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Don't Say Goodnight

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
RIVERSIDE

Don't Say Goodnight

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

in

Visual Art

by

Ryan Mark Perez

March 2013

Thesis Committee:

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Associate Professor Brandon Lattu

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The Thesis of Ryan Mark Perez is approved:

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Committee Chairperson

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## **Chapter 1.**

### **The Coffee Table is Gone**

I thought by now I would have figured things out. I've been making art for a little over 12 years, 4 years confused, 8 years slightly less confused, and I don't think all that much has changed. To a degree, I know a little bit more about art/art history and I know how to use more tools, figuratively and literally, but for the most part, just as it was in the beginning, I'm still turned on by the sheer beauty of putting something into the world, that has never changed, just confused a bit. But, the world is a big place and there are lots of things that exist in the world. Maybe what I mean by putting something into the world, I recognize an exchange between objects and people. But, objects and people refers to a lot of things as well, maybe I just mean myself in relation to objects, and "myself" being someone who experiences objects in the world. This seems to be the way I think and approach art objects lately. I'm interested in how art objects and non art objects relate to one another and affect the lives of people, mainly myself.

Simply said, people are always coming into contact with objects, that's just the world we live in. When people are born they are placed in a crib, an object that cradles babies, a safe haven to sleep in; and yet, at a very early age, an object people already depend on. It's important to realize the impact objects have on our world. Although, I think because we are so dependent upon objects these things become too familiar, and we have a tendency to forget how integrated objects are in most of our lives.

My apartment is the most familiar place I can think of, a personal museum strewn with thrift store mishaps and craigslist dreams. In the permanent collection, we

have my Expedit bookshelf and Malm bedroom set pushing the timelessness of Ikea college furniture. Though, as blank and common as these objects may sound, I have come to realize that these are some of the most important objects in my life. Most of the furniture in my apartment has traveled from apartment to apartment over the past 7 years.

As one travels through my apartment a narrative begins to reveal itself reflecting my taste in furniture, appliances, and also what little buying power I have. But, all judgment aside, this is what my life looks like; this is my idea of home. This is a really important thing to recognize especially since these objects are going to be with me during every intimate moment I have in my home. These are things I have chosen to live with; this is the background to my movie.

At the beginning of my second year of grad school, the girlfriend I lived with for 4 years came out and said she was attracted to women and we could no longer be together. Amongst the many devastating things to come out of the end of this relationship, the most traumatizing moment was seeing the furniture I collected over the last 4 years disappear. My apartment was empty. There was a sudden shift in the familiar aesthetic that was once the place I kicked my shoes off. Where do I put my feet? The coffee table is gone.

This was a weird period for me. The forgotten invisible objects in my home became ever so prominent. I didn't realize how telling those things were until there was a kink in the machine. My daily perception of the everyday had changed by virtue of life. My apartment became a place of polar differences, the life that it once was and the life that it will become, all signified by emptiness and objects – two ideas dancing with each

other whilst generating meaning. This was the breaking point, time to get new furniture and time to make new objects.

## Chapter 2.

### From this to that and that to this

When I think about all of the objects that exist in my life it's strange to realize that most of those things come from mass industry and are made for mass culture. As a person who makes and puts objects into the world, it's daunting to recognize that this what I'm up against (industrial objects that occupy a huge part of my life and most of the world). Though, I don't really have an issue with mass culture/mass industry, in fact, I'm quite fond of it. I actually really enjoy most of the objects I own, otherwise, I wouldn't own them.

Just recently I went to Target to source out a new French press coffee maker, I guess I needed a little brain juice to get this paper flowing and it was also another excuse to further procrastinate. Upon arriving, the French press section at Target didn't really have too many options; Bodum was kind hogging all of the shelf space. But, interestingly enough, I had to choose between at least 4 different presses, all of which, essentially did the same exact thing, brew coffee. Looking at the shelf, the *Bean* was made of smooth plastic and offered three different colors: green, red, and black. It was the cheaper option, but the difference between 35.00 and 40.00 isn't going to make or break my bank, after all, this is an investment towards good mornings and chipper days. The more expensive option (40 bucks) was the *Chambord*. This classic model was shiny with a chrome plated steel frame, and it would both aesthetically remain invisible and visible amongst the rest of my kitchen appliances. This was the one I bought, the *Chambord*. Who needs colored plastic when I can see myself in my coffee press?

What I find interesting about choosing a new coffee maker isn't so much the excitement of drinking French pressed coffee, but more so about the selection process involved with trying to decide between many of the same thing. This process seems to go beyond the kind of utility suggested by owning quality made goods or well-designed products. This seems to be more about realizing aesthetic qualities that supersedes or maybe lives alongside the use of this object. I'm always thinking about how I arrived at obtaining an object, art or non-art. As someone who lives between having an interest in mass culture and art culture, I'm curious of the two, and how the differences and the similarities between the two worlds filter into my work.

On the one hand, in simple terms, the mass produced object strives to fulfill the needs of consumer culture, most of which steer towards utility, but not to be confused with absolute necessity (who needs a Ferrari Testarossa?). But, utility aside, I can't help but feel like seduction is at play when choosing between objects of sameness, this to me is about how one responds to internal feelings of aesthetic desire. I see this happening in both the mass produced object and the art object. Recognizing the differences between the two worlds, also allows me to realize the affinity in surface and sheen; something I find very attractive and drawing.

