

AARON SISKIND: A SELECTION AND ROBERT RICHFIELD: PERPETUIDAD

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On its tenth anniversary Gallery Kayafas presents vintage prints spanning Siskind's career (1939–88) and Robert Richfield's large-scale color photographs of Mexican graves. There is even one Richfield composite of real plastic flowers and Day of the Dead objects attached to a vertical photograph of three columbaria.

The two shows are in dialogue. Richfield attended RISD when Siskind ran its graduate program in the early 1970s and has carried on his mentor's tradition. Siskind's comment, "When I make a photograph, I want it to be an altogether new object, complete and self-contained, whose basic condition is order," finds affirmation in several Richfields.

Richfield also displays the technical ability of Ezra Stoller and Julius Shulman. After years of practice, he has reached an enviable sense of design that manifests itself through extremely intelligent formal choices. Possibly contrary to an anthropological and documentary intent, the strongest images in the show find their merit not in the representation of subject, but in the trans-

formation of it through scale and color. Such factors dim the literalism of gravesites, encouraging more abstract, formal or metaphorical readings of the photographs.

Tobia Bezzola writes in *The Original Copy: Photography of Sculpture, 1839 to Today* (2010), "It (the camera) can create structures that express their sculptural formal value and content in the photograph and in the photograph only." In Richfield's *Zihuatanejo-1 Guerrero, Mexico 2010*, a text on the rusted ferrule of a brush in the foreground of the image reads "5 inches." In the print the brush is reproduced at exactly life-size. Next to it are plants and pink pots in harmonious scale, but for the depths of the photograph the use of a wide-angle lens has gradually deepened space and altered scale relations elsewhere. Manipulated colors counter the optical distortion by reducing contrast, flattening objects and eliminating atmospheric perception, finally abandoning physical reality.



Robert Richfield, *Oaxaca-5 Oaxaca, Mexico*, 2012, archival pigment print, 44 x 57.5". © Robert Richfield.

Richfield's images relate to Siskind's classic *Martha's Vanguard 4*, 1950, whose formation of seven rocks is rendered as a sculptural arrangement in which scale is unknown and gravity has disappeared. Even more striking is the connection between Siskind's *Gloucester (Hand) CA*, 1941 and Richfield's *Oaxaca 9, Mexico*. Surprising

proportional relations among objects lead to metaphorical interpretations.

Richfield also shows a small, dirty, glass house with disproportionately large hinges on its door encasing Jesus and the Virgin of Guadalupe. In the foreground a doll of The Flash, from DC Comics, is frozen in a running posture, like a *commedia dell'arte* figure. Moving across the red and green sedum he seems impervious to the plight of the holy mother and her son. For a second, religion is entrapped. A superhero is the master of his world, and the glory of pop culture conquers death.

—Paola Ferrario