ARTFORUM

TAMMY RAE CARLAND: "Critic's Pick"

Written by Joseph Akel
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There's a moment in *Stage Fright* (1950), Alfred Hitchcock's theater-inspired murder mystery, when the investigating detective played by Michael Wilding remarks, "I once had a cousin who had an ulcer and an extremely funny face, both at the same time." Entertainment, it would seem, entails a necessary degree of anxiety. With her latest exhibition, artist Tammy Rae Carland returns to the subject of theatrical performance, once again evincing the heady charge of expectation and uncertainty that fuels the dramaturgical experience.

While her last show, "Funny Face I Love You" (2010), elicited spectator angst through the obfuscation of her models' faces, Carland now elides the body of the actor altogether in favor of precariously staged mise-en-scenés that evoke a frisson of internalized disquietude. In the large color photograph *Tipping Point* (all works 2013), several interlocking l adders, some inverted, stand precariously balanced atop rolls of gaffer's tape, while in *Balancing Act*, a stack of nineteen golden chairs, framed by a heavily draped proscenium, threatens to topple. The overriding sense is that of catastrophe waiting in the wings. Meanwhile, in the looped single-channel video installation *Live from Somewhere*, a pair of spotlights frenetically paces against a background of drawn red curtains. A row of theater chairs opposite the monitor invites viewers to sit in anticipation of a show that does not begin, echoing the futility of Samuel Beckett's Vladimir and Estragon.

Elsewhere, leaning against a wall, two polished acrylic ladders that make up the installation *Pratfall Effect 1 & 2* appropriate their title from the psychological phenomenon in which perceptions of others' attractiveness change based on mistakes they make. If several of Carland's other works evoke the anxiety of suspended immanence, here there is a nod to thwarted beginnings. Indeed, "Ambition," Oscar Wilde quipped, "is the last refuge of failure."