The other half of this conversation refers to my relationship to art, specifically art I make and art I look at. For the most part, my relationship to art has developed over long nights spent ogling over sculptures I couldn't walk around and surfaces I couldn't penetrate via books and the Internet. At a glance, this may seem like a problem, art should be experienced first hand; but the appeal to seductive images lured me towards the

screen and page. In no way did I see this as problem, I found it very much daunting, mysterious, and also cerebral and contemplative. This is the condition of the times we live in and a condition that should be felt out rather than denied. Therefore, I feel as though the barrier of surfaces and images generates within me a desire to make. This desire to make is also built up from a curiosity and a lack of understanding of art objects I felt aesthetically drawn to. Art objects and imaged art objects draw out this kind of desire for me.

To go back to the mass-produced object, the desire that exists within these material goods maybe more so about a desire to want rather than a desire to make; appetites perhaps. Appetites dressed in utility that seek to fulfill the longing for a Ferrari Testarossa. However, if utility is placed aside, there is a great deal of aesthetics that exists within objects as such. I feel like this kind of aesthetic desire is one that is very similar to what I also recognize in the art object.

Pinpointing these qualities in both kinds of objects helps me determine what could potentially be experienced as seductive and desirable. There are moments when I look at objects within in my home and wonder if I could potentially make an object that possesses a surface just as shiny as my Bodum French press. For most, because the mass-produced object is meant to remain within the realm of the utilitarian, and also perfected in a way that pushes its design into the familiar periphery, questioning its construction and aesthetic existence hardly ever comes into mind. Why question whether I can make this thing when industry already provides me with it?

Maybe in some ways my attention to questioning and looking at the objects that surround my life is a way of shopping for or building up a visual vocabulary that I can output back into the world. There are lots of similarly curious things that are locatable within art culture and mass culture. It's exciting to realize that these things have the ability to seduce me in a way that either forces me to stare at them repeatedly or bring it home to make coffee in. Within my work, I'm interested in generating an experience as such. I'm searching for those moments of seduction that I feel stand up to and pay tribute towards the objects I desire most.



### **Chapter 3.**

#### **Taste and Coolness**

I've spent a huge part of my life trying to figure out how to be cool, it's not an easy thing to figure out. It's hard knowing what's cool and not so cool. Coolness, growing up at least, felt more like a social endeavor. It was the gateway to scoring dates, wearing the right pants, rocking the right shoes, and ultimately forging acceptance amongst those who I thought mattered (note the bitter attitude towards my youth). I wanted to be cool so bad in Jr. high, high school, and even most of college; teenage thirst for acceptance seemed to be all that mattered at that age. I think this might be true for most people at some point in their lives. I'm curious about the desire to be cool. Furthermore, I'm interested in how that naive energetic desire transforms as one gets older and navigates through various moments of developing knowledge. But, to talk about the search for coolness may prove to be an embarrassing flight towards definitive nothingness. But, it could be an interesting venture that pokes at the affects mass culture has had on individuals who identify with objects deemed cool and of sophisticated taste.

Coolness opened up potential ideas of social dynamics and also raised a question regarding the invisible line of division amongst those who are either in or out, (whatever that container or boundary may be). Though, it's pretty outrageous to realize that one can be potentially marginalized by factors that are completely out of their control, especially when it's by a kind of marginalization that thrives on frivolous terms. Because of this, I can't help but feel that coolness and taste are both one and the same; both flourish on subjectivity and create ideas of separation amongst individuals within various social

forums. The notion of taste maybe key to understanding how one moves through what is perceived as coolness.

I used to believe that my sense of taste was determined by my collective experience of the culture I surround myself with. Though, most of the things that surround me happen to be from mass culture and mass industry. This to me presents a problem particularly because most things within mass culture happen to be accessible to everyone within that culture, (or at least a knowledgeable understanding of those things, thank the internet). We are now at a point where sophisticated taste is no longer the task of the upper class. High fashion couture is presented on Bravo and Kanye West is rapping about Hermes bags. Even Godard is now being appropriated in Target commercials and Missoni has taken up space on their shelves as well. Elitism has gone out the window and all things are cool and tasteful to everyone.

I'd like to think that in some ways the ultimate goal of taste and coolness is the continuous search for individualism amongst the pool of sameness or objects people feel they can't identify with. But, sophisticated taste and coolness can no longer be achieved by reaching for separation through esoteric objects of mass culture, those things are now too understood and co-opted by classes both high and low, (this is the history of Camp and Hip-Hop). What we need now is to go beyond the dependence and reliance of mass culture to provide these things for us. The Fonz wasn't cool because he wore a leather jacket and dressed in 50's garb, he was cool because of the attitude that paraded around Arnold's. That attitude read as mysterious, charming, uncontrollable, and desirable. Sure,

