

## Evan Lee: New Illusions

CLARK & FARIA, TORONTO MAY 19 TO JUN 20 2010

by RICHARD RHODES



Evan Lee *Forest Fire, Kwoiek, BC (I)*, after BCFS Aerial Photo 2009 Courtesy the artist and Clark & Faria

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The Vancouver artist [Evan Lee](#) pushes ever further into uncharted zones of post-photography in his latest show at Toronto's [Clark & Faria](#). In the past few years Lee has given his audiences spooky portraits of ginseng roots that stray into suggestive realms of hybrid figuration while paying retrospective homage to the 19th century science and design photo studies of [William Henry Fox Talbot](#) and [Karl Blossfeldt](#). With his [Dollar Store Still Lives](#), Lee stood a flatbed scanner on its side and turned it into the equivalent of a large-format camera to generate tasty, atmospheric still-life images that had the timeless daylight quietude of [Jean-Siméon Chardin](#) paintings. For the artist, it's a post-photographic world where the pre-photographic is very much alive.

In the new show, Lee prints his images on the wrong (unreceptive) side of darkroom photographic paper. Instead of staying put and rendering the usual photographic realism captured by the camera lens, the pigments sit on the paper's surface like so much pre-mixed paint. Lee then pushes the pigment around with brushes to activate shapes with residual textural marks or blur outlines and subjects into a state of near painterly abstraction. Aside from a noirish reclining image of a woman on a bed that looks at first glance like an Edward Hopper, the subjects are forest-fire landscapes and flash-lit web erotica, subjects that communicate as working metaphors for the newly "hot" or "visceral" surfaces that the process allows. The images are made permanent with an acrylic medium that serves like old-fashioned fixative.



Evan Lee From the *Flashers* series 2009 Courtesy the artist and Clark & Faria

The overlap with painting in the new show piggybacks on painting's newly revived popularity. Lee's images are as close to paintings as photographic works are likely to get anytime soon. At the same time, however, the images cling fast to core concerns of contemporary photography, concerns that hover over the reality basis of photographic imagery and its alienating gaze, and concerns that have been part of the photography equation in contemporary art since the 1960s. The constructed, stage-managed, hyper-articulated photographs of the past few decades spoke to the cinematic mediation of experience in contemporary culture, a critique that painting answers with its immediacies of first-hand engagement and objectified delivery. Lee knows this and duplicates the look to give his photos a sly doubleness that plays to new levels of illusion in photography as well to as a new insistence of the inherent contingency of photographic images.

To walk with Evan Lee—trained eyes into the adjoining room of large-scale nomadic hobo images by Justine Kurland is to see not romantic documentary images of cross-generational itinerants, but rather images waiting for their own opportunity to be misprinted and reshaped by sensitive, aesthetic brushwork. Kurland images become Lee images in waiting. The net effect is to feel photography poised on a reinvention in an expanded field of engagement. It is a field that shows an increasingly refined appreciation of both photography's pervasive impact as well as its inherent and absolute limitations.

- [www.clarkandfaria.com](http://www.clarkandfaria.com)



Evan Lee *Figure and Bedspread* 2009 Courtesy the artist and Clark & Faria

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In his exhibition "Drawn from Memory," Evan Lee, in a departure from his forays into photographic experiments and still life, takes up subject matter drawn from the everyday. Whereas his previous work often played with double meanings in a somewhat surreal, paranoid-critical way, here Lee favours a direct representation of his subjects.

### **Kristine Moran: The Marsh, The Maze**

In her first Toronto solo show since completing an MFA at Hunter College, Kristine Moran presents several bold new paintings. As critic Carol-Ann M. Ryan reports, Moran successfully captures allure, sensuality and looming danger, among other elements.

### **Greg Girard: Pacific Strangelove**

In Greg Girard's new show, the China-based photographer presents images from more than 20 US military bases and communities in the Asia-Pacific region. These couple Cold War aircraft and banal suburban developments with an absurdist view of empire.