

Stephen Gill's fatigue laboratory

4th of November 2016 – 28th of January 2017

Christophe Guye Galerie is proud to announce the second solo exhibition of Stephen Gill (*1971, Great Britain) at the gallery. The show will feature his celebrated series „Best before End“ and his latest work series „Energy Field“, which will be on view for the very first time. Many of Stephen Gill's photographic studies covers a different theme or preoccupation, but many were inspired by the London Borough of Hackney, and all are attempts to reflect and react to aspects of life in this diverse and ever-changing area of east London. The first photographs he made in Hackney are largely descriptive and literal, and represent a process of him getting to grips with the breadth of his interests in the Borough.

The images in these two series began life in East London as recordings onto colour negative film. They then went through a process of transformation which aimed to preserve something of their intense and emotional character, even as the colour coatings and emulsions making up their physical form were completely altered. The colour negative film was part-processed in energy drink, softening the film emulsion and causing image shifts and disruptions to take place. This is how the series “Best Before End” came into being. For the second part of the series the softened film was manipulated manually, the layers of emulsion being stretched, moved, torn and distorted, before further shifts were added with a soft brush while the emulsion was still pliable. The individual negatives dried for up to three years before being re-photographed, at which point a single master print and one proof print were made before the original negative was set in resin. These works now form his latest series „Energy Field”.

“Nobody has made a better record of the energy field of this provocative place than the photographer Stephen Gill. Stephen reveals himself, through his modest determination, his stalking and circling of the subject, as a major documentarist, responder, playful conceptualist and dazzling visual poet. More than any other bounty hunter of the margins, this man has recognised the obligation to collaborate with chaos, to make art from difficulty, to mix forensic science (the microscope, the high-resolution medical camera) with river mud, bugs, stones, and ribbons. Gill has become the absolute master of cultural superimposition: the mundane with the lyrical seizure, ordinary folk going about their business alongside floral explosions, ants crawling across unexposed film. ‘Best Before End’, is a Stephen Gill apotheosis. It is hard to discuss these painterly prints without returning to the metaphor of alchemy - which has always been a part of London's occulted history, from the Elizabethan magus John Dee to the libertarian filmmaker Derek Jarman. Alchemy, the serious practitioners understood, is about process, repetition, going through the same rituals, time after time, to achieve the golden light within your own consciousness. It was never about the vulgar metamorphosis of dirt into gold. It was about understanding how we must keep on, following our blind instincts, refining our craft, until the craft refines us, burning off everything unnecessary and false. Gill's brilliant intuition here is to involve toxic energy drinks, Hackney's junk Viagra of the supermarkets, as an active agent in the process of layering an image. Territorial descriptions, low key by intention, records of persons and places, are developed and then finessed in a bath of fizzing sugars. The cellular damage is spectacular. The large prints are the fulfilment of Gill's alchemical marriage between photography and painting, local particulars and corporate marketing. I think they are among the finest things Stephen has done. The crowning glory of an astonishing and perhaps definitive account of the argument between artist and place.”– Iain Sinclair

“‘Best Before End’ is at once a stairway to heaven and a descent into hell. It nearly was the end of Stephen but luckily for us produced one of the most lucid responses to being alive in the history of photography. Will Self in his introduction to the book of this work states that ‘The Best Before End series memorialises the freewheeling decline of the west’. I would go further and say the end of mankind is quantified and measured in these pictures. Death is shown to be the only viable strategy for separating matter from its subject. The most sensual of dances emerges as the final sleep speeds towards us. One day I sat down with Stephen to witness the cooking of the images in the different energy drinks. The process was extraordinary as the amphetamine like juices of our cultural wasteland became part of the history of alchemy. Stephen coughed a lot I coughed and felt nauseous. Through an effort of the will Stephen finished the series as his body was breaking. Of course he ended up in hospital. This was his last work made in London. New horizons of a redemptive nature are now his favoured habitat and laboratories. Even in this new environment his forensic analysis of the metropolitan dilemma continues apace.” – Timothy Prus