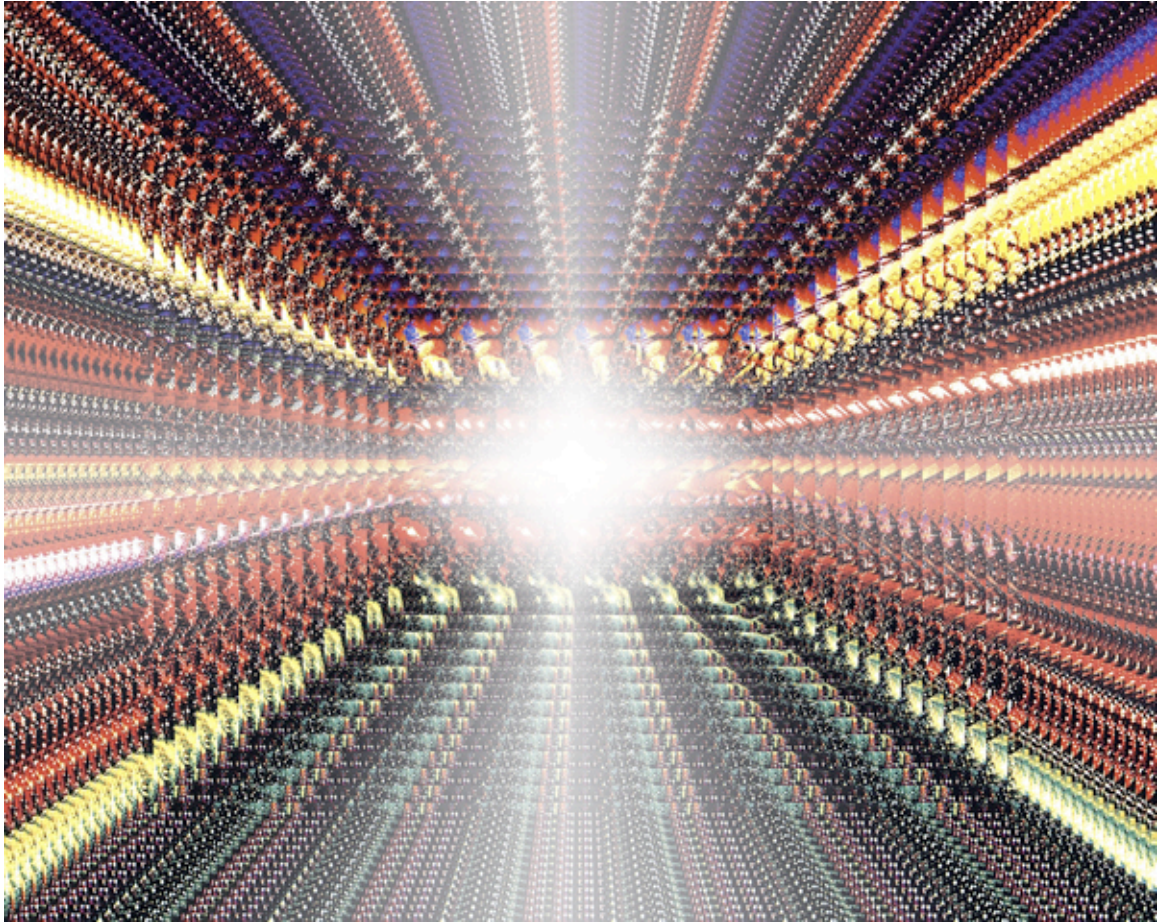
The Fonz was a part of mass culture but the phenomenon of his character proves to be one of individualism, there is only one Fonz. We need to figure out how to be Fonzie without relying on someone else to give it to

