

ARTFORUM

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Alison Rossiter

YOSSI MILO GALLERY

Alison Rossiter,
Fuji gaslight, exact
expiration date
unknown, ca. 1920s,
processed in 2010,
gelatin silver print,
12 x 10".



Alison Rossiter's photographs—made without a camera, using expired, vintage photo paper—are a lot like paintings. She applies developer as a painter might, dipping the edge of a paper into a bath to create a slender, Barnett Newman-esque zip or letting the liquid pool into a lopsided shape that, when paired with a similar print in a diptych, yields a semisymmetrical blot. (When the developer is applied, these expired papers turn black.) Rossiter made one group, a series of tornado-like forms that fade into penumbral regions rippling with sepia and gray, by pouring the developer—an action that recalls Morris Louis, as Matthew Witkovsky noted in *Artforum* this past March. The comparison is instructive: As Clement Greenberg observed, by pouring thinned oil paint for his “Veils” in the late 1950s, Louis kept the pigment from adhering to the textile surface, thereby transforming the canvas into “paint in itself, color in itself, like a dyed cloth.” In Rossiter's pours, too, the substance of the ground transmutes; the emulsified halide crystals reduce to metallic silver. But while Greenberg could impute to Louis's “Veils” a disembodied pictorial effect, Rossiter insists we attend to her works' materials and their history.

The titles of her prints—*Fuji gaslight*, exact expiration date unknown, ca. 1920s, processed in 2010 or *Haloid Platina*, exact expiration date unknown, ca. 1915, processed in 2010—enumerate the facts of their creation with scientific specificity. “Reduction,” her recent show, took on the feel of a *Wunderkammer*, as if the works were set up for a pedagogical exercise in comparing and contrasting the different papers and the various ways in which they have aged. Hinged to archival board and floated in white frames, the papers warp and curl, exposing edges that are, in some cases, abraded and jaundiced. The prints also display differing qualities of black. In the three pieces titled *Gevaert-Gevaluxe*, exact expiration date unknown, ca. 1930s, processed in 2010, the developed regions are marked by faint, crystalline sparkles, while in the seven titled *Fuji*, exact expiration date unknown, ca. 1930s, processed in 2010, the paper reaches a deep, uninflected ebony.

The four largest works—diptychs titled *Haloid US Military*, expired July 1958, processed in 2010—are also the “youngest,” and their affiliation with cold war imaging technology seems salient. Rossiter is perhaps deliberately creating a trajectory that terminates in the military-industrial complex. Most of the papers date to before World War II, a period that witnessed the proliferation of diverse photographic materials, as manufacturers competed to serve the then relatively new practice of commercial darkroom printing. Yet this rich moment of innovation ended with the war, due in part to the consolidation of photographic industry (aided by its co-option for wartime efforts), but also to the advent of color.

Rossiter's paintinglike work is less an elegy for predigital photography, however, than a meditation on the medium's myriad historical forms and ever-shifting parameters. While she may be evoking a contraction of photographic possibility in the postwar years, it's also important to note that, in almost all of the pieces here, the “exact expiration date” of the photographic paper is “unknown.” This assertion of lasting potentiality is resonant: After all, the act of moving pixels in Photoshop is also a lot like painting.

—Lloyd Wise



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ALISON ROSSITER

Rossiter didn't need a camera to make these handsome abstractions; she used only photographic paper and a liquid developer applied to its surface. Some of her stark black-and-white pieces look like hard-edge paintings, others like charcoal drawings or spilled ink. All of the works, which are relatively small, were made with long-expired papers (some more than a hundred years old), giving Rossiter the unpredictable, imperfect results she wants. Their brown or curling edges and creamy tones warm up her chillier exercises in minimalism and provide the ideal ground for the more organic and unsettling black pours. Through Oct. 30. (Milo, 525 W. 25th St. 212-414-0370.)