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NAC in SOHO: Colby Bird

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Colby Bird @ Fitzroy



Peering behind the frame

Pull back the curtain, peek around the side, look at what's behind the picture—what you expected?—well, no; who hangs a photograph on a coat hook with a brass drawer pull? Colby Bird does. He also hinges them together and screws shiny doorknobs onto the backsides of others. In fact, photos that hang flat on the wall are in the minority here. You might say Colby's photographs are on their way to becoming sculpture.



Hotel Window: Too much glare for head shot

The content of Colby's photos remind me that the act of looking is itself always a process of becoming, never finished, always restarting, always recreating—endless metamorphosis really. In the opening image—nearest to the entry, so also the closing, to be fair—Colby enlarged

a color negative and centered it on an expanse of blackness. What we see is a hand that is either drawing back white drapes to reveal a view of a swimming pool, or closing them to conceal it.

For me this piece became a stage setter from which motifs forked immediately. On the opposite wall a gorgeous still life verily celebrates a bright yellow box of Kodak Ready Load sheet film—precious stuff now that it's a thing of the past—atop a towel-draped table. Two large photos of windows—one in full sunlight, one viewed in the reflection of a mirror at night—stand freely on the floor.

Where this travels to—the realm of Eros—is perhaps predictable, given the potential of the gaze to be a penetrating force. Colby gives us a side-by-side pairing of surf on sand, but what do I see: a crotch.

And just to the left: another window's view of two seaside bikini-clad beauties



toweling off, framed, naturally, by vines and flowers. Bright as it may be, this section resolves on a dark note. It looks like a depiction of a void, a dull shine in lightless space, birth canal, maybe? No. I think it's actually a blurry colander; that kitchen tool used to rinse dirt and grime—those unwanted elements of the outdoors—from the food we



Down on my knees, looking at the backside of the void, with bikini babes in the background

bring inside.

And yes, yes, these apples and oranges that sit among the stairway's balusters, directing one's gaze foot-ward even as one descends into the subterranean level of the gallery; they are part of the exhibition too. I can't help myself from personifying the sculptures down here into stage actors. Is it the lighting? Yes, partially, in certain instances the shadows seem to be as much a part of the work as any tangible element. Also the linear arrangement; they look as if they're about to take a bow?

I get up close and it looks like these pieces are made of the struts, arms, and legs of chairs. All but one seems to be completed by a piece of fruit, a fertility metaphor perhaps? Maybe. The fruit would seem to offer a new view on to the theme of metamorphosis. Renewed is better. Like the artwork upstairs, its potential transformations may only be suggested—no tree is going to grow from these apples—they nevertheless blossom before the mind's eye.



From the stairwell, a good fifteen to twenty paces away