

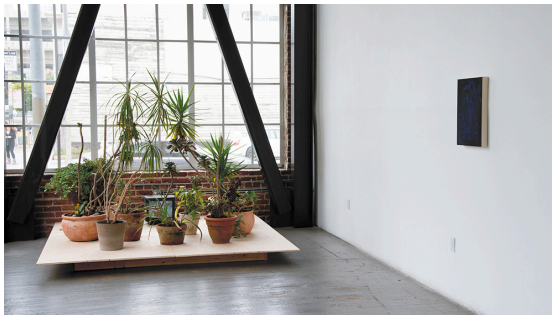
Hotchkiss, Sarah, "Shaun O'Dell Proffers Pairs and Portals at Gallery 16", KQED ARTS, 6 June 2015.

# KQED Arts

## Shaun O'Dell Proffers Pairs and Portals at Gallery 16

By **Sarah Hotchkiss**

JUNE 6, 2015



In his second solo exhibition at Gallery 16, Shaun O'Dell draws a meandering line through the past to the present, using layers, doubling and mimicry to tie together a disparate group of two-dimensional, sculptural and video works. O'Dell's sprawling source material includes the 1906 earthquake and fire, Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, pixelated images of technology components, an ancestor's portrait of Charlie Chaplin and grainy footage of a Stanford robotics experiment.

Through recurring motifs and an accompanying exhibition statement, O'Dell gathers these bits and pieces into an exhibition that enacts a type of thinking that is complicated, cyclical and iterative. This methodology rejects the linear and orderly approach, and in doing so, trades predictability for true surprise.

Over and over in *Doubled*, things are — as expected — doubled. A video shows quick cuts of two owls puffing their feathers to face unseen foes. *The Dust*, two wall drawings by Emily Prince, grace O'Dell's solo show with perfect wall-high circles of charcoal — one filled solid, the other inverted — on opposite sides of the room. And the aforementioned Chaplin portrait captures the star in a slightly shifted double exposure, his two eyes now four.



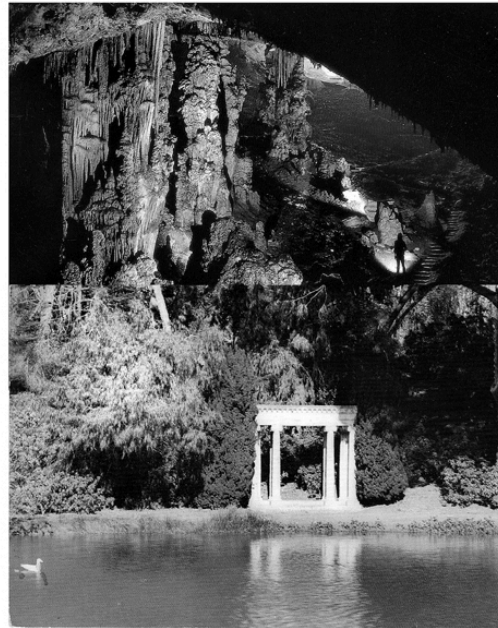
Installation view with Emily Prince, *The Dust*, 2015.  
(Courtesy of Gallery 16)

Even in the personal essay that doubles as an exhibition statement, O'Dell and Prince's family histories are positioned as parallel narratives, two story lines that ultimately converge into one family unit.

Shrouding the exhibition in a layer of mysticism is a printed image on newsprint hanging behind the gallery's desk. *Portals.2.past.carls* is split in two, the top half a photograph of Carlsbad Caverns, the lower half a view of Portals of the Past, a stone portico perched on the edge of [Lloyd Lake](#) in Golden Gate Park. Today this isolated bit of architecture functions as a memorial to those who lost their lives in 1906. Local legend holds the portico is a literal portal to the spirit world; ghostly sightings abound.

Portals of the Past figures in Hitchcock's seminal psychological thriller *Vertigo* as a place where Madeleine Elster (Kim Novak) falls into a trance. The doubling continues: In the film, "Madeleine" is actually the hired doppelgänger Judy Barton. And then there's the portrait of Carlotta Valdes, another dead ringer for Madeleine/Judy/Kim.

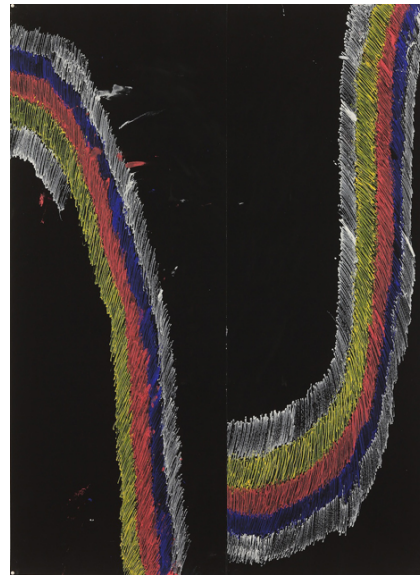
In this way, fictional and real-life history intertwine throughout *Doubled* until such classification becomes meaningless. In a real gesture of "rewriting" information, two large airbrush on paper pieces show O'Dell mimicking an underlying digital print (one an enlarged multicolored Intel chip, the other a zoomed-in view of Gallery 16 from above).



Shaun O'Dell, *Portals.2.past.carls*, 2015. (Courtesy of Gallery 16)

The "split" appears again and again in a series of nine same-sized paintings lining one wall of the exhibition. 9. *PAINTING* appears to be a continuous work on paper cut in half, with one side flipped upside down and repositioned. This and other off-kilter gestures — like the positioning of a tiny video monitor behind a forest of potted plants — make exploring *Doubled* a bit like spelunking in a cave of the unexpected.

If, according to the exhibition text, we are to come to "the realization that the present and the past are simultaneous," where does that leave the future? *Doubled* advocates for a view of time that retains such complications, allows space for meandering, unmediated experience and unabashedly mines the past for a more meaningful understanding of the present.



Shaun O'Dell, 9. *PAINTING*, 2015. (Courtesy of Gallery 16)