



David Fertig, *Captain Broke of the 'Shannon,'* 2012, oil on Masonite, 11½" x 8¾". Paul Thiebaud.

artistic descendant, Howard Hodgkin—make historical references by means of their titles and subject matter. But their soft focus of narrative and description evokes the vagueness of our capacity to imagine our way back to such different, distant times.

The few portraits on hand depicted some historical figures, including Napoleon and British naval commander Horatio Nelson—and some with names that seemed almost familiar, but not quite. This ambiguity sent viewers searching their own memories of early 19th-century painting to discover Fertig's possible sources. Whether or not those sources actually exist mattered less than recognizing Fertig's effort to keep painting and imagination—especially the imagining of history—intimately connected.

—Kenneth Baker

Robert Richfield

Gallery Kayafas

Boston

In the midst of rural Mexican cemeteries, and especially within the concrete columbarium vaults for cremation urns, photographer Robert Richfield discovers all manner of contradiction. Tokens of life and death, geometric shapes and organic forms, brightly hued keepsakes and monochromatic architecture, jostle visually and conceptually in his large-scale photographs. His exhibition "Perpetuidad" (Eternity) featured five multi-panel prints of the niched structures,

most ten feet wide; 13 large prints of individual shrines; and one installation in which the artist decorated his own photographs of Mexican graves with objects that have personal meaning for him.

Oaxaca-11, Oaxaca, Mexico (2012) presents a cemetery's sunlit columbarium as a six-part panorama. Each segment of the tawny facade is dotted in a grid of shadowed recesses and inscribed plaques; together, the abstract patterns of darkness and light evoke the rhythm of music notes or computer code. The ephemeral silhouette of the photographer's shadow superimposes a flash of life on this wall that bears the dead. In other panoramic pictures, a sliver of tree-dappled sky or a hint of landscape serves as a reminder of the world of living things.

Turning his attention away from the rigid concrete framework of columbaria, Richfield has recorded burial plots exploding with flowers, dolls, tin ornaments, snack food, religious figurines, family photographs, ceramic pots, painted handprints, and a variety of one-of-a-kind mementos. This "more is more" esthetic offers a challenge to death's somber anonymity. Even if sorrow lurks just beyond each picture's edge, Richfield's lens captures a space where grieving loved ones choose to celebrate life and its abundance rather than emptiness. His images translate *Ars longa, vita brevis* into unforgettable scenes in which SpongeBob presides over calla lilies, plastic bouquets, a tin wreath, and garlands of cut paper that will live on forever.

—Joanne Silver



Robert Richfield, *Oaxaca-5, Oaxaca, Mexico*, 2012, archival pigment print, 44" x 57½". Gallery Kayafas.

Victoria Sambunaris

Museum of Contemporary Photography Chicago

While road tripping across the United States over the last ten years, photographing the country's landscapes with a 5-by-7 wooden field camera, Victoria Sambunaris has accumulated an impressive array of artifacts. "Taxonomy of a Landscape" presented some 30 photographs and



Victoria Sambunaris, *Untitled (Tomato Pool, Yellowstone)*, 2008, chromogenic print, 39" x 55". Museum of Contemporary Photography.

photographic installations, one video, and a number of vitrines exhibiting these objects, or "ephemera," in the words of the artist. But the items—which include odd souvenirs such as mineral specimens, guidebooks, a handmade wire scorpion, and a note from a stranger asking her for a date—do not just complement her photographs. They keep her work from feeling detached from its subject, and contextualize her images in some personal way.

Throughout the show, the artist compressed intensive research and observation of weather and light conditions into just a few images of each site that interests her, focusing on how humans have altered the natural world. In *Untitled (Red Containers, Wet Ground, Fort Worth, Texas)*, 2000, Sambunaris captures two rows of colorful trucks and their reflections, which shimmer on the pavement. But her understated photographs never overwhelm viewers with environmental degradation, and might even seem dispassionate were they not given life by the other elements in the show, such as her vitrines, or her installation