## **Slides**

*Works from 2009-2012*

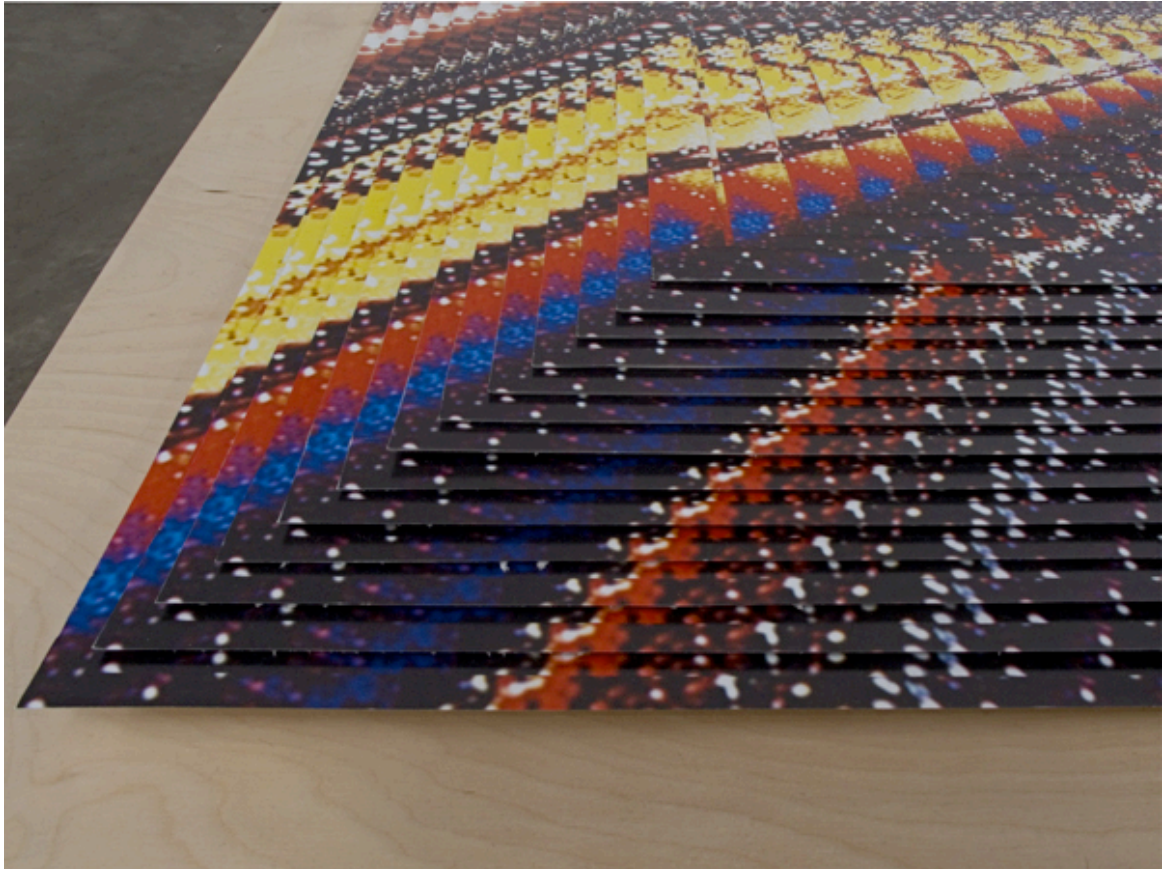


**The Wizard**, 2009  
Birch plinth, 14 sheets of mat board,  
and 14 archival photographs stacked.  
48 x 65 x 18 Inches

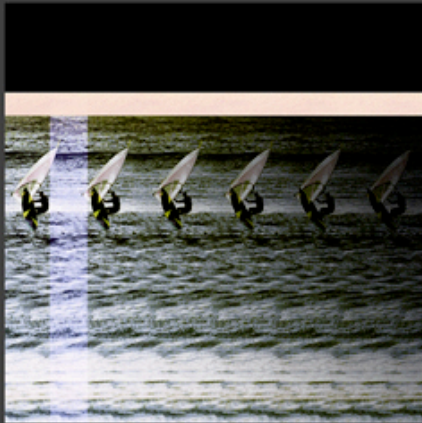


**The Wizard Detail**, 2009  
Birch plinth, 14 sheets of mat board,  
and 14 archival photographs stacked.  
48 x 65 x 18 Inches





**The Wizard Detail**, 2009  
Birch plinth, 14 sheets of mat board,  
and 14 archival photographs stacked.  
48 x 65 x 18 Inches



