

Dan Torop

Falling Water

April 8th – June 3rd

Tops Gallery is pleased to present *Falling Water*, an exhibition of new photographs by Dan Torop. An opening reception will be held on Saturday, April 8 from 5-7pm.

In the last few years, Dan Torop has made repeated visits to places where there is either too much or too little water. One such site is a waterfall behind a playground in upstate New York. In a place both deluged and water-starved, sustained seasonal observation allows for telling images.

These flows of water—their absence and presence—present a revelatory landscape. An image of a torrent pitching itself over a cliff, a rendering of spray and rainbow—these are sites of dreams. They become similes: for aging, for the irrevocable, for entropy, irrationality, and wonder. Water, in its flow, makes known the underlying structures, but also obscures. These flows of images both veil and reveal. The land resists, denies, and transforms.

Proximity with powerful flows of water endangers the objective position, compelling awareness of a body bearing the transparent eyeball. Working around the rapid change of rushing water entails risk. Sporadic melts and violent flows are possible cataclysms. Freezing violent motion holds back trauma, recording a moment in the immeasurable field of constant motion.

In these photographs, the language of American landscape photography is simultaneously advanced and cast into doubt. Where once the landscape was something tangible that could be captured precisely, now the real world is no longer so solid. Change manifests on the land. Observation opens up a space not forward, but between. The age of exploration is gone. The ground beneath our feet remains unknown.

Torop has spent extended periods in locations on the outskirts of America. He has retraced the wanderings of Mark Twain, and the journeys of exploration of Lewis and Clark. Torop has long pictured water. His photographic series *Frozen Period* is based upon Meriwether Lewis's daylong trek in 1805 past two waterfalls. His digital *Ocean* is a real-time physics-based simulation of the sublime.

Torop researches the mechanics of how light is recorded and translated by digital processes. He takes account of the camera's tri-color mosaiced digital sensor, and the interpretation and rendering of that data as ink on paper. He contributes code to the open source photography software with which he tunes his images. This intimate grasp of technical processes allows a sensitivity to tone, hue and chroma. It invests subjectivity to the nuances of light.

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The water pouring down the bulky rock in Torop's photograph *Two Boulders* renders white. A Hollywood tale tells that, during the eponymous dance in *Singin' in the Rain*, the spray from above didn't read on camera. The stagehands turned to a vaudeville standby. And so Kelly was pelted with milk as he swung on that lamppost, and rivulets of milk streamed down past the curb and cobblestones to the drains.

The droplets in Torop's images are reminiscent of shattered glass falling in a movie by the Wachowskis. Think of the crown of milk photographed by Doc Edgerton in a moment more finely sliced than our eyes can perceive. Edgerton had already founded EG&G, the defense contractor which took on not just the photography but the entire management of the Nevada Test Site. In Torop's work, radiance bursts through to form rainbows.

The title of this show is a nod to Frank Lloyd Wright's *Fallingwater*. Like Wright, Torop attends deeply to a site through contemporary techniques. But *Fallingwater* was also a bit of a comeback project for Wright, a transition from Prairie Style modern to otherworldly. Torop, too, is an artist in transition. To be attentive to the mechanics of photography is to engage with change. The technology of the medium shifts. The world which the camera regards is ever unstable. Yet the photographer returns with a single image, which remains.

Photographers find the lasting in the flurry of the moment. The investigation and habitation of sites is the work. The resulting images are manifestations of experience. They are guideposts for both perceiving and imagining our veering world.

This is the third show of Dan Torop's work presented by Tops Gallery. Torop's work has been shown in solo and group shows at numerous institutions, including the American Museum of the Moving Image, the Lynden Sculpture Garden, Tomato Mouse, Derek Eller Gallery, Fish Island Gallery, Green Gallery, the CLUI Wendover Exhibit Hall, the San Francisco Exploratorium, and the New York Video Festival. *Triple Canopy*, *Paper Monument*, *Cabinet*, and other periodicals have published Torop's images and writing. He contributes code to *darktable*, an open source tool for processing photographs. Torop is co-editor of a photo book series ASMR4 and is an Assistant Professor at Cornell University.

At Tomato Mouse (NYC), a sibling to this show, *Three Rainbows* opened on March 18, and remains on view into April. A good bit of the words above are owed to Tomato Mouse. Both shows have received support by a grant from Cornell's Center for Cities and by the Dean's Professional Development funds of Cornell's College of Architecture, Art, and Planning.