

Eileen Quinlan

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY
36 Orchard Street
October 26–December 8

Eileen Quinlan's photographs slip between a space-drained illusionism and a shivered sort of abstraction. Her latest series of gelatin silver prints, unframed and identically sized, treat the negative as a substrate to be compromised. Some betray subtle technical lapses, their subjects blanched from overexposure or crossed by an errant hair. Others are more violently deformed, their emulsions incised with steel wool or torn from their supports. In each, Quinlan performs a physical encounter with the negative. Tactility, which implies a certain conjunction of touch and pressure, is made an issue, as if in dialogue with analog photography as an imprint of the real.

A rephotographed photograph of Saburo Murakami's 1955 performance *Laceration of Paper*, in which the artist flung himself through forty-two frames taut with paper, grounds *Sun and Stars* (all works 2013). Rehearsing Murakami's gesture, Quinlan has peeled the emulsion away from its support, which she then let tarry in a chemical bath. The excision announces itself in tulle-like folds, the original image now confined to a handful of halftone dots along the composition's edge. In lieu of an image, a velvet-black void specked with sediment, like crusted stardust, commands the photograph's center. The result is a space at once demonstrably flat (the trace of silver salts on film) and infinitely recessive, even cosmic. Nearby, *Harry Rag* finds a male friend seated in profile in front of twinned windows, his gaze casually trained on a cigarette. Space here is cinched, the window affording not an exterior view but a reflection of the sitter's own image. The photograph becomes something hermetic, unable to register more than surface effects.

Silver gelatin's dusky gray scale lends the show a melancholy mood. Yet Quinlan's lingering on an outmoded technology speaks not of nostalgia but of an acute awareness of the complexities and limitations of her chosen medium. The show's title, "Curtains," suggests both a blockage and an ending. In Quinlan's work, analog photography resolves in saturated hues at the moment of its obsolescence, its materiality made vulnerable by digital's loosening of image into data.



Eileen Quinlan, *Summer, 2013*, gelatin silver print, 25 x 20".

— Courtney Fiske