**Whichever way the wind blows, 2009**  
Archival photograph  
30 x 30 inches

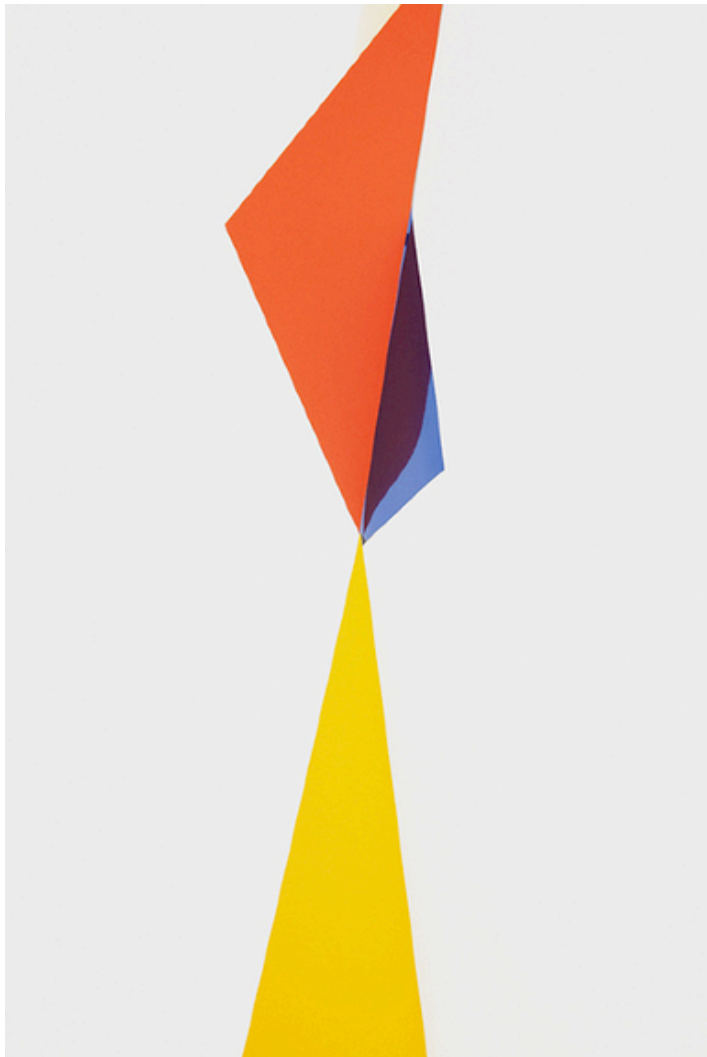




**Studio Construction, 2010**  
Archival photograph  
30 x 45 inches



**Studio Construction, 2010**  
Archival photograph  
30 x 45 inches



**Studio Construction**, 2010  
Archival photograph  
30 x 45 inches



**4 oranges arranged by taste, 2010**  
Archival photograph  
30 x 30 inches



**Smooth yazz, 2010**  
Archival photograph  
30 x 45 inches



**Escalator to nowhere, 2011**  
MDF, acrylic polyurethane,  
Industrial strapping  
75 x 30 x 24 inches per object



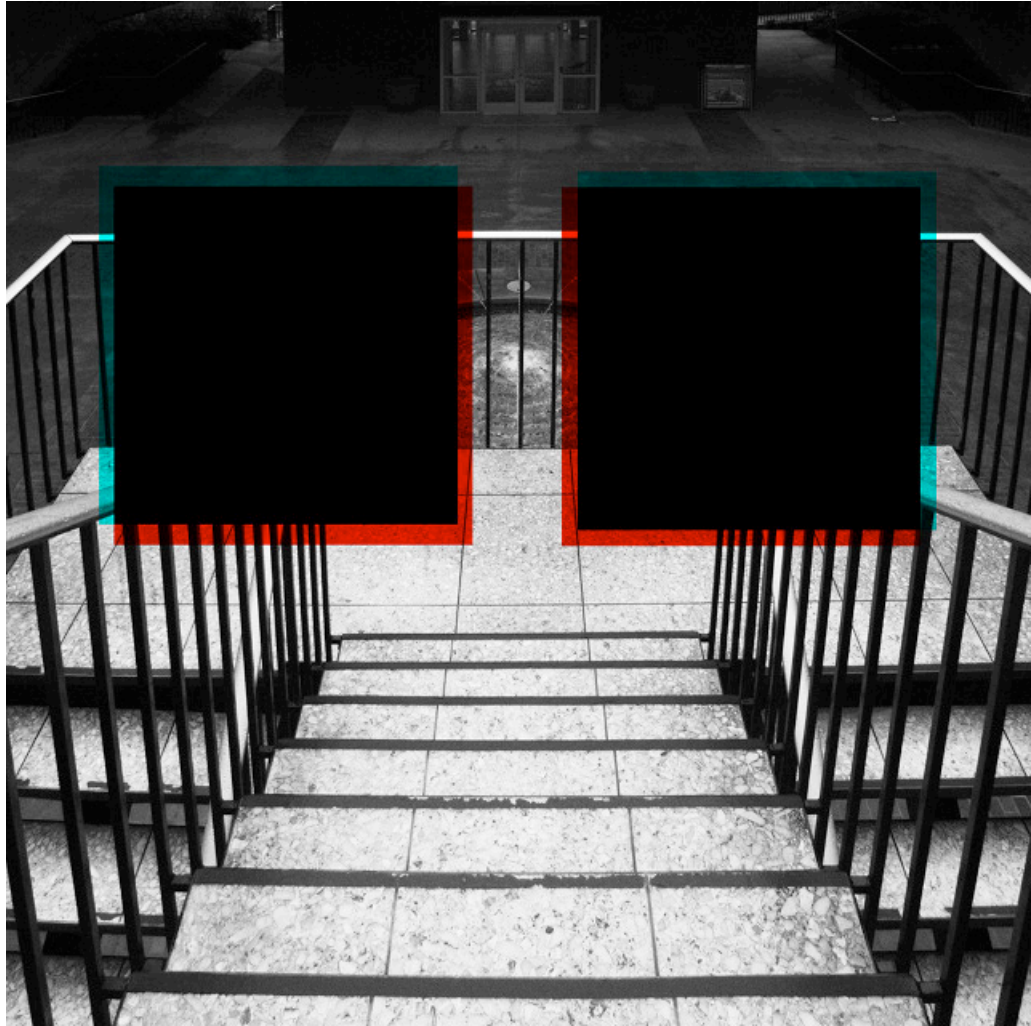


**Escalator to nowhere *Detail*, 2011**  
MDF, acrylic polyurethane,  
Industrial strapping  
75 x 30 x 24 inches per object



**Escalator to nowhere *Detail*, 2011**  
MDF, acrylic polyurethane,  
Industrial strapping  
75 x 30 x 24 inches per object





