

THOMAS MACKER

(sign) [show] {trade}

February 9th - March 16th, 2013

Opening Reception Saturday, February 9, 6-8pm

Book launch on Saturday, March 16th, at 4pm

gallery km

2903 Santa Monica Blvd.

Santa Monica, CA 90404

www.gallerykmLA.com



Thomas Macker
La Mort et le bûcheron, Jean-Francois Millet, 1859
Type C-Print, 2012, edition 3

gallery km is very pleased to present Thomas Macker's *(sign) [show] {trade}*, an exhibition utilizing photography and sculptural objects to explore the intersection between natural ecosystems and built communities, and the way in which the impulse towards constant modification—and its resulting toxicities—obfuscates our ability to connect, while magnifying our desire for that connection. The exhibition will take place from February 9th through March 16th, with a reception for the artist on Saturday, February 9th, from 6-8pm, and precedes the publication of an artist book by Macker featuring the same series of works. The book is available for pre-order through the gallery, and there will be a book launch on Saturday, March 16th, at 5pm. This is Macker's first solo show with gallery km.

Conceptually, the exhibition is structured horizontally, with two formally similar series of photographic works bridged by photographs and sculptural objects that offer a dialogic counterpoint to the main series. The first group of photographs focuses around seed signs and sacks advertising distinct crop strains of genetically modified corn and soy. The individual sacks and signs are set up at the center of still life compositions, staged in the basement of Macker's home in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. The sacks hang from the fiberglass insulation and wooden boards of the basement ceiling, while the signs are placed in gravel on the floor. The backdrops, often constructed by hanging used textiles against the gold-painted walls of the basement, offer glimpses of American nostalgia—old quilts featuring Winnie The Pooh, The Transformers, and Disney Princesses, along with faded floral sheets, tie-dye hangings, penguins. The series is presented as a calendar of images; each photograph is named for a month of the year, with an additional one for each season. The repetition in the photographs acts as a meditation on the ways we mark time, while the content of the images posits company branding as a primary signifier of cultural and personal identity: nostalgia and desire for meaning co-opted by companies that alter the foundation of our sustenance.

In Macker's work, the 'seed'—as altered commodity—locates the collision between the idea of the natural world as something outside and other than human, and the natural world as what we are (as animals who eat food grown from seeds, eat animals who have eaten plants grown from seeds, breathe air full of oxygen created by photosynthesis, and on and on). This space of collision and contradiction is where Macker argues we reside, and the photographic and sculptural pieces that bridge the two still life series in the exhibition offer a glimpse of the effects of that lived contradiction. *Dog God | Man Camp |*

Big Piney, WY shows a coyote impaled by a pole and posed with its head up (as if howling), a scene Macker found and documented next to one of the “Man Camps” of trailers that have sprung up throughout the Gaslands of Wyoming, the Dakotas, Colorado and Iowa to house temporary gas line workers. Another shows the snow-filled landscape where Matthew Shephard was beaten and killed, the only marker of that moment of cultural mourning and instigator of progressive action now a gas company pole. Bumper stickers Macker stole from trucks in Wyoming and printed onto vintage glass tiles depict the cartoon character Calvin wearing an ‘oil fields’ hat and peeing on the word ‘Obama’, and a digitally rendered bust of a disembodied pregnant torso hangs next to a digitally rendered image of a Molotov cocktail. Reproduction, destruction, re-birth, identity, and verbal and physical languages of dominance comingle with cultural hope and yearning—a yearning that always seems to leave violence in its wake.

In the second still life series, the seed signs have been replaced by gas company signage. These signs, stolen by Macker during drives across the Gaslands, functioned as markers for the temporary roadways that crisscross the landscape where gas lines are in construction. In this series, the signs rest on top of a wooden crate instead of being placed in gravel, and the backdrop is now constructed of brown carpet. In front of the carpet, Macker has hung reproductions of 19th and 20th century artwork mythologizing woodcutters. Behind a Unit Drilling Company sign directing us towards Rig 24, we see Winslow Homer’s *The Woodcutter*, here featured on a living room wall as part of an interior design advertisement. In *Der Holzfäller*, Ferdinand Hodler, 1910, a Danger Benzene Cancer Hazard sign accompanied by a potted plant stands in front of Ferdinand Hodler’s *Der Holzfäller*. Co-opting these already-reproduced artworks, Macker highlights the historic glorification of human dominance over nature, as well as the problematic placement of the artist within this glorification, as a symbol and actor of these same problematic humanist ideals. The scenes are constructed to be visually satisfying, uncomfortable, humorous, claustrophobic, and unexpectedly personal, reflecting our continued desire to feel communal pride in our accomplishments, as well as the consequences of a system in which the structure for expansion we have created necessitates an unwillingness to recognize the fallibility or responsibility of power.

Thomas Macker received his MFA from CalArts in Photography and Media in 2011. Currently, Thomas lives in Jackson, WY, where he works as the photography department head for the arts and education nonprofit, the Art Association of Jackson Hole, where he is also a curator for the organization’s galleries. Macker also teaches photography at Central Wyoming College, and has just opened an artist-run alternative gallery space, ITP Space. As an artist/curator he has exhibited his work in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Miami and New York.