

RAVELIN

“Mary Manning At Cleopatra’s” by Alec Coiro, Ravelin. 2016. <https://www.ravelinmagazine.com/posts/mary-manning-at-cleopatras/>

Mary Manning At Cleopatra’s

ART | The photographs in “Trees as Good as Anything” come in a range of styles united by Manning’s vision.

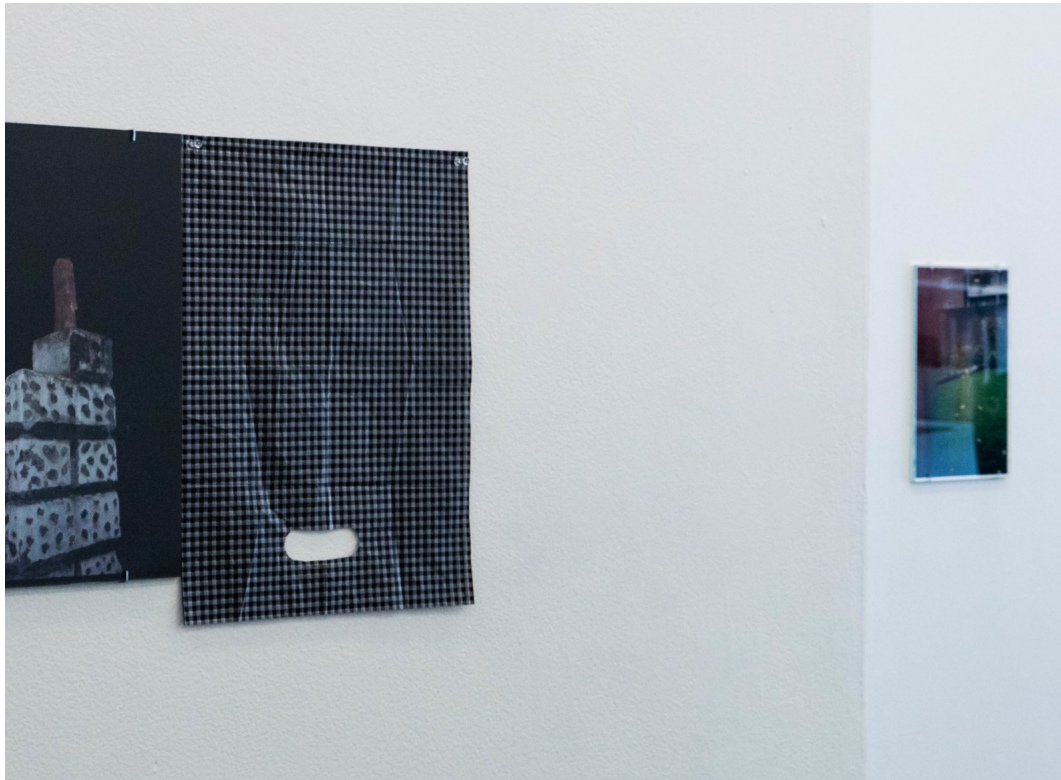


Image: Alec Coiro. Images Courtesy Of Cleopatra’s

Sometimes an artist or a gallery show wants to flatten out what counts as art by elevating unexpected things to an artistic level. The irony of this noble and democratic pursuit is that it is frequently done in a lofty and pretentious way. For every Warhol or Duchamp there is someone with an artist statement that makes extensive reference to Pierre Bourdieu. Not so for Mary Manning. There is little in her artist’s statement for those seeking a theoretical groundwork for the show. Instead, it centers around a line from a poem by Alice Notley that reads “What difference does it make? I like my poems. They’re good as rocks.” The message being that Manning’s subject matter, her photographs, and the show itself are valuable to her because she finds them valuable. And,

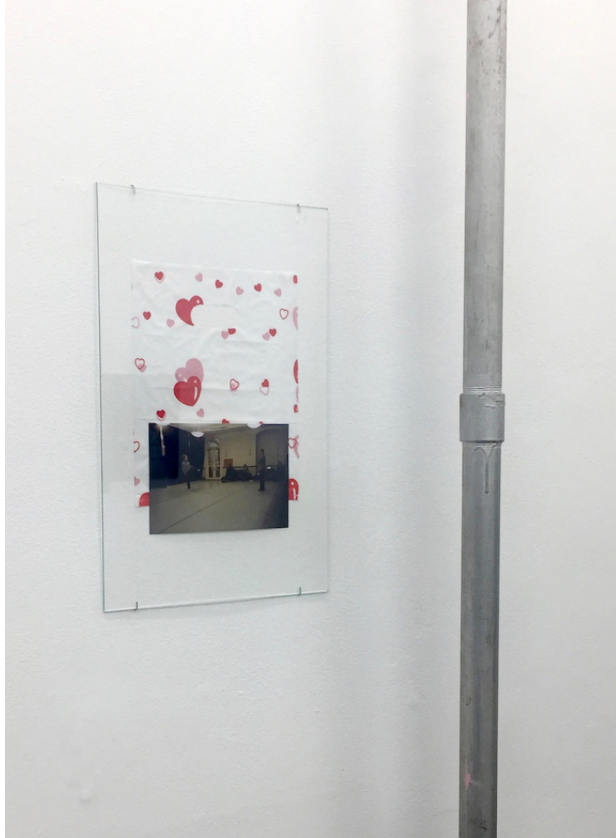


Image: Alec Coiro. Images Courtesy Of Cleopatra's

indeed, the purity of Manning's vision and her trust in that vision is what makes the show so valuable for the viewer.

Manning's placement of plastic bags side-by-side with her photographs indicates an indifference to the distinction between art and the commercial, the rarified and the consumable. But the pairings also worked on a purely aesthetic level because the bags were attractive and well-chosen, pleasing to her, and thus paired equally with her photographs — just as the rock is so paired with poem in the lines from Notley.

Manning's subject matter is often prosaic: a fruit stand, a yard, a skyline. But there is often an obstruction in the way of the subject matter or something in the foreground that gives the photograph an expressionistic flair and also asks the reader to join Manning's gaze by peering in further and examining closer to fully make out the subject. The prints are smaller than I'm accustomed to at a photo show, again asking the viewer to join

Manning for a closer look. There are also occasions when the subject matter is off in the distance at a concert or the photograph has a snapshot-like quality as is the case for her photograph of what appears to be a dance rehearsal. These photographs stood out particularly for me because they seemed the most persona, their subject matter is as much what was being photographed as it was Manning's experience being there.

It was a perfect show for Cleopatra's, a private gallery without profit motive. Both artist and gallery alike have a purity of interest in showing the viewer things that they find interesting and beautiful.