

Brion Nuda Rosch

DCKT Contemporary

A statement accompanying Brian Nuda Rosch's first New York exhibition trumpets the fact that turquoise, for this San Francisco-based artist, is a "symbol of escape." Yet the collages and sculptures in the exhibition left one with the sense that there must be irony, if not self-reflexivity, in this bromide. The works on view seemed intent on unraveling the semantics of the color - emphasizing that its mean and presumed affect are propped up by all manner of cultural banalities. As the press release goes on to tell us, Pantone named turquoise its "color of the Year 2010" with the claim: "Turquoise Transports Us to an Exciting, Tropical Paradise While Offering a Sense of Protection and Healing in Stressful Times."

Lavender blue and sky blue, as anthropologist Michael Taussig has argued in *What Color Is the Sacred?* (2009), are names that bring to mind a color's natural source, thereby functioning "as substitutes for what had disappeared" with the development of chemical-based pigments: a relationship with color that, in Taussig's view, allowed it to be polymorphous, even magic. The marketing of a color, then, involves the regurgitation of gentrified visions of its origins and the idealized relationships we have with them, much as supermarket tubes of factory-made margarine are adorned with pastoral scenes. Rosch, too, sketches out a material history of color, its transition from variable natural substance to entry in the Pantone color chart. In *Turquoise added* (all works 2010), he adapts a black-and-white photograph depicting "turquoise specimens rough and polished" laid out on a Navajo textile as if for sale in a bazaar, covering the samples with strips of turquoise paper, which appear like redactions from a censored document. Similarly, *Specimens of Turquoise*, another found book page, presents three black-and-white depictions of rocks. These are also covered in turquoise strips, but here the surfaces of the stones are visible, only partly obscured by the color bands.

Reference to the American West - one of the stone's principal natural sources - returns in an arrangement of five works, installed in the rear corner of the gallery, that are based on pages torn from books. Each piece features a grandiloquent, black-and-white photo of a natural landscape that might evoke "escape" in its Romantic-heroic apotheosis: Shafts of sunlight plunge through clouds above the towering angular peaks of a mountain; plumes of volcanic smoke rise from rippling ocean waters; waves break over a frothy sea. Yet Rosch pokes fun at these Ansel Adams-esque pretensions. Three rectangular excisions are cut into each page, from the topmost of which each image hangs, causing the paper to bend outward distorting the photo and emphasizing the flimsiness of the material. These holes also somewhat goofily, form faces, as the titles - *Bright Eyes*, *Smoke Eyes*, *Sunset Eyes* - indicate. The collages *Our Past Laid Out Before Us*, *Monument Positioning Itself*, and *Cut Face Rock Mask* likewise appropriate book pages, in these cases featuring black-and-white images of towering sandstone formations. But these, too, are detoured, coolly obliterated by the brown-acrylic-painted paper the artist has layered on top. Yet in a way, this procedure seems redundant: The appropriated images are already clichés, incapable of evoking the awe and grandeur they were intended to convey in their original contexts.

In contrast to the staggering vistas in the book pages were five turquoise-painted sculptures: Four featured conjoined boards bent at various angles; one, a roughly triangular length of wood positioned on a table, like a maquette. Referring to architecture, these pieces - complemented by two walls painted turquoise for the show - evoke the designed spaces in which the semantics of turquoise might be put to work. But if the affect of color (or a landscape) is already recognized as myth, to what end is its appropriation directed?

-Lloyd Wise



Our Past Laid Out Before Us, 2010, acrylic on paper on found book page, 10 5/8 x 16 1/2"

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