

A keen observation of the material environment and a concomitant reflection on time's passing repeatedly surface in Will Rogan's photographs, sculptures, and videos. For the early photographic series *Public Sculpture* (2001), Rogan captured unexpected moments of strange beauty in the urban environment when things went awry: a car door opening and pinning a bicycle to an RV; a snail climbing up the side of a car; a plastic bag entangled in barbed wire; a sewer cover that was painted over and over in the street, with each repainting revealing the rotation of the cover. Rogan's recording of these kinds of chance discoveries in his environs, where chaos eclipses a natural order, typify his subtle, inquisitive style. He locates the meaning inherent in seemingly insignificant everyday situations by connecting them to larger, existential concerns relating to the nature of things in the universe, both physical and metaphysical. In effect, the accumulation of these documented moments is a way to both make sense of them and appreciate their mystery.

Many of Rogan's varied interests coalesce in *MATRIX 253*, which features motifs he has revisited in his work for over a decade. Moreover, the passage of time, subtly evoked in the sewer cover photograph, underlies many of the works in the exhibition. In *Picture the Earth spinning in space* (2014), he rephotographed his earlier color picture in black-and-white, a transformation that obscures the legibility of the image. Without the bright yellow stripes visible on the surface of the rotated sewer cover, it is difficult to discern what is out of place as the defining yellow and black street paint disappears into gray scale. *The way it is* (2004), the original, color version of the photograph, was last shown a decade ago and Rogan's revisit of it here, in his first solo museum exhibition, shifts the meaning of the image from a marker of elapsed time in the urban environment into an uncanny signpost of time's accrual in his own work.

Clocks, indices of time, have been consistent motifs in Rogan's oeuvre, appearing and reappearing in various forms. His adoption of Salvador Dali's melting clock, in particular, has emerged in recent years as a poignant symbol of the changing structural nature of time. Significantly, Rogan appropriated the iconic Dali image from a kitschy mug that sits on his desk—something he experiences everyday in his studio—rather than from a canonical art-historical text. In one sculpture, seven Dali clocks rendered in brass drape like Slinkies over the steps of a fragile ceramic staircase, which the artist fired in a pit in his backyard. Rogan made all seven of the clocks by hand, cutting them from brass sheets and then bending and inscribing them accordingly. Their shiny industrial material contrasts with the organic matter of the fired clay; yet, the rounded contours of the brass clocks endow them with a seeming softness, while the hard rectilinearity of the ceramic steps implies a false sense of strength. The preponderance of clocks on the small staircase seems an absurd excess, mocking our attempts to track and quantify time, even as it inevitably slips away.

Twenty-four (2014)—one of several mobiles that Rogan has made over the past few years—also conjures a timepiece, albeit one that is nonlinear and ordered by chance. The numbers from a clock face dangle beneath the mobile's arms, yet they rotate in an illogical manner, guided randomly by air

currents, sometimes even spinning in reverse. Rogan cut each of the numbers out of brass sheets and then painted them white on one side and black on the other, with the edges revealing the natural sheen of the metal. In *Negative* (2014), Rogan appropriates a cheap plastic film camera that *TIME Magazine* sent out to its subscribers in the 1980s. Rogan has reversed the original design and shape, transforming the camera into a negative of itself, with the letters TIME rendered in reverse—another instance of time as a shifting, illegible construct.

A sense of upended order, or of an understanding of time that looks both forward and backward, also informs Rogan's photographs of a reversed one-foot ruler made by his daughter on which the numbers run from right-to-left rather than left-to-right. The numerals on the ruler—one through twelve, again summoning those found on the face of a clock—call attention to our desire, or need, to quantify and regulate the world around us using tools with a standardized system of units. The backwards ruler, like the inverted camera, shows the glitch in the system, where a personal, subjective ordering threatens to undermine a prevailing structure and regime.

Over the last several years, Rogan has been interested in magicians, collecting old issues of the magician trade magazine *M-U-M* (an acronym for Magic-Unity-Might) and incorporating its pages into his work. He was first drawn to the journal while researching the magician Doug Henning (the focus of an earlier body of work) who gave up practicing magic to study transcendental meditation. In one series of works on paper, he erases the magicians' bodies, leaving only the object(s) they hold; in another, he covers certain parts of their bodies with triangles of black paper. Through this obscuring process, he imbues the magician, an operator of the unknown, with an even greater sense of mystery. For a new artist book, *Broken wands* (2014), made for this exhibition, Rogan reproduces obituaries published in the magazine, focusing on those that mention photography or clocks, or that commemorate magicians who died in the middle of performing an act. He sets the clippings starkly against a black ground, as if to underscore the fact of mortality.

