

photograph

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Tania Franco Klein: Proceed to the Route

ROSEGALLERY, Santa Monica, CA

By Catherine Wagley

Tania Franco Klein's *Proceed to the Route*, an exhibition named after a frequent Google Maps refrain, had the feeling of a multi-room collage, albeit a tasteful one put together by a judicious minimalist. Some photographs, printed large, adhered directly to the walls, others were framed and hung at eye level, knee-level, or high up; occasionally, images overlapped. This installation made the show feel a bit like a connect the dots exercise – you were compelled to find the narrative relationships between images. Though the works assembled here in fact came from a few different series, they shared a glamorous cinematic aesthetic and a kind of ennui that stretched across the motel rooms, desert landscapes, planes, and old cars that Franco Klein takes as her subjects. She frequently poses pensively in her own photographs, lying on a

carpeted floor, or blocking her eyes from the sun while standing beside a vintage car. Her clothing could have jumped from 1960s Hollywood, and it is occasionally difficult to tell if these well-composed, romantic images are nostalgic for nostalgia's sake or trying to unearth a bigger truth about the hold vintage versions of beauty still have over us.

Franco Klein, a Mexican artist who is based in Mexico City and L.A., has said that artists including William Eggleston and Jo Ann Callis inform her practice, and their influence is palpable in her subject matter and composition. (Writing for the *Los Angeles Times*, Leah Ollman called the show full of other artists' "shadows.") *The Waiting*, 2016, in particular, a staged image of a phone and an overfull ashtray balancing on a blue pillow above a blue carpet, conjures Eggleston's lonely glasses of liquor, condiment bottles, and TV sets. But other of Franco Klein's photographs are more performative. In *Contained (Self-Portrait)*, 2016, her figure is seen on a small vintage television next



Tania Franco Klein, *The Waiting*, from *Our Life in the Shadows*, 2016. Courtesy ROSEGALLERY

to an empty bed in a wood-paneled room – on the screen, she's shown perched on the same bed in the same room, looking at the TV. Even if this image-within-an-image is somewhat heavy handed, her slightly blurry, blown-out onscreen likeness looks like it's about to flicker away, escaping this bounded context.

Another kind of escape is found in the unglamorized, loosely composed street photographs that, in a few places, stretch mural-like across the wall. Shadows expand across mismatched border fences with a frank mundanity that gives Franco Klein's work a different potential, suggesting that she is not destined to become, say, another Alex Prager, a photographer fully consumed by her own filmic melodramas. The most riveting work in the show, however, may be *Breathe*, 2019, a sepia-toned GIF shown on a tiny old television. The artist, her image literally confined inside an attractively nostalgic object, hyperventilates into a brown paper bag, conveying the anxiety of being stuck inside an old, fictional idea of glamour.

Miljohn Ruperto and Ulrik Heltoft: Voynich Botanical Studies

Friends Indeed Gallery, San Francisco

By Kim Beil

Diane Arbus described a photograph as a "secret about a secret." That quote aptly describes these pictures by the artist-duo Miljohn Ruperto and Ulrik Heltoft. Even when the duo's process is revealed, the images in their *Voynich Botanical Studies* remain mysterious, like the manuscript to which they refer: a 16th-century codex that contains text written in an unknown language, as well as drawings of plants, zodiac symbols, and nudes. The cryptic text has fascinated codebreakers for centuries but has never been definitively deciphered. Even the subjects of its botanical drawings remain un-



Miljohn Ruperto and Ulrik Heltoft, *Voynich Botanical Studies, Specimen 55r Podzim*, 2014. Courtesy Friends Indeed Gallery

identified, and some scholars believe that the manuscript is, in fact, an elaborate deception.

