of the filmstrips are focused and edited suggests a desire to frame particular aspects, perhaps as a film still might, albeit within an explicit context of its physicalised existence. The experience of the film in its integrity may have been displaced, but specific moments within it have been highlighted—a material way of holding on to something in particular, imbued perhaps with the affective concentration of a keepsake, relic, or memento.

In its deconstructive tendency, *Motion Pictures* sits within a larger constellation of works that turn cinema back onto its own material and temporal mechanisms: from structural cinema, as theorised by P. Adams Sitney, where duration, repetition, the frame and the conditions of projection become the subject; to Takahiko Iimura's *Film Strips I* (1966–70), which foregrounds the filmstrip as material; Hiroshi Sugimoto's *Theaters*, where an entire film screening is compressed into a single long exposure, its duration reduced to a rectangle of accumulated white light; and Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962), which reverses the relation between stillness and movement, constructing cinematic duration almost entirely from still photographs, with movement emerging through editing, among many others.

But there is another atmosphere the photographs inhabit: by returning particular arrangements and moments to objects that can themselves be owned and displayed immobile on a pedestal, they make something that was once elusive and evasive suddenly fixed and retrievable. The film and its contents are no longer something that passes before the viewer and disappears, but something that can be held onto, looked at again, and possessed. This, for me, offers a more reticent way of approaching the work.

Christian Marclay's *The Clock* (2010) offers an important counterposition: rather than freezing, compressing or reconstructing cinematic time, Marclay takes thousands of fragments from films and television—shots of clocks, watches, characters announcing the time, waiting for time to pass—and assembles them into a 24-hour montage synchronised precisely with the viewer's own time. At any given moment, the cinematic time represented on screen corresponds to the actual time outside the work, so that cinema becomes both an image of time and a functioning measure of it. The effect is to conflate cinematic time with lived time, placing the viewer's body, itself progressing through gradual decay, in relation to the clocks it has invented to measure that progression. Something similar seems to happen in *Motion Pictures*, but in reverse. Moments of identification, significance, affection—or simply those moments in which a desire to hold onto something emerges—have been paused and made possessable. What was once experienced as passing, as something that could only be encountered and then lost, becomes an object that can be returned to, bringing that moment back into lived time—not the time of projection, but the time of the viewer's own continued experience.

Moreover, *Motion Pictures* does this without explicitly revealing the reasons behind these particular impulses. Why one set of frames has been highlighted over another is approached with a conscious reticence, to the point that what comes to the foreground is not the significance of any particular image, but the impulse to take hold of a particular moment itself—abstracted from any specific narrative or personal justification, but physicalised, now suddenly tangible. In this, it evokes an experience of cinema that is perhaps at the heart of its significance: those private moments in which one comes into contact with whole worlds, but does so unwitnessed. This happened for me last week while watching Katharine Hepburn in *The Philadelphia Story*, when she wrestles a man to the ground and soils his white trousers, an absurd and strangely liberating gesture that I read as an expression of female physicality and expressivity rarely permitted on screen, or elsewhere for that matter. Whatever it is that moves a person, whatever moment in a film suddenly evokes the desire to pause, observe, hold onto it—to possess it—may be one of the closest expressions of unhindered affection, intellectual or otherwise. These moments eventually become mirrors and portraits of the viewer as much as of the film, and so, once again, the question of which is the projection screen for the other becomes as unclear as which time is more real, or which materiality more authentic.

Maya Tounta

Wyatt Niehaus, Motion Pictures

5 September – 10 October, 2026

Works:

Motion Pictures 1-11

2026

Archival pigment prints

20 x 17cm each

Real duration

2026

Framed archival pigment print

40 x 34cm

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Saturday 12-5pm or by appointment