

John Opera
Equivalent Simulation

The cyanotype (and subsequently, the history of photography and the photographic image) would not exist without the discovery of the chemical reactions inherent to its process. It is human-made, but born directly out of experiments requiring the natural world.

With his new series of cyanotype experiments, John Opera continues to investigate this antiquated but essential process. *Equivalent Simulation*, evoking the Baudrillardian notion of the simulacrum being a separate, sovereign truth rather than a surrogate of the original, extends the indexicality of the photographic image and its subject, in terms of possibility of meaning, significance, and truthfulness. Opera is eminently aware of the world he is in and how photography simulates it. Photography may be a transfer of the real but what does this mean when the real is already infinitely reproduced? In this exhibition, John Opera presents four new series of cyanotypes that continue to investigate these concerns.

Directly referencing Alfred Stieglitz's photographs of sky and clouds, considered the first conscious attempt at representing an abstract subject in photography, the artist has created his own distinct series of *Equivalents*. Stieglitz initiated photography's departure from recognizable form and its relationship to literal meaning and content. In Opera's cyanotypes, content is further disconnected from its recognizable subjects. The abstracted imagery of a virtual sky-space is literally framed by another cyanotype of abstract images of ink. This image frames the central images, further extending the artist's interest in fluidity and flow in the natural world. The two opposing elements of 'window' and 'frame' create a hybrid between object and image where the viewer is caught up in negotiating both pictorial space and the illusionistic mechanisms used to achieve that space.

Opera's *Sun/Sky* works were made with a homemade telescopic pinhole lens that forms an image without the use of a glass lens. The oldest form of optical imaging, predating the invention of photography, these sun photos were made over the course of several months on the artist's porch. They are simple documentations of the natural world that offer something both sublime and foreboding.

Opera has also created images of window blinds that have been bent and damaged, seemingly by exposure to heat. The images are situated in *media res*; something destabilizing has occurred. Although the *Blinds* series is the most overtly related to the human-constructed world, it is also the most reverent of the natural world, nodding to entropic forces, perhaps even ecological crisis.

Finally, the artist has reconstructed the frames of his *Equivalents* series as sculptural cyanotypes that insert themselves into the preexisting architecture of the gallery space.

Working in a similar manner to Cliché verre, the Beams are made from photographic hand painted negatives of ink on Mylar. The resulting images reference water and fluidity, subject matter that has appeared frequently in the artist's work in recent years. Presenting the beams as objects in themselves and separating them from the images they also frame, the artist disrupts the pictorial space of the 'window,' calling into question what is real and what is symbolic.