



CLEARING

## Marina Pinsky

Artforum, April 2014

by Beau Rutland

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# ARTFORUM

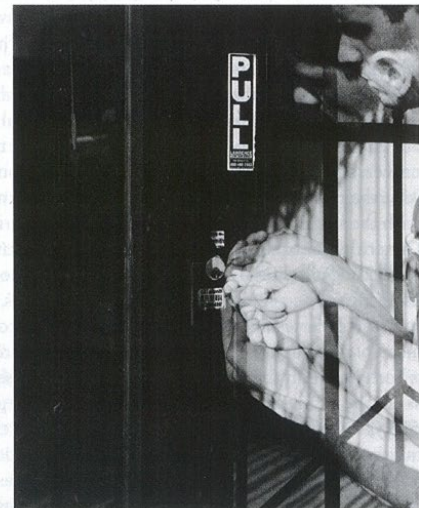


Above: Marina Pinsky, *Instruction Manual*, 2013, twelve gelatin silver prints. Installation view, *Clearing*, Brussels. Below: Three details from Marina Pinsky's *Instruction Manual*, 2013, twelve gelatin silver prints, each 9½ x 7¼".

OPENINGS

# Marina Pinsky

BEAU RUTLAND





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Marina Pinsky, *Role Model too*, 2013, inkjet print on aluminum, polyisocyanurate foam, 56 x 68 x 32".

**WHAT DO WE EXPECT OF PHOTOGRAPHY TODAY?** Should it muse on the negotiations of our screen-filled lives? Or comment on Photoshop, the software that has seemingly come to stand for the medium itself? Recent essays and exhibitions have suggested as much, yet there are other paths too—escape routes from such technological determinism, for artists looking to extricate their work from the drop-shadow corner into which they have been backed. Los Angeles-based artist Marina Pinsky has found her own way by approaching the medium untraditionally: to put it simply, as a sculptor. Even if her photographs didn't both depict their three-dimensional subjects and sometimes take up physical space themselves—

an object-image tension she harnesses to great effect—Pinsky approaches composition and production with the disposition of someone used to working in the round. This sensitivity to objecthood affirms the time she spent studying with the gleefully confounding artist Charles Ray. Paradoxically, her deft manipulation of resolutely physical materials is what fuels her investigation (whether in the studio or the darkroom, or via the computer) into the process of looking.

Pinsky's object-based inquiry can be said to stem from a set of 2014 works that employ the traditional painting trope of the still life to generative ends, providing an alluring friction behind each depicted object. Tapping into the familiarity of commercial

displays and photography, Pinsky continues to examine the ways in which we read images now, but also our desire for images to perform, a desire Pinsky's art ostensibly satiates (though rather wryly). Take, for example, the works included in "Tradewinds," her two-person exhibition with Cooper Jacoby at Clearing in Brussels this past spring, which both fulfill and negate our expectations as observers. In *Gaussian Blur II*, 2013, yards of Dutch wax print—featuring a jaunty pattern of blue monster claws in the midst of spray-painting—serve as a backdrop for a tabletop tableau of household cleaners. One can imagine this visual trigger spurring a chain reaction, invisible cogs setting the image in motion. The bottles



