



“Dashiell Manley: Time seems sometimes to stop”

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Dashiell Manley. *Time seems sometimes to stop*, 2015; installation view, Jessica Silverman Gallery, San Francisco. Courtesy of the Artist and Jessica Silverman Gallery, San Francisco.

In July 1978, New York’s Museum of Modern Art presented *Mirrors and Windows: American Photography Since 1960*. Curated by John Szarkowski, the visionary head of MoMA’s department of photography, the exhibition postulated that a photograph is either a mirror, “a romantic expression of the photographer’s sensibility as it projects itself on the things and sights of this world,” or a window “through which the exterior world is explored in all its presence and reality.”¹ Szarkowski’s somewhat tidy dichotomy was specific to photography, but it is nonetheless relevant to Dashiell Manley’s paintings and sculptures in *Time seems sometimes to stop*, which oscillate between the two metaphors. Using the idea and form of the newspaper, the artist examines how information culture can be both a window to, and a reflection of, the larger world.

Manley employs a labor-intensive process to make the large, enveloping *New York Times*-based paintings that constitute the bulk of the exhibition. For each, he transcribed in watercolor pencil the entire front page of a week-old *New York Times* onto canvas, covering the surface with pastel words that read both horizontally and vertically. Individual words and phrases are mostly illegible—the result of layering and the physical smearing that occurs as the artist’s hand traverses the canvas. The paintings are finished with a silver-tinted wash, adding a subtle reflective luster that further obscures the text. Ten of these paintings are installed just a few inches apart in the front room, effectively wallpapering the gallery with old news. As viewers, our eyes roam each canvas, seeking words or phrases that would locate them in time and geography, but the artist’s formal choices prevent a resolution.

The small sculptural objects that fill the center of the gallery likewise echo newspaper formatting, but these are less successful. They are perched on nine white pedestals with mirrored sides. They vary in size, each box made from glass, zinc, and silver. Some of their faces are either glazed, so that viewers struggle to see inside, or mirrored, so that we only see ourselves. The top of each pedestal is sized to match the broadsheet format of the *Times*—a key detail that is not immediately apparent—and the sculptures on top are intended to echo the placement of the photographs on the front page. The tension between mirror and window that makes the paintings so engrossing is lost in these confusing objects.

The exhibition resonates with photographic practices on another level as well, taking its title from an essay by the filmmaker and art critic Hollis Frampton on the serial photography of Eadweard Muybridge.² In the essay, Frampton asserts that Muybridge sought to make photographs that were more than just frozen moments in time. Manley's paintings likewise remove newspapers from the mere dichotomy of past and present, news old and new.