



Nathan Harger

Hasted Kraeutler
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Thursday, December 9 to
Saturday, January 29, 2011
Hours: Tues-Sat, 11 to 6

Nathan Harger brings together several long photographic traditions in this ambitious show at Hasted Kraeutler Gallery, the most prominent being the high-contrast extractive style epitomized by Harry Callahan. The second is the fascination with industrial, unplanned constructions and their impact on the landscape; we can think of Charles Sheeler, continuing on through the Bechers to Edward Burtynsky today.

Harger brings a third element into this mix: the ever-expanding role of digital manipulation in producing images. It is not as if Harger has a choice here -- there are few photographic images today that do not get digitized at some point. The question becomes how discreetly the digital processing is tucked in, and how

much the old-fashioned quality of standing-in-a-field with a black box and lens is retained. In this show, Harger seems to be moving the sliders back and forth a bit, searching for the proper mix of digital and traditional elements.

There are several styles of images in this show, but I refer now only to the high-contrast images that form the bulk of the work. These images are obviously digitized, the 'step-ladders' of pixels along curving lines clearly seen in the prints, and clearly embraced. Other parts of the image, however, retain older photographic qualities.

In the first image seen in the show of a large gas-tank with a spiraling staircase, the vertical lines are converging, though they are not doing so on the tank, and would not appear to be doing so to an observer in the field. It is only the camera -- tilted back to fill the frame -- that sees the tank this way. Harger has chosen to retain this perspective, even though it could easily be



adjusted in Photoshop -- and would probably have produced a 'stronger' composition. A second quirk in this picture is that Harger has retained the grayscale details in the three doorways along the staircase. It is a bit hard to see why, except as a token of the more traditional photograph at the core of the print.

Origins and intentions are ambiguous in other images as well. The images of overlapping signs, or of subdivided walls on Staten Island could be produced by traditional long-lens compression, or may just as easily have been produced at the desktop. Other images are awkward enough that they just might be straight photographs, and Harger sometimes accentuates this innate, photograph-ness with his grayscale tricks, seemingly reluctant to lose his connections to traditional ways of seeing.

Overall, Harger seems to be circling around some interesting concepts, but he doesn't seem to have quite found his subject matter yet. He will be ready when he does.