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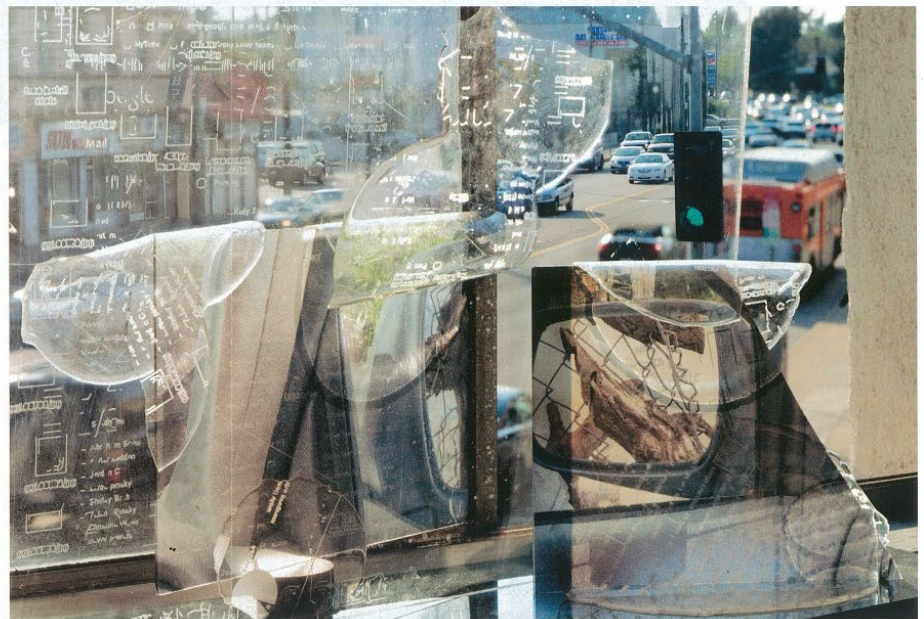
of disinfectant sit atop plastic cubes filled with condensing screen-printing ink, an analog counterpart to the work's titular Photoshop filter, which averages out frequencies to produce a digital haze. A Wind-wielding hand is seen reaching into the frame, aggressively pointing the bottle toward the viewer and seemingly spraying the work's Plexiglas glazing, thereby fulfilling the potential action embedded within the graphic fabric. This physical blur propels the scene, guiding the viewer's attention to the previously unnoticed brand labels, in turn smudged yet still recognizable. Such ease of obfuscation within photography is no surprise, yet here Pinsky elicits the ability of advertising to hide itself in plain sight, reminiscent of Jonathan Crary's likening of photography and capital as "homologous forms of social power." This intentional visual slippage places a very tiny wrench in the act of looking.

The speed with which a picture is read takes priority in Pinsky's thinking—as we see again and again throughout the artist's process, and as she herself has explained. Another work exhibited in Belgium, *Instruction Manual*, also 2013, includes twelve black-and-white photographs of a model hired to try to pick a storefront lock with his handsome hands. The photographs appear to be double exposures, heightening the filmic tension of the interpolated moments—will he succeed in time? (Each gelatin silver photograph is actually printed from two overlaid negatives, and each

evokes remarkable spatial and temporal depth due to this nonsequential analog facture.) Indeed, the prominence of the word PULL on the door within the scene serves not only as a sly reference to the work's title, but also as an acknowledgment of the physical energy embodied in many of Pinsky's photographs.

What may be Pinsky's "slowest" picture to date, an untitled work from 2013, captures the view outside the window of her Koreatown studio, cars piling up at an intersection and LA greenery in the distance. We are immediately aware of looking at something highly mediated, that overused term for the technical distance separating the viewer from the "scene" captured by the camera. Yet the work's intervening layers are analog in nature: etched Plexiglas, molded silicone, and a piece of cut glass upon which Pinsky has printed an image of a side-view mirror reflecting a chain-link fence pierced by a tree branch, to name just a few. This physical insertion of images within larger compositions, pictures *en abyme*, serves to help Pinsky better understand the way an image behaves and what other meanings it may hold, depending on the context in which it is situated. Through this accumulation and recursion of various strata, Pinsky highlights the entanglement of the many different speeds and modes of looking that our contemporary experience of seeing requires. She lets these disjunctions snarl and confuse the picture plane to productive visual ends—witness the traffic jam in

**Pinsky enacts the ways in which photographs today never just float in a digital ether (as so many platitudes would have it), but always also stubbornly manifest as material, spatial, social, and ideological things.**



Above: Marina Pinsky, *Gaussian Blur II*, 2013, ink-jet print, 29 1/2 x 23 1/2".

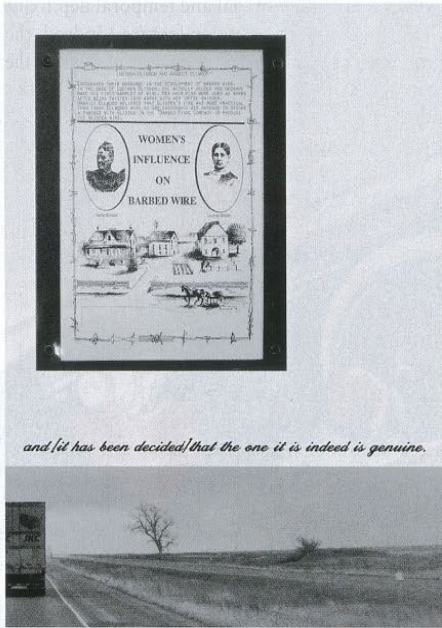
Right: Marina Pinsky, untitled, 2013, ink-jet print, 20 x 30".



