

‘FROM WHERE I STAND’ OPENS A WINDOW INTO ERIK BEEHN’S ELABORATE PROCESS

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From Where I Stand is a curious title for Erik Beehn’s show at Michele C. Quinn Fine Art. Curious-er and curious-er are the 24 artworks themselves. Prints seem to come into focus and fade, sharpen and dissolve, as if they were being glimpsed through a rainy window, or a foggy lens, or a filmy eye. This art is all about lush surfaces and fluid textures. It’s about the physical process of art making, and the sensual record left behind.

In the main series, “Division, Present and Refusal,” Beehn, a Las Vegas native, began by shooting the woods around Chicago on 35mm film. He tiled up the negatives to 8-by-10 inches and selected the ones he wanted. After adhering the negatives to acetate, he scanned and printed and really rolled up his sleeves. Using solvents, he dissolved the ink, let it dry, painted on the print with his own studio-made acrylics, photographed the result, printed, added varnish and more solvent, scanned and printed. The result is a photograph that functions like a drawing, its surface so rich and wet, so emollient it appears almost waxy.



Erik Beehn's 'Division'

The Ur-subject, the apparent mother ship of the series, is “Division.” Like its fellows, it’s a diptych, with a horizontal line dividing the work into two vertical panels. On the top is a graceful winter tree, symmetrical and lithe, melancholic perhaps, but exuding a kind of confident elegance. Below the line, mystery stirs. In the lower panel, the darkened ground seems at first to mirror the tree, but it’s a different landscape in reflection—a mirror that isn’t a mirror but a spectral image in which waves and drips and glazes suggest the primordial, organic power of earthiness, of life. “Division” is the only artwork drawn with graphite. In others, Beehn “draws” with solvents to transform the “Division” imagery into progressively more opaque and textured variations. In the culmination of the suite, “Refusal,” the trees have disappeared into the fog.

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Beehn's "Obstruction and Transition" series transforms materials in a different way. He begins with the same photographed negatives printed on various papers and films, and treated with solvents. Next, he cuts up the photos and assembles the pieces into tight collages. The liquidity is still there, flowing among the forms. The shapes of the elements sometimes recall the waves in Matisse cut-outs, while the compositions suggest Christopher Wool abstractions. The barest traces of landscape surface, like wood floating on the water.

From Where I Stand functions as a commentary on the transience of experience, and the literal impossibility of standing anywhere for long. The same, limited photo stock of winter trees is constant in the show, but the iterations open onto the infinite.

Erik Beehn: From Where I Stand

Through December 5, Monday-Friday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Michele C. Quinn Fine Art, 702-366-9339.