



Andrew Reyes
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They are unerringly still.

In the photo work of Andrew Reyes, it is the first quality apparent and the one that resonates most frequently, no matter the subject. We are not witnessing a drama or event, we are considering the moments between moments. Either we have just missed something or it has yet to happen. Even in an image that is literally an action captured—a dog chases its tale and appears momentarily headless—Reyes succeeds in communicating a sense of suspended time.

This quietude is amplified visually with a sedate and careful sense of composition. Even those images with the most visual clutter—a grid of ribbons festooned above name Riyas and a collaged set of teeth with pomegranates—do not disrupt their own muteness.

They luxuriate in tedium. Tedium reveals things.

Which is not to suggest Reyes' images are boring. Concise in appearance and even willfully ambiguous, they are raptly, weirdly compelling. Insistence on a low key, ordinary image forces the viewer more deeply into the apparent tedium to a point where it becomes clear that "boring" is the least characteristic of Reyes' photos. His images and the slight alterations he applies are precisely formal—not every suspended or banal moment is the same as the next—and they create a strange new emphasis. A spread of brick wall in black and white is entirely unremarkable, but a configuration of red, black, and white stripes laid across the image torque the image into a unique space that is difficult to deny. It may not explain the image—it may be denying all rationale—but the gesture feels right.

There is no image that is not banal. But there's banal and there's banal.

There is no image of Reyes' that isn't entirely ordinary. If there is a narrative within the banality, it is barely even implied—the undercarriage of a dusty car, laid on its side, might appear to suggest a post-accident moment, but the image does not feel like that. Like the rest of Reyes' images, there is a perfunctory quality, as though this moment is not only not out of the ordinary, but is as it should be. If Reyes' images seem off at first, incomprehensible, they quickly seep into the viewer with a quiet persistence and hit the right notes.

A swank approach can tart up anything.

The gestures Reyes applies to his intentionally banal imagery are almost always slight. He may borrow a graphic connotation from the world of design, but he is extremely selective. One such graphic gesture is typically enough. The word "leg" emblazoned in big red letters across an image of a dirty white apartment building reads as "ledge" and suddenly seems to suggest something dangerous. Three vertical orange lines—like wooden toothpicks—are situated in the dull image of a Corbusier-designed space in India, asymmetrically mimicking the pillars. Reyes' artistic insertion could not be more slight, yet that slightness is more than sufficient to animate the image.

Nothing happens. So much of nothing happens. To things and in space.

In the ongoing tone poem that Reyes' images collectively create, there are things and space. We consider objects bluntly reiterated to us in their original state or objects juxtaposed in simple but unexpected fashion—disembodied puppy heads against scaffolding or a giant brick hanging and counterbalanced by a quaint, dotted rock. Or else we are presented with an acute sense of space—a shadowy garbage truck plunging between palm trees or blue fluorescent bulbs jutting from the openings of a stone tower, electrifying the total darkness.

Cauliflower eye. Perceptual catheter.

Reyes is not above mocking himself as artist or the notion of artistic representation. A clump of cauliflower over his eye suggests a swelling from ingesting too much imagery. Beaten up by imagery. So badly that one needs a pseudo intravenous drip through the nose, nourishing one sensory organ while the other is badly bruised. It's a peculiar gesture to suggest that an artist can suffer from too much imagery—we would presume that it's never too much—and thus becomes funny in a manner more unsettling than hilarious.

A sun over a desert is dry and lush.

It's extremely compelling to see Reyes work through the equation of just how salacious can one make the driest (pun intended) of images. A small, quiet sun sitting above the desert sand is enhanced by the subtlest of moves—a wash of baby blue across the sky, that same blue reflected in the sand, while the sun and its reflection dot the image with bright pink.

Congratulations on your Complete Ennui.

As Fred Flintstone was fond of saying, "Droll, Wilma, very droll." When Reyes employs humor, he uses it with the same proportion of concision he applies to his imagery. What's the slightest gag that will work? Two disaffected birds are funny, if in a dark, brooding way, an existential Heckle and Jeckle. Also reminiscent of the clipped, cheeky humor of a greeting card—or, better still, the dumbly sardonic posters that festoon office cubicles—it may be most funny because Reyes is undercutting the quiet eloquence of the image.

Greeting cards distill emotions.

The dopey demeanor of a greeting card or motivational poster can be mocked for its triteness, but Reyes is not averse to recognizing their effective distillation of emotion. If anything, he is exalting it in the same proportion with which he might be seen to be criticizing it. A hokey sentiment is only so due to its abuse or overuse—within it somewhere is still an earnest sentiment.

Vegetables are good for you

Reyes multi-panelled iteration of vegetables collapses numerous of his visual ploys into a single piece. It's humorous but also unnerving. Again, Reyes' gesture is a gentle manipulation of the source imagery. In a black and white that is slightly over-exposed, everything natural and nutritious appears a little sickly and distasteful. Deformed specimens. Side show freaks. Given that the vegetables are, in fact, dead, it is perhaps unsurprising that this collection reads like a series of autopsy photographs.

Life is long. Moments are long. Tedium is long and deep.

Reyes is toying with modes of representation—sometimes coy, sometimes earnest, sometimes absurdist. He is, on the one hand, skeptical of a distinction between the visual language used in art and that encountered in other areas of popular culture. It is all, ultimately, the same pool of imagery. If he mocks the way imagery is used, he is as quick to mock the possibilities of his own artistic pretensions—recall the seemingly headless dog reaching around the smell of its own butt. To do so, to apply a wry cauliflower eye to the question of image and the categories within which we perceive them—while including your own gestures into the equation—is to demonstrate a deep and abiding faith in the perpetual resilience of the image.

John Massier
Visual Arts Curator

Andrew Reyes was born in Sydney, Australia in 1964. Recent solo exhibitions include *Posters* at the Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, and *Beigi Pigedon* at Diaz Contemporary, Toronto. Group exhibitions include *News from Nowhere* at the Susan Hobbs Gallery, Toronto and *Fair Trade* at Outpost for Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. He lives and works in Toronto.

Andrew Reyes is represented by Diaz Contemporary, Toronto.

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