

SOLDES

Nilo Goldfarb

ON VIEW

October 21 –

November 25, 2023

EXHIBITION OPENING

October 21, 2023, 4–9pm

For Immediate Release

Open space, which abounds in the automobile metropolis, rarely accommodates the human bodies that move through it without combustion engines (or their battery-powered replacements). In the compositions that make up Nilo Goldfarb’s most recent suite of images, now on view at SOLDES, the artist has made room for the human figures that mobilize against the backdrop of such a built environment.

These figures are joined in a technics that the body stores by means of muscle-memory, and expresses by means of gestures. Some of the gestures in these photos take the form of poses, or of formalized stretches that hold the limb still, in extension, and with the oversight of an intimate who might provide support or correction or comfort. Other gestures take the form of traces: here, trucks—that is to say, the axels of skateboards—have left a deposit of glitter-like aluminum flakes suspended in wax on concrete benches. Then there is the body in repose, a figure seated on one of those same benches: his presence brings up the possibility of considering rest, even in its unposed absence of activity, as a technique of the body that developed in gestural approximation to external conditions. “The way of sitting down is fundamental,” Marcel Mauss reminds us. “You can distinguish squatting mankind and sitting mankind. And, in the latter, people with benches and people without benches.” (1)

The figure in the photograph, who is a friend of the artist, must not rest too long, or two well, for the seat of his pants, warming the wax used to ease the travel of the axel across the plane of concrete, will be henceforward festooned with those same metallic deposits. The trace that the skateboard has left behind on the bench, the texture that its grains of metal have drawn on the surface of the concrete, invites the viewer to look more closely at

(1) Marcel Mauss, “Les Techniques du corps,” 1935

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the surface of the silver gelatin print itself. Seduced by the detail large-format photography offers, we are invited to think about the similarity of its surface to that of the phenomena that stand before the lens. Like the various depths at which the metal flakes resulting from the grind of skateboard against bench lay suspended, so too the grains of silver-halide in gelatin leave their traces on the platine surface of the paper. All over, after this recognition, analogies abound: leaves and exfoliated bark pieces fallen to the ground in their crispened states remind us of the tendency paper has to curl after soaking in photo chemicals and washed in water. The water itself figures in a man-made riverbank, the basin of which, though significantly larger, is no less manufactured than the tray in a darkroom.

These photos remind us that, even when we are looking at a landscape, our encounters with the natural are often, in actuality, interactions with overlapping arrays of belabored artifacts—the constructedness of which we have simply forgotten as such. The photograph of the river-bank, for instance depicts the South Los Angeles Wetlands Park, which, far from standing as an exception to the city-planning of the automobile metropolis, once served as a rail and bus depot that fell into disuse for many years. While any restitution of public space is a welcome exception to the logic mapped onto the landscape by the car and petroleum industries, Goldfarb's photographs capture the moment when the process of "re-greening," as the council members of the city have called it, covers over the historical process that still conditions the present. Where previously curvilinear iron streaked the landscape, we now see waterfowl floating and the concentric wavelets made by their movements and the stirrings of other animals. The natural movements of these animals are circumscribed by the artificial shape of the environment made around them.

Gestures are not mere spontaneous eruptions of expression, but rather an internalization (and perhaps also a miniaturization) of the technē involved in the building, modification, and maintenance of the environment, as well as the fashioning of perspectival frames through which that environment is viewed. The perspective of the large format view-camera requires its own sequence of gestures to become memorized until they eventually become second-nature. For example, the Swiss monorail view-camera used to make the pictures in this exhibition must be reconstructed upon each use: first the tripod must be set up by extending its legs, and leveling its head; then the base of the camera must be carefully attached to the tripod-head; then the rail along which the focusing screen and lens travel can be insert-

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ed; after this the focusing screen and lens assemblies are attached—and, finally, these assemblies are bridged by an accordion bellows made of flexible-folding material. Only after this carefully orchestrated sequence of operations can the photographer—remembering to take the lens cap off, and opening the aperture, of course—look through the camera to bring an image into focus. Most impressively, Goldfarb, though a young artist, has disciplined his body to such an extent that he can take photographs of people and moving landscapes with the elan other photographers struggle to achieve with lighter digital cameras.

What does it mean, in the current era, to repeat the silent gestures of the camera operator common to Marcel Mauss' time? If an answer to this question were possible, it would tell us something about the secret affinity that links the gestures shown in the photos with the gestures of the photographer that brought them into being. We will leave the discovery of those affinities to the visitors at SOLDES. The idea that these images would analogize but one set of bodily operations that have all but vanished with the automation of pictures points not only to the historical conditionality of all gestures, but to their transitory nature as well. As Jan Tumlir has recently written, such a conditionality does not correspond to temporal fantasies of linear progress, despite what one reads every day about the rapid technical development of the graphic arts:

“At the origin of the human is a gesture that acknowledges what is repeated in life by repeating it. Later, this gesture will be inscribed onto a surface, thereby translating the rhythm of what actively unfolds in time into a static mark, or collection of marks, that can be encountered in a single moment, as a pattern. The markings that we find on the artifacts of our prehistory, etched into bone, bark and stone, herald the inception of image and language, the pictograph and ideogram, while remaining the immanent output of bodies sympathetically vibrating with the rhythms observed in their environment. These are notations that do not yet exercise any determinate iconic or symbolic function. They are scores, where notation does not just serve to shore up the memory of what has already transpired, but is oriented toward the future, as a prompt to reenactment.”

-Jeffrey Stuker, 2023