

Art in America

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

Mark Shetabi

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JEFF BAILEY Gallery
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by Kristen Chappa



Afterimage (Brontosaurus), 2010, oil on linen, 80" x 84"

Mark Shetabi's solo exhibition at Jeff Bailey's new 27th Street location in Chelsea features paintings and sculpture that activate the classic tropes of nostalgia. For *The Apparent Motion of Stationary Objects*, the artist juxtaposes genre photographs united by their Jungian pervasiveness: photographs of the earth taken from the Voyager 1 spacecraft; vintage encyclopedias; natural history catalogues. The grouping is formally unified as monochrome renderings with minor gestural marks that suggest the resilience of intentional, unified style.

Executed in sepia and inky hues to look like an aged photograph, the oil painting *Afterimage (Brontosaurus)* (2010) emphasizes temporal remove. It looks like a dream-sequence still. The dinosaur skeleton and its natural history museum setting have a murky quality as if time as a temporal remove were a clouded filter, interceding between viewers and the reconfigured bones. This image provokes questions about how these creatures remain fixed as replicas and reference book content, while our knowledge and understanding of them evolves.

The painting *Projector* (2010) depicts a carousel slide projector in use, with a beam of light emanating from the apparatus. Nearby, *Afterimage (projector)* (2010) is a representation of the same mechanism in sculptural form, made from wood, polystyrene, steel and acrylic paint. Upon close inspection, the illusion of each breaks down. Palette knife markings remain visible on *Projector*'s impastoed canvas, and the acrylic black and white surface of *Afterimage* has a thick, even clunky, treatment. Neither is an entirely convincing rendering, or even a maquette; the artist seems to suggest that these modes of nostalgic representation point elsewhere.

Considering László Moholy-Nagy's seminal 1925 treatise *Painting Photography Film* that outlined a shift toward art forms that support immateriality and motion over materiality and stasis, Shetabi's works reverse that trajectory. *Projector* incorporates the subject matter of projection back into the more traditional medium of painting. The sculpture *Afterimage* performs the same function - here, a conical beam of light is imbued with solid mass, memorialized. In both works, immaterial light is preserved and joined with its requisite material support.

Reminiscent of Tacita Dean's film *Kodak* (2006), which did homage to the discontinuation of 16mm film production, Shetabi's works deal comfortably and productively in the untimely. Whether focusing on waning analog formats or natural history museum presentations, this exhibition speaks to contemporary art's preoccupation with obsolescence and anachronism.