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Page from Marina Pinsky's *The Road to White Columns*, 2013, photocopy on paper, closed: 11 x 8 1/2".

the photograph's far-off corner—as one more instance of allowing dimension (perhaps more than we would like) into the image.

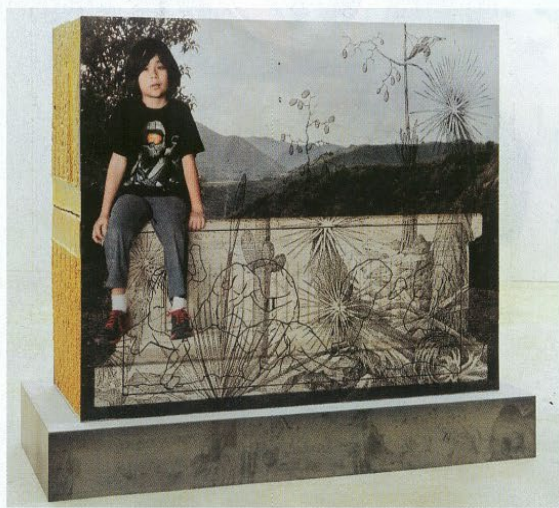
Seeking relief from weeks of studio labor during exhibition preparation, Pinsky has occasionally distracted herself with offhand projects. The zine *The Road to White Columns* mused on a cross-country road trip preceding her New York show at the venue this winter, punctuated by such highway diversions as an institution dedicated to barbed wire, the Devil's Rope Museum, in McLean, Texas. Likewise, in the months leading up to her MFA thesis exhibition, she showed "Beautiful Young Men," 2012, at Night Gallery, Los Angeles, in 2012—portraits of her fresh-faced male friends, their dress and poses paradoxically giving the works the casual appearance that commercials or niche youth sitcoms labor to achieve. Intended as a detour from official work, the project quietly ruminates on the hidden construction of images and social interactions alike.

How, then, do we expect photography to depict *people* today? What setting would appear most natural, most fitting? An appropriate answer seems to be the shoppers and anachronistic architectural kitsch that populate the Grove, LA's consumer wonderland of an outdoor mall. The vertical sculpture *Role Model I*, 2013, shows a strapping, sunglasses-clad twenty-something (a stranger to Pinsky) nonchalantly posing in front of faux Doric columns. More complex in subject and form, *Role Model too*, 2013, features two images of boys, one on either face of the work, in front of a barrier disguised as a vaguely classical wall, evocative of the sepulchre and melancholy landscape of Nicolas Poussin's *Et in Arcadia Ego*, 1638–40.

One boy furtively sucks on a fountain drink, the other exudes innocent indifference to the camera. In both images, the Santa Monica Mountains loom in the distance as overlain line drawings of native vegetation and a Herculean frieze spring from the ground up.

The appealing peculiarity of these digital composites brings various photographic idioms to mind: advertising, traditional landscape, and 1990s youth portraiture in the self-conscious if unblinking vein of Rineke Dijkstra. The images were printed on an aluminum sheet (later bent), providing a dual presentation of adolescence, perhaps the fork in the road between sociable and lonesome. These upright works mirror their upright subjects, who carry their constructed identities in plain sight: through their dress, hair, posture, and so on. As one walks around the *Role Model* sculptures, the polyisocyanurate foam typically used to insulate houses becomes visible, giving rise to speculation about architectural and photographic authenticity. Here, Pinsky enacts the ways in which photographs today never just float in a digital ether (as so many platitudes would have it), but always also stubbornly manifest as material, spatial, social, and ideological things. A work such as *Role Model too* trains the eye to more fully explore what, exactly, is presented before it, both in actuality and through inference. By homing in on the ways in which we see, Pinsky pinpoints the circuitous and physically demanding experience of visuality in the present. Her medium-unspecific approach proves that it takes someone who constantly looks in multiple directions to point us in the right one. □

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Left: Marina Pinsky, *Role Model too*, 2013, ink-jet print on aluminum, polyisocyanurate foam, 56 x 68 x 32".

Right: Marina Pinsky, *untitled*, 2011, ink-jet print, 23 1/2 x 29 1/2".

