Speers Mears, Emily. "Motion Detector," *V Magazine*, Winter 2007, p 72

image

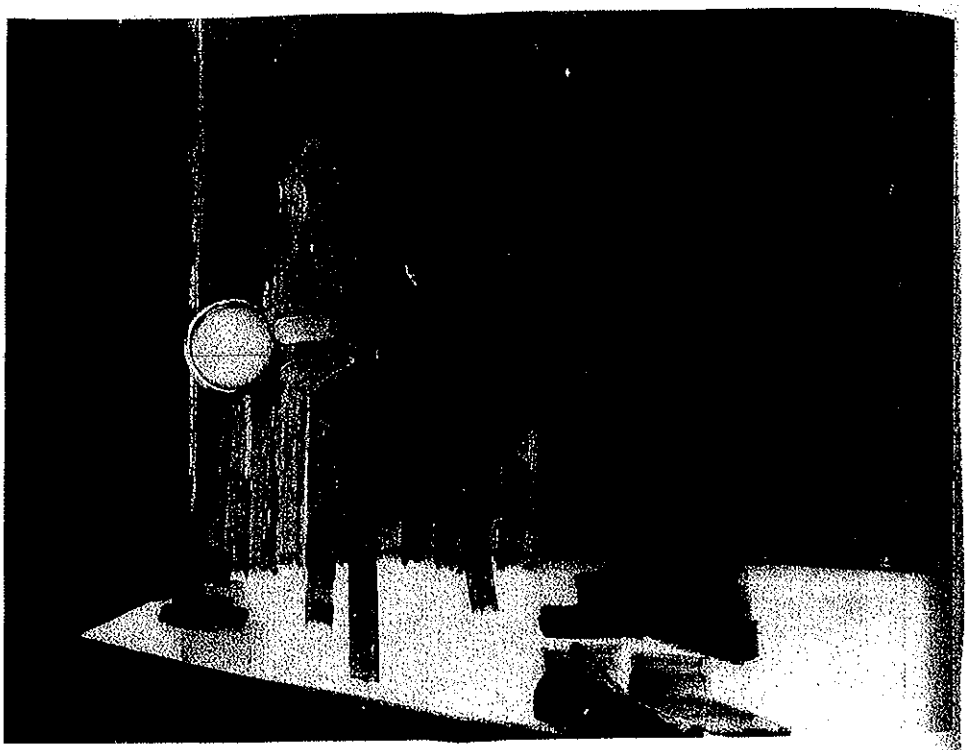
MOTION DETECTOR

GERMAN ARTIST MAGNUS PLESSEN PAINTS AN ESCAPE ROUTE FROM THE DEAD ZONE OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Magnus Plessen is on a mission. His aim is to resuscitate the people, places, and things trapped in photographs, which he's going to do with "completely unsentimental" painting. The 40-year-old German artist is actually not a fan of photographs–he sees the "captured" images as imprisoned in time and space, which strips away all life and turns them into nostalgic objects. While the likes of Nick Knight and Elaine Constantine may object to the idea that their photography lacks dynamism, what Plessen is really talking about is the way all photographs refer to a past moment. In order to bring subjects back from the dead, so to speak, Plessen breaks them up into pieces so that they seem almost to become moving images across his canvases.

Plessen often starts with a photograph–although given his de-sentimentalizing urge, he is unsurprisingly cagey about its exact provenance. His subjects are then rendered in striking abstract color schemes in the German artist's trademark blocks, made by simultaneously applying and removing paint with a spatula. Take, for example, the deceptively simple *In and Out of my Shirt* (2007), a painting of a white button-down shirt outlined in red, black, and blue. The shirt's owner appears as a light brown, one-eyed shadow looming around the piece of clothing, which seems to be moving as he writhes either to put it on or to take it off. Whether he is dressing or stripping is entirely unclear. Injecting such a sense of movement into paint recalls the Italian futurists, who welcomed the fast new age of the automobile in their art productions at the beginning of the 20th century.

But, unlike the efforts of the speed-hungry futurists, something slower, lighter, and more elusive lingers in Plessen's paintings–as it does around the artist himself. For one, the futurists never made a painting of a disembodied shirt, or someone reclining in a deck chair (*Garden*, 2007), the thin brown line of the lounger barely discernible among the chunks of green. And they definitely never went in for touches of surrealism: in *Rider* (2004), a jockey in pink silks perches on a wooden horse, which appears to have two heads. The result? "Perhaps," Plessen muses, "an image that leaves the viewer–and also the art object and its creator–much freer." **Emily Speers Mears**



Apartment, 2002. Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, NYC

Magnus Plessen's exhibition runs December 1, 2007–January 5, 2008, at Gladstone Gallery, NYC.
For information: www.gladstonegallery.com