**Landing Space, 2011**  
Archival Photograph  
20 x 20 Inches



**The Layover**, 2012  
3 reliefs cast in plaster  
and cement tint.  
42 inches across each



**The Layover Detail, 2012**  
3 reliefs cast in plaster  
and cement tint.  
42 inches across each

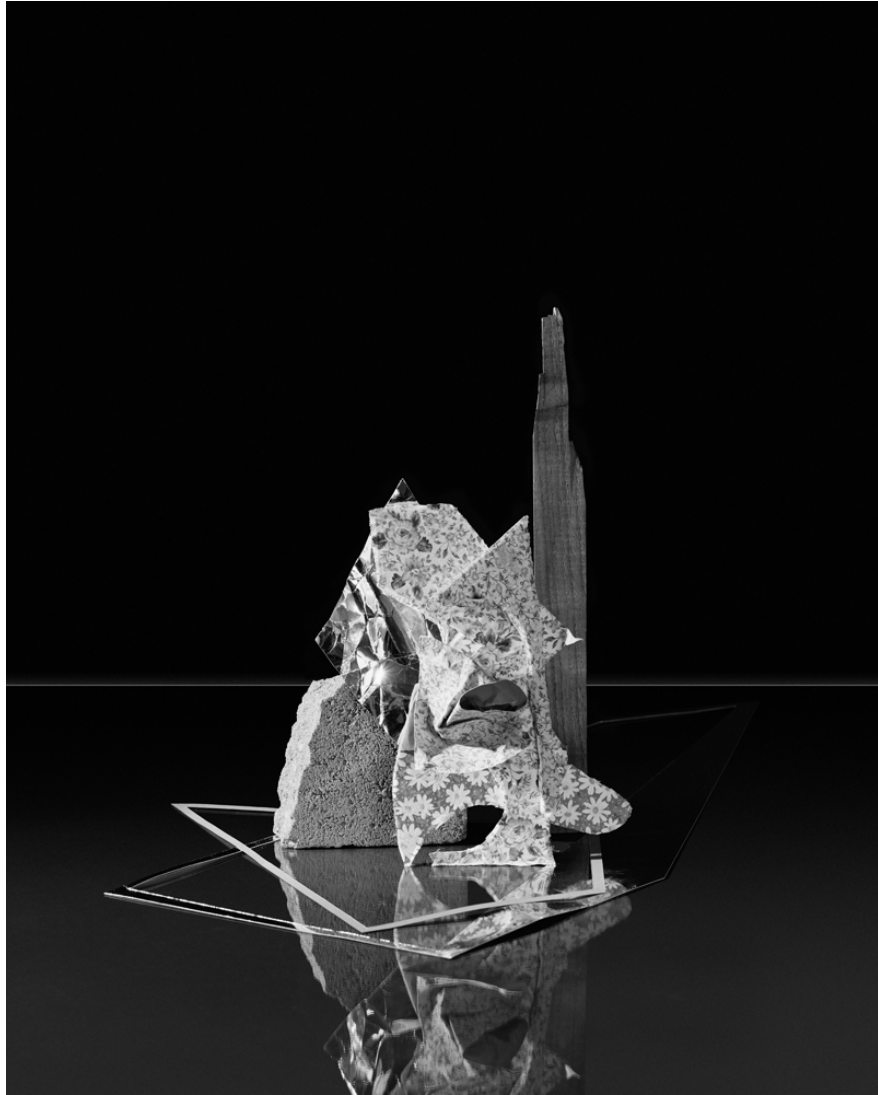




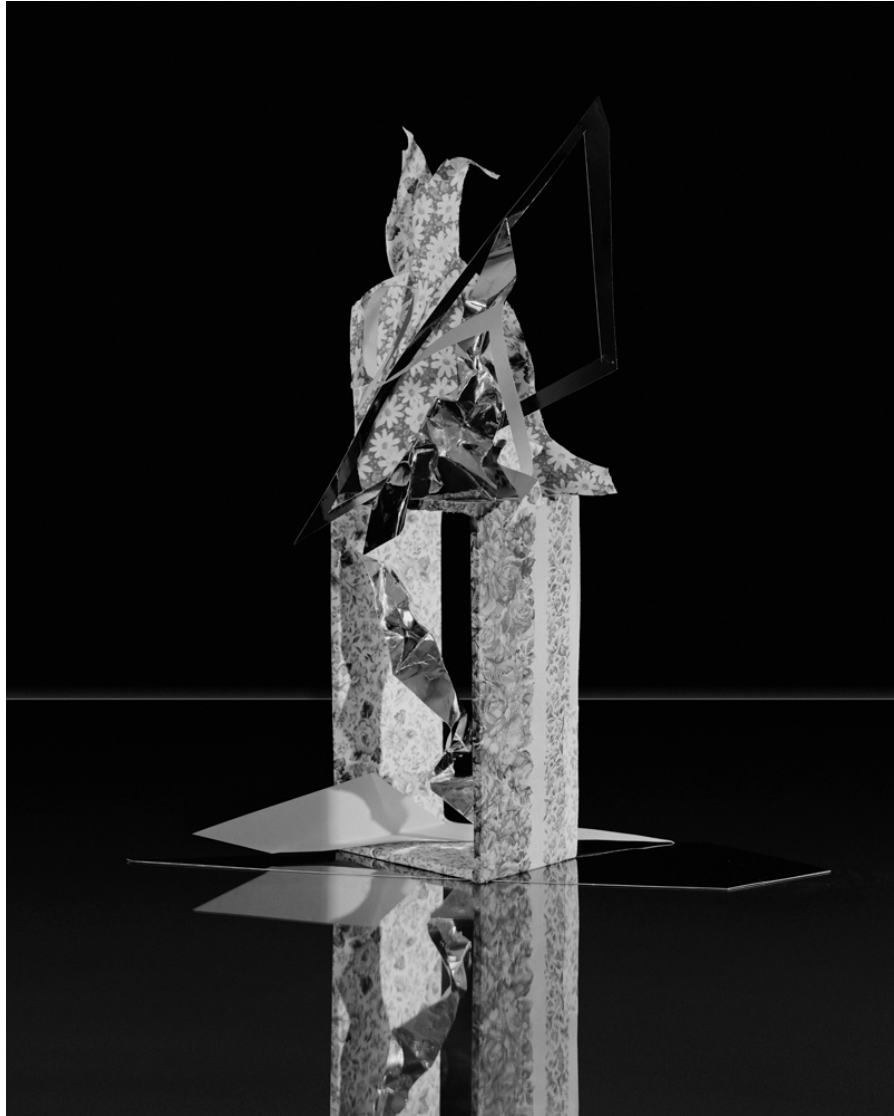
**The Layover Detail, 2012**  
3 reliefs cast in plaster  
and cement tint.  
42 inches across each



