

POSTED 05.02.13

Peter Holzhauer & Aaron Rothman

## Expect Everything



Peter Holzhauer, *Expect Everything*, 2006.

Peter Holzhauer, a photographer living in Los Angeles, makes sly, deceptively simple images. While most of his pictures present straightforward views of ordinary things, documentation is not their primary intent. Rather, each image, following its own visual logic, translates fragments of the visible world into a self-contained reality within the flat rectangle of the photograph. Holzhauer says his work is inspired by conceptual artists such as Dan

Graham and Robert Smithson, but the images also remain dedicated to a traditionally photographic depiction of the physical stuff of the world. As a result, they tend to hover, unsettled, between the external reality that is pictured and an internalized space — of idea, conjecture, memory.

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Holzhauer did not set out to create a specific body of work about Los Angeles, but since moving there in 2005, he has amassed a significant group of photographs of the city. His way of working is strangely suited to [the character of the place](#). The photographs resonate with David Ulin's view, in [L.A. Day/L.A. Night](#): "even after nearly two decades ... I still find the place elusive, difficult to see except in pieces that often confound my sense not just of what this city is, but of what cities are, how they grow and operate, the processes by which they are made." Each of Holzhauer's L.A. photographs conveys a very particular sense of place. The city's pieces are depicted with mystifying clarity: a graffitied tree on a street suffused in Southern California light; a billboard above a large, haphazardly modified house that declares "Expect Everything"; a Jiffy Lube glowing iconically in the night. But each image is a self-contained entity, and the fragments don't cohere into any unified or comprehensive view of the city.

Los Angeles is hard to grasp not only because it is so large and heterogeneous, but also because the city has been so heavily mythologized — as paradise or urban dystopia, or both — that it can be difficult to resolve the *idea* of L.A. with its actual presence. On my first visit I was struck by how the various versions of Los Angeles in my mind were at odds with the often shabbily mundane reality. It's not that my conceptions were wrong, necessarily; but they were not materialized, except as fragments, in the city's urban fabric. Holzhauer's photographs, balanced perfectly between the external world they depict and the self-contained world they create, catch a point of sublimation between materiality and idea. Some images explore this tension directly: a courtyard planter filled with tropical shrubs creates a sad diorama of paradise in front of a window display of idealized landscape paintings; a non-descript building with Korean signage on a particularly flat street is topped by a billboard for a luxury condo development, "The Summit." Others are more oblique: a high-rise of perfect, glass-clad towers seems to dissolve into a random, pixelated pattern; a block of ice melts on the blacktop, obscuring the difference between solid and liquid, stable and ephemeral.



Peter Holzhauer, *About*, 2009.

If there is a unifying theme to Holzhauer's Los Angeles work, it is this slipperiness between the material and the immaterial. In one particularly mundane scene, a windowless white building is flanked by a gated storefront and telephone poles and backed by other anonymous buildings at an intersection of wide streets. A sign pole bisects the building and the minivan parked out front, causing a slight rift in the city's physical continuity. On the building, in large pink letters, is the word "ABOUT." My first reaction was to understand this as a play on photographic meaning — but then my mind shifted to the other sense of the word: *approximately, nearly, somewhat like*. The image signals that what we see is almost, but not quite, what's there. These fragments of physical reality pictured with perfect clarity give us an approximation of place, which is probably as close as we'll get.

— Aaron Rothman