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ARTnews

Artists to Watch

The Mona Lisa Theft: Missing Pieces?

The Hidden Clyfford Still

$6.00
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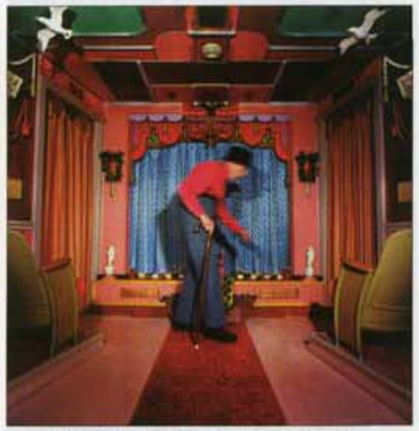
Kendall Messick

Hemphill

In this show, titled "The Projectionist," Kendall Messick presented an intimate yet realistic portrait of his friend the folk artist Gordon Brinckle. The 14 photographs and 30-minute documentary film skirt sentimentality, but Messick never lets the tenderness he feels for his subject overpower his photographer's eye.

Neighbors during Messick's childhood, the photographer and the 90-year-old Brinckle bonded when they became reacquainted as adults and embarked on a seven-year artistic collaboration that lasted until Brinckle's death, in 2007. This exhibition consisted of two contrasting series of photographs, which added up to a multifaceted narrative. The black-and-white "Upstairs" series shows the elderly Brinckle in his daily life, while the color-saturated "Downstairs" series places him in the Shalimar Theatre, a faux-vintage, nine-seat movie theater that he lovingly assembled in his basement. Messick photographed the eccentric and passionate projectionist, documented his blueprints for the theater, and helped preserve the Shalimar as a work of visionary art.

Messick's black-and-white photos are formally rich and dense with texture,



Kendall Messick, *Act I*, 2003, C-print, 19" x 19". Hemphill.

with romantic and melancholy undertones. In *Shaving* (2005), the harsh reality of living in an old man's body is rendered in stark light, without emotion. In contrast, the color prints vibrate with an artificial and burlesque esthetic: cadmium reds and acid greens compete for attention with gold brocade and satin curtains—as well as Brinckle's larger-than-life personality. In *Opening Act* (2007), Brinckle poses in the center of the stage, his jaunty confidence palpable as he is transformed by his own creation.

Messick's skill as a portraitist lies in his willingness to meld fact and fantasy. These photos exist in a realm between reality and imagination, where staged poses and theatrical color intensify authenticity rather than undermine it. —*Cara Ober*