**The Layover Detail, 2012**  
3 reliefs cast in plaster  
and cement tint.  
42 inches across each



**The Santa Maria**, 2012  
Pigment Print, Walnut  
Artist Frame.  
22 x 27 Inches Framed

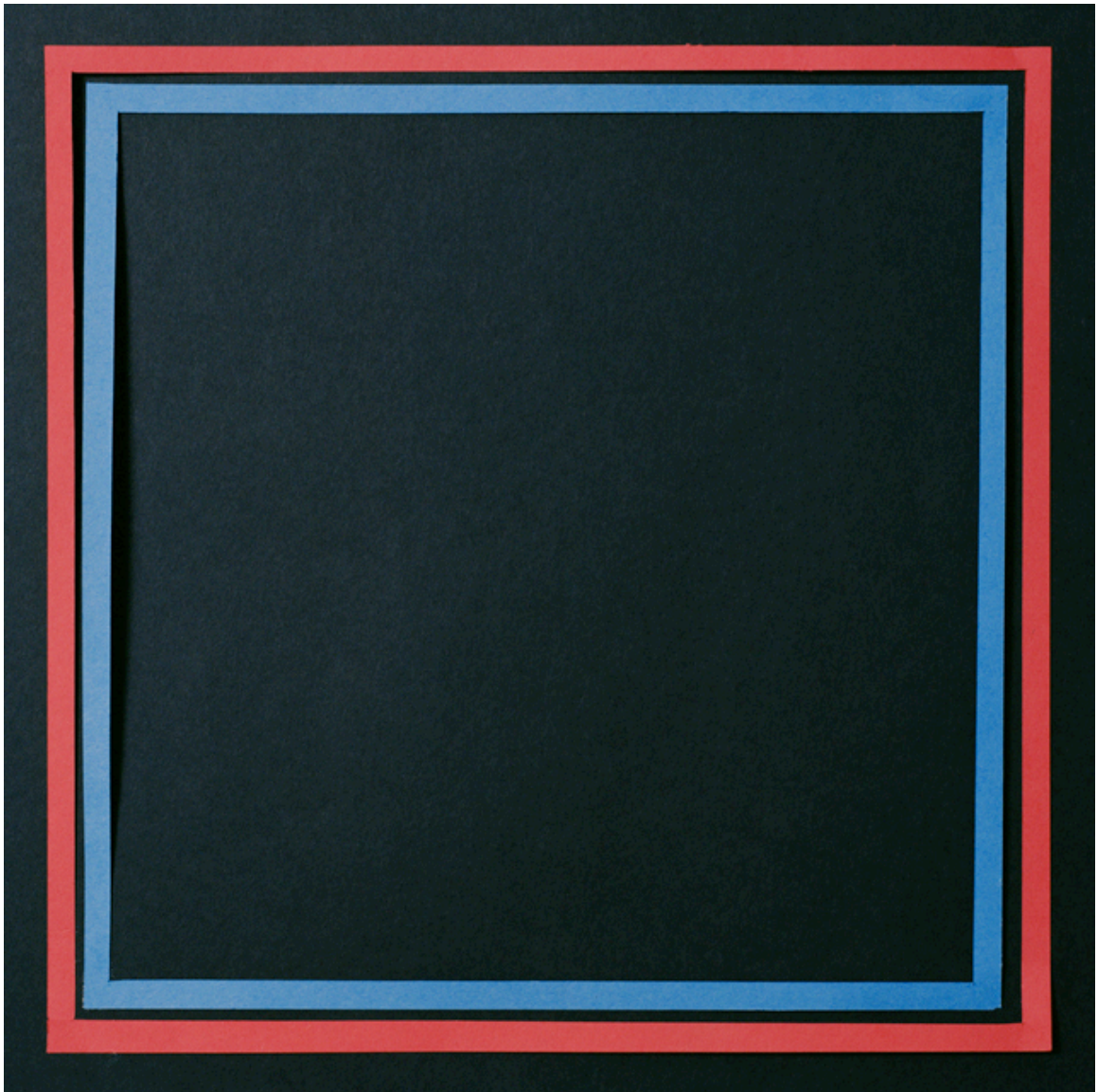


**The Pinta**, 2012  
Pigment Print, Walnut  
Artist Frame.  
22 x 27 Inches Framed



**The Nina**, 2012  
Pigment Print and walnut  
artist Frame  
22 x 27 Inches Framed





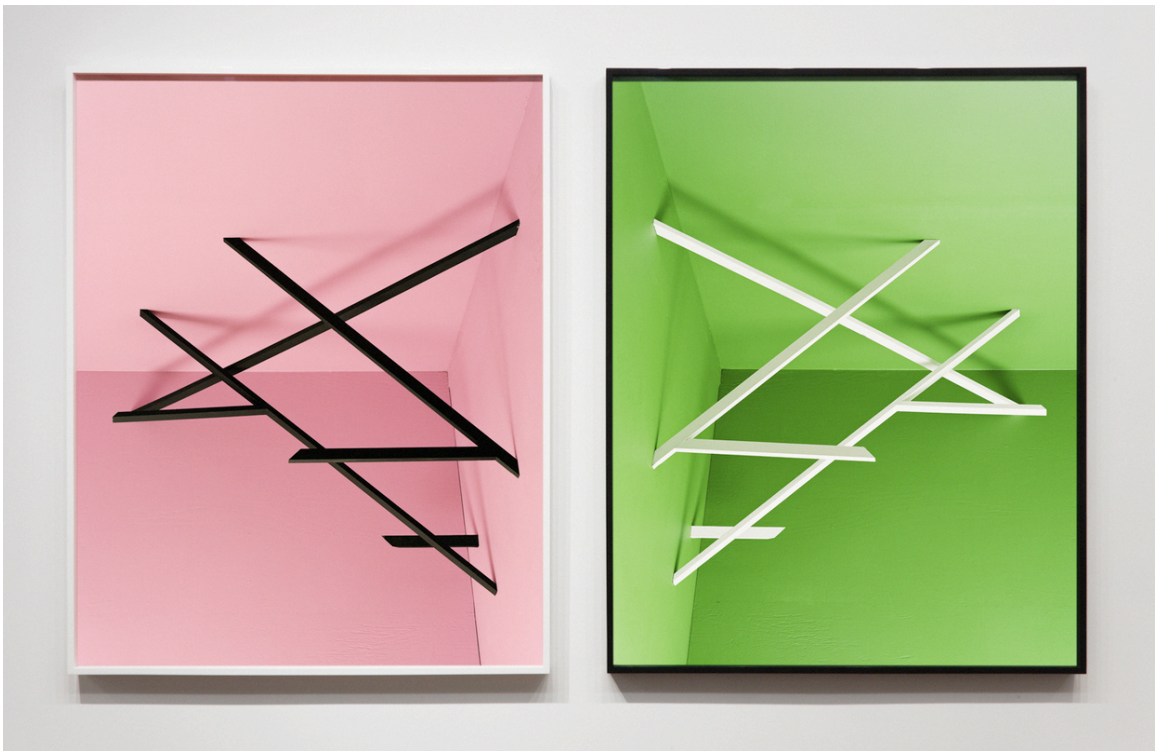
**Studio Construction, 2010**  
Archival photograph of construction  
paper.  
20 x 20 inches



**Black and White Flugruger, 2011**  
MDF artist frame, gold screws,  
enamel, acrylic, black & white  
mats, and archival photograph.  
