

MATT LIPPS: *Library* Review

Marc Selwyn Fine Art
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March 2014

Matt Lipps destroys in order to create. In *Library*, he begins by culling through the *Life Library of Photography*, a seventeen-volume set published by *Time-Life* Books between 1970 and 1972. Lipps carefully selected images from this vast archive, cutting out the black-and-white reproductions of camera and individual photographic artworks. The books in *Library of Photography* series were designed to instruct non-artists on how to make good photographs, while simultaneously outlining the history of photography. In many ways, Lipps's work is the antithesis of what the *Library of Photography* presents. Rather than showing a linear history or a trajectory of how to get from A to B, Lipps takes bits and pieces from the different volumes and reassembles them to form idiosyncratic narratives about photography. Though each of Lipps's eleven works is titled after a subject covered in the books—travel, photojournalism, or nature, for example—they are not didactic illustrations. His juxtapositions are often based on visual relationships and become poignant commentaries that are simultaneously witty and uncanny.

While Lipps's photographs appear to be digitally assembled, they are in fact analog constructions. Like many contemporary artists using photography today, such as Daniel Gordon and Sara VanDerBeeck, Lipps creates miniature stage sets using the cutout images that he then carefully lights and photographs. In his previous series, *HORIZON/S* (2010) Lipps arranged images cut from the original magazines onto horizontal shelves, securing them with toothpicks and hand-crafted bases that are occasionally visible in the final images. Published in the United States from 1958 to 1989, *Horizon Magazine* was a "magazine of the arts" and an arbiter of taste. In the *HORIZON/S* series, Lipps juxtaposed color and black-and-white images that collapsed time and reframed art history. In *Library*, he similarly reconfigures the history of photography.

In each of these photographs (all 2013), three to five glass shelves horizontally bisect the image. Each shelf contains an assortment of reproductions cut from the *Library of Photography* with an X-Acto blade. The objects range from images of cameras to fragments carefully excised from both photographic artworks and how-to diagrams. These elements are backed by a color photograph previously taken by Lipps, who clearly is at ease recycling his own work as well as appropriating imagery. His paper cutouts function like actors assuming a specific place on stage or in a still life; they are preserved as if precious collectables carefully arranged on the shelves of a curio cabinet. The four shelves in *Camera* juxtapose images of different types of cameras with some of photography's iconic pictures—a pepper, a moon, a dancer, and a nude—as if to imply that these cameras made these photographs. In *Photojournalism*, he includes sequential images of a rocket launch as well as a photograph of an astronaut. *Travel* depicts images of exotic places, whereas *Nature* includes reproductions of animals and plants. *Themes*, the only diptych, is a meditation on fashion photography. In front of a series of positive and negative images that Lipps shot of a female model, another array of poses spans seven shelves, featuring men and women,

young and old, amid a selection of tools and props that collectively illustrate the transition from classical to casual posturing, from photography's inception to the 1970s.



Camera, 2013

Each setup is shot against one of Lipps's vibrantly colored photographs, which provides ample contrast to the black-and-white reproductions and simultaneously serves as a background. Lipps flattens three-dimensional space while also playing with shifts of scale, as the final images are at least triple the size of the originals. To the connoisseur, it becomes a game of recognition.

Who made that image? Is that what I think it is? Isn't it upside down? The work entitled *Photographers* contains just three shelves. Its background features a blue-tinted image of one hand above another hand clicking the shutter of a camera. The images on the shelves include fragments from famous photographs by August Sander, Aaron Siskind, Alfred Steiglitz, and Minor White, among others. The intrigue comes from the relationship between the fragments, their sizes in contrast to one another, and the narrative that can be constructed as the eye moves from element to element. And they are not without humor. As one of Siskind's divers floats in the space where the horse would be in Steiglitz's *Spiritual America* (1923), it is evident that Lipps is specific about his references.

Lipps's appropriations have less to say about photography's history and its cultural significance than its processes. While he is mired in the analog, his collages would be easier to make with Photoshop. Instead, the works indulge in the inexactness of cut-and-paste collage and acknowledge photography's blow-up capabilities, while creating a new narrative about the medium. Through this accumulation of disparate parts, Lipps weaves his own story of photography, one that celebrates form and the process simultaneously.