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PRESS



Review: Bar Code Scan, Fused Space, 2015
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Modern Painters
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SAN FRANCISCO

“Bare Code Scan”

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USING THE X-RAY as its point of departure, “Bare Code Scan” chronicles the evolution of the optical experience through technological advancement and cultural awareness. Dazzling and challenging, the exhibition may best be understood as an allegory of the old axiom: The eye sees what the mind knows.

The show opens with Barbara Hammer’s film *Sanctus*, 1990, effectively prompting viewers to consider the science of looking. Animating radiographs originally shot by Dr. James Sibley Watson, *Sanctus* follows a skeleton as it moves, drinks, and shaves. Captivating and eerie, the film exposes how technology has both deepened our understanding of the body and distanced us from it: We know that we are bones beneath skin, but we do not necessarily recognize ourselves in that image.

Cooper Jacoby’s sleek *Optimal Clot* and *Toxic Variable*, both 2015, insist on close inspection. Protruding from vinyl reproductions of X-rays sourced from their inventor, Wilhelm Röntgen, steel door handles are interrupted by clear cubes of suspended canola oil or ferrofluid, a liquid that magnetizes in the presence of a magnetic field. In conversation with X-rays, the fluid signifies the limitations of optic awareness, establish-

ing a gateway between what we see and what we cannot immediately discern.

Photographs by Lucie Stahl consider the threshold of the zoo and its partitions that enclose animals. A turtle presses its soft underbelly against glass in *Close Encounters*, while in *East of Eden* (both works 2014), a gorilla sits in a corner covering its face with its arms, expressing the emotional trait of either modesty or avoidance. Printed on aluminum, Stahl’s photographs reflect the viewers, welcoming their presence into the work and highlighting a voyeuristic gaze.

Sam Lewitt’s *Flexible Control* (*No Touch Through Me Lineament*), 2013, directs focus back onto technology’s mediation of the retinal. Etched to resemble a microchip’s circuitry, the oversize copper panel magnifies the minuscule element responsible for operating devices like smartphones and computers that command our visual attention. In this sense, Lewitt’s piece is a progression from Hammer’s and Jacoby’s ponderings: While the X-ray represents advances in our understanding of the human body, the computer chip illustrates society’s ascendant belief in technological innovation.

Challenging the mind to conceive that which the eye cannot perceive, “Bare Code Scan” ultimately reminds us that



even as technology breaks down impediments to visual cognizance, it erects new hurdles. —Francesca Sonara