31¼ x 76¼ x 2¾ inches per frame

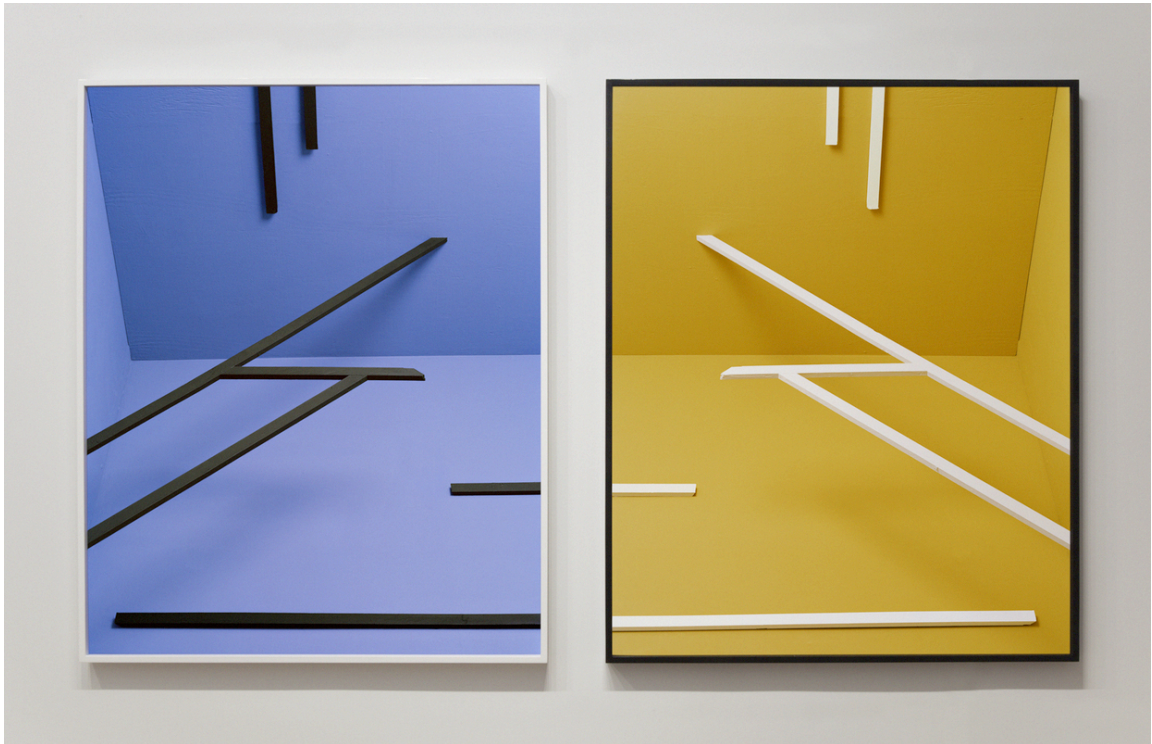


**Black and White Flugruger Detail, 2011**  
MDF artist frame, gold screws,  
enamel, acrylic, black & white  
mats, and archival photograph.  
31¼ x 76¼ x 2¾ inches per frame



**B.O.G.O. Vision** (pink & green), 2012  
Archival pigment prints and acrylic  
urethane artist frames  
40½ x 50½ inches framed each





**B.O.G.O. Vision** (purple & yellow), 2012  
Archival pigment prints and acrylic  
urethane artist frames  
40½ x 50½ inches framed each



**B.O.G.O. Vision** (orange & cyan), 2012  
Archival pigment prints and acrylic  
urethane artist frames  
40½ x 50½ inches framed each