

Petzel

Eric Miles, "John Stezaker, the Photoroman Collages, 1976-1979," *Photograph*, Jan-Feb 2018.

photograph

John Stezaker: The Voyeur: Photōroman Collages, 1976-1979

Petzel, New York City

By Eric Miles



John Stezaker, *Untitled (Photoroman)*, 1977. Courtesy Petzel Gallery

"There is something very odd, even unnerving, about cutting through a photograph," the British artist John Stezaker told the *Guardian* a few years ago, concluding, "It sometimes feels like I am cutting through flesh." Stezaker (born in 1949) has been a quiet influence on some of the key developments in the art of the last 40 years. Long fascinated with found photographs and printed material – vintage film stills, old postcards, Victorian pastorals – he has used these as source material for his richly allusive collages and appropriations.

For this elegant show of 27 works, on view through January 6, he used pictures cut from Spanish photoromans, which he began collecting in the mid-seventies. Stezaker can be included among artists as diverse as Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, Ed Ruscha, John Baldessari, Cindy Sherman, and Jeff Wall, for whom mass-produced imagery is a central point of departure for critical inquiries into the nature of representation in the "age of mechanical reproduction." His is a decidedly handmade aesthetic: using nothing more than a razor blade and photos culled from the pages

of photoromans, he creates photocollages that harken back to Surrealist interventions in the medium. Like Surrealists, Stezaker explores sexuality, though he often does so through the understated gesture of "the kiss," a key visual trope in both the photoroman narrative and in vintage film. Also like Surrealist photography, Stezaker's collages explore human attraction not as an expression of human nature, but as Rosalind Krauss famously described the phenomenon (in *L'Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism*), something "woven of fantasy and representation, [that] is fabricated."

Stezaker has an uncanny knack for disrupting our expectations of how these highly conventional images function. The difference between "montage" and "collage" is crucial here: "I've always made a distinction between collage and photomontage," he told the *Guardian*. "Montage is about producing something seamless and legible, whereas collage is about interrupting the seam and making something illegible." In removing images from their original context and "repurposing" them, his work recalls almost all of the historical avant-garde

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movements of the 20th century: Cubism, Dada, Surrealism, Pop, Situationism, Conceptualism, and postmodern appropriation. In this, his oeuvre deserves a place among the very best artists whose practice has been formed by an abiding fascination with the ways in which mass-produced images permeate even the deepest recesses of our unconscious lives.

Farrah Karapetian: Building Dwelling Thinking

Von Lintel Gallery, Los Angeles

By Leah Ollman



Farrah Karapetian, *Puzzle*, 2017. Courtesy the artist and Von Lintel Gallery

In the classic optical illusion known as the Necker cube, spatial orientation is unstable. The outlined cube can be read in two different ways, as if seen from slightly above or slightly below – or as oscillating between those mutually exclusive positions. Farrah Karapetian's photograms have often evoked a similar ambiguity through the interplay of opaque and