

Christopher Culver

Tough Joy

June 22 - August 10, 2024

Let Me Hold You for Awhile
There's more to life than a little money, you know... Don't you know that?
Needle on the Ground
San Francisco Sunset
Car Jerk
City Park Turtles
Dog, Room, River
Ambulance
To Be Back in the Desert Again
Strange Neighborhood

Michael Benevento is proud to present *Tough Joy*, A solo exhibition of ten new drawings by the New York based artist Christopher Culver. This is Culver's first solo presentation with the gallery.

The work of Christopher Culver stems from an ongoing attraction to images that reveal traces of human presence. Culver's tight meditations enrich and deepen his subjects using a sensual raw touch. There is a pared down quality to Culver's drawings, as if the artist lurks deep inside, pushing the world away. First captured in photographic snapshots, Culver's subjects expose psychological and emotional qualities felt within waning American environments. These images that begin as photographs, are then transformed through Culver's complex drawing process.

In his works on paper, Culver portrays vacant cityscapes, forgotten still lifes, and empty domestic spaces. Layers of charcoal and pastel are built up by pressing and rubbing different pastel powders through a multitude of sponges and brushes. The paper becomes stained and saturated with pigments. Images come into being through the layering of charcoal, pastels and erasure. The resulting grainy surfaces enhance the filmic quality of his darkly veiled compositions, and imply a sense of degradation. With a forensic sensibility, Culver revisits his subjects across multiple works, heightening their mysterious significances, distilled from a larger interwoven narrative.

In *Tough Joy*, Culver continues to uncover the imagery of his surroundings, this time through his archive of images over the last 17 years as a resident and visitor to California. The oldest source image is from 2006: a polaroid the artist took of his studio apartment in San Francisco, where he lived during his early twenties. In *San Francisco Sunset*, (2024) a depiction of a bed-less room with pillows and rumpled sheets on the ground touch upon the gridded window overlooking South of Market Street at the end of day. The uneasy suspension of clothing, an empty collapsible hamper, and debris as a foreground merge into a cityscape and sunset fused together. The stark California light pierces in through the grid and jails the inner walls of the empty residence.

Other works in the exhibition include depictions of animals. These more recent subjects include a bale of turtles floating in an abyss of green water, and guard dogs from an auto body shop located a couple of blocks away from Michael Benevento Gallery. Culver's subjects, inanimate and not, convey a spirit with a disarming capacity for affection and closeness in a an otherwise dark and uncanny landscape.