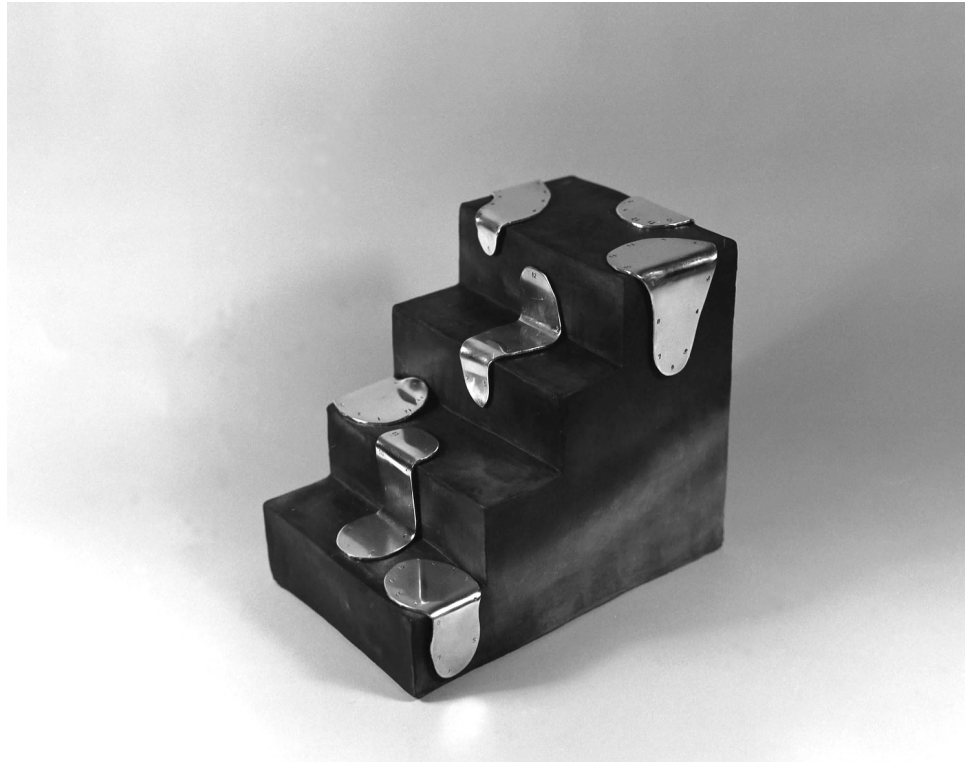
Throughout the exhibition, Rogan visualizes a series of diverse time scales as manifested in common objects, where mystery, banality, finality, and beauty are all productively and subtly entangled in one another. As a symbolic crescendo, the exhibition concludes with Rogan's video of an old white hearse exploding in extreme slow motion, perhaps a magician's attempt to subvert his own mortality. Rogan here transforms the destruction of a universal symbol of death into a transcendental imagistic effect, revealing the hidden minutiae (and magic even) in the event. "To show the death of this object in a beautiful way," the artist says, "is to suggest that beauty and tragedy are muddled, that inside everything is a kind of pragmatic operating system, and magical incomprehensible beauty."

Apsara DiQuinzio

CURATOR OF MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART AND PHYLLIS C. WATTIS MATRIX CURATOR

Will Rogan MATRIX 253 APRIL 11–JUNE 9, 2014

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY ART MUSEUM & PACIFIC FILM ARCHIVE



Biography

Will Rogan was born in 1975; he lives and works in Albany, CA. He received an M.F.A. from the University of California, Berkeley (2006), and a B.F.A. from the San Francisco Art Institute (1999), in addition to attending the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture (1998). Rogan's work has been featured in solo exhibitions at Laurel Gitlen, New York; Altman Siegel, San Francisco; Objectif Exhibitions, Antwerp; the Atlanta Contemporary Arts Center, Atlanta; Misako and Rosen, Tokyo; and Diverse Works Project Space, Houston. Selected group exhibitions include: *Reactivation: The 9th Shanghai Biennial*, Shanghai; *When Attitudes Became Form Become Attitudes: A Restoration / A Remake / A Rejuvenation / A Rebellion*, CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Art, San Francisco; *Terrain Shift*, The Lumber Room, Portland; *Fifty Years of Bay Area Art: The SECA Awards*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco (SFMOMA); *Light in Darkness*, Western Bridge, Seattle; *Walking Forward-Running Past*, Art in General, New York; and *2010 California Biennial*, Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach. He is the recipient of a Rockefeller Media Arts Fellowship (2004) and of SFMOMA's SECA Art Award (2003).

FRONT
Scout's ruler

ABOVE
Picture the Earth spinning in space

LEFT
Seven

RIGHT
Still from *Eraser*

Works in the exhibition

Broken wands
2014
Artist book
5 ¼ × 7 ½ in.

Eraser
2014
video, looped; color, silent;
5:45 mins

Negative
2014
Mixed media
3 × 5 × 4 in.

Picture the Earth spinning in space
2014
Gelatin silver print
16 × 20 in.

Scout's ruler
2013
Gelatin silver print
16 × 20 in.

Scout's ruler
2013
Gelatin silver print
20 × 24 in.

Seven
2014
Ceramic and brass
9 × 6 × 7 in.

Twenty-four
2014
Brass, paint, wood, metal
Dimensions variable

All works courtesy of the artist; Altman Siegel, San Francisco; and Laurel Gitlen, New York.

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