

Lutz, Leora, "Doubled," ART PRACTICAL, 23 June, 2015.



ART PRACTICAL



Review

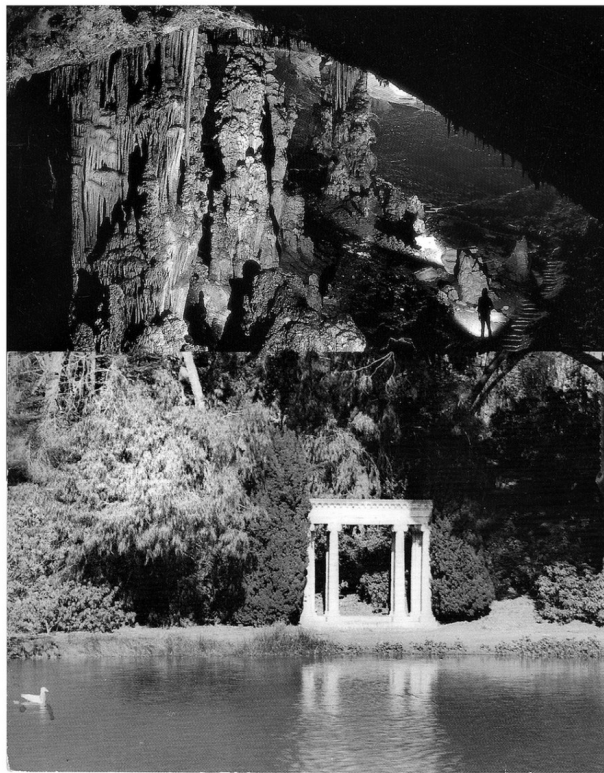
Doubled

By Leora Lutz June 23, 2015

Shaun O'Dell's second solo exhibition at Gallery 16 seems to be an incongruous flurry of the artist's thoughts that carry over from daily life and find their way into the studio—however, first impressions can be deceiving. As the title *Doubled* implies, repetition abounds: films of owls, plants in pots, large murals, a suite of sculpture, airbrushed works on paper, pairs of drawings and photo transfers on marble, a series of paintings. A complex and poetically disjointed prose essay written by O'Dell supplements the exhibition, blending personal historical references with pop culture. The fragmented personal stories in the essay create threads of information that link the pieces. O'Dell confesses in the text: "I frequently experience slippages in my perception of time and lose track of where I am in the temporal landscape. My memory feels like it was erased or severely fragmented and I have a disorienting feeling that my memories are not my own." He passes this deduction on to the viewer through doubling (not to be confused with mirroring or replicating), which political scholar Deems D. Morrione describes as "not

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merely destructive; it is also creative, as it produces a remainder"¹ in his essay "When Signifiers Collide: Doubling, Semiotic Black Holes, and the Destructive Remainder of the American Un/Real." Morrione opens the essay with an analysis of the Twin Towers as emblematic not only of architectural doubling, but also of the remaining space left behind as a result of their absence. So too can greater meaning be found in the remainders that O'Dell leaves for the viewer—the in-between space of his work, where no verbal or visual language resides.



Shaun O'Dell. portal.2.past.carls, 2015; pigment on paper; 32 x 42 in. Courtesy of Gallery 16, San Francisco.

One frequent departure point for O'Dell is the film *Vertigo* (1958), directed by Alfred Hitchcock. The film's fixation with time sends O'Dell's mind reeling with reminders of his family's past, including a trip with his son to visit the Portals of the Past in Golden Gate Park, which is referenced in *Vertigo*. The structure of the portal is a marble replica of a classical Greek portico that was relocated to the park as a memorial to the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire; it stands now in front of lush forest trees at the end of Lloyd's Lake—its double reflected in the water. Returning to Marrione, "The real and its

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stand-in are perceived to have equivalence.”² Here, the portico’s new location is a somber reminder in a bucolic utopia. O’Dell counteracts the notion of utopia in *portal.2.past.carls*, (2015), which features a photograph of the portico on the lower portion of a black-and-white print with an image of the Carlsbad Caverns superimposed above, creating heaviness where treetops and sky once were. A conceptual double of the Carlsbad Caverns with an implied reference to Plato’s cave is seen in *plato.dbl.SUNS.marble* (2015), a black-and-white photo transfer of Plato’s concealed face on white marble. Further doubling occurs with the marble slab substrate acting as a double of the portico, while an image of two suns covering Plato’s face doubles as his eyes.

The sun thread continues in another part of the gallery, where two large murals on two different walls face each other across the span of the room. Titled *The Dust* (2015) and contributed by Emily Prince, one mural features a large sun demarcated by a black background drawn in charcoal, the dust from the drawing still present on the floor. Its exact inverse is across the way and can only be read as the moon, also hovering above fallen dust. The piece conjures existentialism and mortality awareness; its temporary home in the gallery will be gone when the show closes. Adjacent is an installation of various off-white abstract papier-mâché sculptures on small shelves attached to a black wall. The relics create a cabinet of curiosities, and the material replicates tan recyclable packing materials, similar to egg cartons. The question of use-value comes to mind here, and again in another untitled piece with completely blackened pages that is “modeled” after the Oxford Encyclopedia of Greek History. It is as if history or perhaps even books are dead. If that is the case, where is one to house encyclopedic knowledge ... or furthermore, if documentation is gone, how is anyone supposed to remember anything without some kind of visual reference, be it text or objects?

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Shaun O'Dell. *Doubled*, 2015; installation view; (left) *Untitled*, 2015; mixed media, papier-mâché, pigment, methyl cellulose. (right) *4004.5x.difference*, 2015; acrylic airbrush on paper mounted to canvas mounted to panel, 43 1/2 x 60 in. Courtesy of Gallery 16, San Francisco.

O'Dell's recent area of conceptual focus draws from the book *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance* by Franco "Bifo" Berardi. Berardi's treatise on economy focuses on the dichotomous issues of growth and debt, wherein the two are forms of societal control enacted by the financial sector—particularly when agents of commerce attempt to influence the market by manipulating language. With that, Berardi proposes that poetry become a new form of political weaponry: "Poetry as the insolvency of language, as the sensuous birth of meaning and desire, as that which cannot be reduced to information and exchanged like currency."³ This insolvency, Berardi suggests, implies that language alone can be bankrupt, and that real power is in the weight of each word. In the case of O'Dell, each object is made not simply for its face value, but also for its psychological currency, the poetry of visual language.