

MATT LIPPS: Lipps' work holds a certain mystery to it and engages across academic and low-brow boundaries

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Matt Lipps' photographic work consistently flips traditional curatorial, photographic, and art historical traditions on their heads. His latest show at Jessica Silverman Gallery in San Francisco doesn't leave us wanting in these areas – he combines collage, sculptural, theatrical, and photographic techniques to address the medium's nebulous role in the history of, well, us.

The Populist Camera is sourced from a 1970-2 seventeen-volume set from Time/Life, Library of Photography. Included in this vast how-to manual of being a

photographer are chapters like Great Photographers, Special Problems, Frontiers of Photography, and best of all, Caring for Photographs. The irony of these titles is not lost. Lipps hacks up these books that specialize in teaching photographic techniques and specialized care of a photograph, high or low-brow, mounts the figures on cardboard, and juxtaposes them in large cases with work from his days as a student at UC Irvine, setting them as warm emotive backgrounds to a colder history. These cut-outs act as moveable characters in this strangely malleable history, and Lipps' combination between historically elevated photographs and his own work creates a new fractured form of storytelling.

His work also questions and addresses the role of photography in shaping our collective social history. The characters are seen in a dislocated context, outside of a history book or guide to being a "better" photographer, and leads us to question how these particular photographs, selected by large-scale publication companies and museums, have the objective power to represent a moment in history. Now, although this question is admittedly one of high importance, the presentation of his conglomeration of found images does not read as explicitly "photographic."

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The different techniques that Lipps utilizes in *The Populist Camera* are interesting as a whole, but lack a sort of engagement and mystery that his previous body, *HORIZON/S*, had an abundance of. Neon color schemes lighting both black and white and color images from a publication started in the 1950s, and are ultimately photographed digitally and exhibited as chromogenic prints. That body of work confronts the problem of where photography stands in an increasingly digitized moment, and where it will go in the future. Despite other

photographers confronting the same issue, Lipps' work holds a certain mystery to it and engages across academic and "low-brow" boundaries, something that more established artists' work does not necessarily have the ability to do when in the context of high-brow institutions.

Lipps' combination of different modes of image making and staging in both of his bodies of work are, however, very effective and engaging in that they work to make the viewer think, and do, to an extent, hold a sort of wonder as to what is going on in the quasi-fluorescent backgrounds that are crisp and modern, juxtaposed with "baby boomer" generation analog photographs.