

MATT LIPPS: Matt Lipps – Profile of the Artist

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Matt Lipps, Installation view, *Library* at Marc Selwyn Fine Art, Los Angeles.

At first glance, Matt Lipps is a photographer. Though, if you take a closer look into his exhibit *Library* at Marc Selwyn Fine Art in Los Angeles, you'll see he is as much a prop stylist and set designer. His technique involves a multi-dimensional process, from collaging and posing, to lighting and photography. He cuts out images from various publications, which in the instance of this exhibition is from a large volume of Time-Life photographs from 1970–1972. He then mounts these cutouts upright in a manner reminiscent of Peter Blake and Jann Haworth's famous contributions to pop album art. He poses his "cast" methodically, yet playfully – contrasting historical and pop figures beside one another to create a rewritten history. This allows Lipps to make commentary, giving each cutout its own personality. His piece *Print* in the exhibition, for example, poses Albert Einstein peering suspiciously from behind flowers, or *Travel*, which poses various famous landmarks such as The Great Wall and Sphinx among laborers and wealthy adventurers. Carefully collected and arranged in a jumble, these are reminders of the past attempting to construct an entire memory that has been forgotten for many years. At some point, the work becomes archival – like a factual part of history, merely reconstructed for your viewing pleasure. The background is a different color in each piece, but when examined closely, a photograph taken by the artist himself is revealed, which serves to ground the composition.

Lipps has been exhibiting this style of multi-media photography since his 2004 MFA thesis at University of California, Irvine. His past exhibitions have taken place everywhere from Los Angeles, to New York, to Athens, Greece. Throughout his career he has evolved, but with evident continuity in his work. His various renditions of collage touch upon themes of glamour, violence, elegance, and

iconoclasm. He evokes a curiosity for adventure, showing in his work a yearning to explore and experience time through the capturing of history by a lens. He can bend this experience of time by combining images of different eras with recognizable figures of historical significance. His work *HORIZON/S* from 2011 is a great example of his use of contradiction to achieve this statement. In these images, you will see ballerinas posed next to a sari-clad Indian woman, abutted next to a painting of the Virgin Mary. By experimenting with the very idea of context, Lipps's collages play with the viewer's construction of meaning. Another common sentiment of his imagery is that of oppression, in the sense that many of his works are inspired by the documentation of persecution he finds in the publications that provide his "cast." By repositioning these figures among unrelated images, the artist gives subjects a new life, honoring tragedy by offering it a second chance at existence.

Lipps takes the medium of photography, and flips the very idea of familiarity on its head, forcing us to change our perception. His new work, which now touches upon a broader historical context that the masses can sympathize with, began as a personal narrative. His work *70s* from 2004, for instance, is closely tied to the acceptance of his sexuality as a child and being affected by images of AIDS victims in the mid-1980s. It speaks about the tragedy of a radical movement in the midst of a viral epidemic. In more recent exhibitions, Lipps' work has evolved into something that a broader audience can relate to, like *Home* from 2008, which poses cutouts of Ansel Adams's National Parks photography in front of home interiors, representing the feeling of a vast and wild being contained in a disproportionate space. *Home's* images suggest that while we as human beings grow wilder, whether in the sense of being overwhelmed or untamed, the spaces we are confined to seem more constricting than ever before. These two collections, though vastly different in composition, both convey the idea of a desire for freedom and adventure while being inhibited by physical and societal restrictions. Overall, Lipps' work is a reflection of viewing contexts, revealing the meaning we assign to a history that continues to be rewritten time and time again.