Ruperto and Heltoft create 3D renderings of the plants depicted in the manuscript, borrowing textures from scans of real plants, then digitally grafting them into unrecognizable conglomerates. Like Arbus's secret, their only referent is the enigmatic manuscript. The images are transferred to 4x5-inch negatives and printed on fiber paper in a darkroom. While the plants in the original manuscript are drawn with opaque washes of vibrant color, these monochrome prints point to our expectations for naturalistic representations. Like feathered, rainbow-hued dinosaurs or pearlescent pictures of outer space, vivid colors read as fantasy, while black-and-white images possess the aura of truth. This predilection derives from a 20th-century faith in photographic reportage, which the artists mine in other ways, too. We don't trust these pictures only because they are photographs, but because they look like a specific genre of photographic art. With dramatic



Tania Franco Klein, *Toaster (Self-Portrait)*, 2016, ink-jet print, 63 x 42".

ARTFORUM Critic's Pick: Tania Franco Klein at ROSEGALLERY 2 JANUARY 2020

Popular culture often conflates travel with personal development. But if the lone wanderers in Tania Franco Klein's photographs were hoping for self-discovery, they appear to have gotten lost in non-places, presumably still in the present day but replete with nostalgic affectations. Franco Klein titled this show "Proceed to the Route," after the command some GPS applications paradoxically give to users who have strayed off course. Photographs and wallpaper installations from various bodies of work are juxtaposed in unexpected configurations, evoking split-screen disjunctions.

Franco Klein's stagings are redolent of commercial photography, or perhaps more Hitchcockian and Lynchian film stills, as her subjects' glamour is matched by their malaise. Although many of the photographs are self-portraits, the artist suppresses her identity—donning wigs and retro fashions, obscuring herself with shadows and props—to make room for the enigmatic, anonymous characters she plays. Many of her poses suggest exhaustion, unconsciousness, even death. In *Yellow Tiles (Self-Portrait)*, 2017, she appears behind a shower door, her face and body blurred by the textured glass as if she were an apparition.

The source of her protagonists' discomfort is invisible, but motifs of bathrooms, beds, and vintage appliances offer hints. The toaster in *Toaster (Self-Portrait)*, 2016, reflects a woman's head resting on a table, as though she had collapsed while preparing breakfast. Even as technology progresses, everyday life grows increasingly arduous in a society that devalues individuals while expecting them to perform. Two GIFs shown on old televisions most succinctly encapsulate the feeling of being trapped in an endless loop of ungratifying obligations: In *Breathe*, 2019, a woman hyperventilates into a paper bag, besieged by a panic attack that never advances yet never retreats.

— Annabel Osberg

Review: For Mexican artist Tania Franco Klein, self-portraits come with plenty of shadows

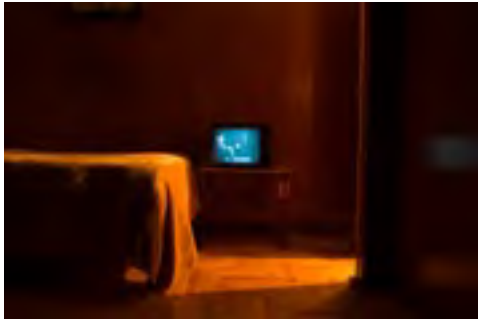


By LEAH OLLMAN
DEC. 24, 2019 8 AM

Most of the photographs in Tania Franco Klein's show at ROSEGALLERY are self-portraits. She appears unaccompanied, but in a certain sense, she is not entirely alone. Other artists feel present: Jo Ann Callis, Edward Hopper and Cindy Sherman, among them.

Klein has assimilated an assortment of familiar aesthetic stances — retro styling, cinematic staging, the still as narrative spur — as well as now-common tropes relating to female isolation, longing and the elusive definition of identity. She builds on these foundations and tweaks the recipes just enough to give her work its own piquant flavor.

One of the most striking examples is a large black-and-white image of Klein seen from behind, in just pants and bra on a scrubby field, her body leaning forward toward a small plane in the near distance. It's a scene of vague desperation and urgency. The woman Klein plays is a changing character more than a stable self, and the frequent references to transit imply that she is moving or wanting to move toward something different, perhaps better. In domestic settings, she appears in a state of deep interiority, looking at a screen, out a window or at her own reflection, as if imagining herself elsewhere.



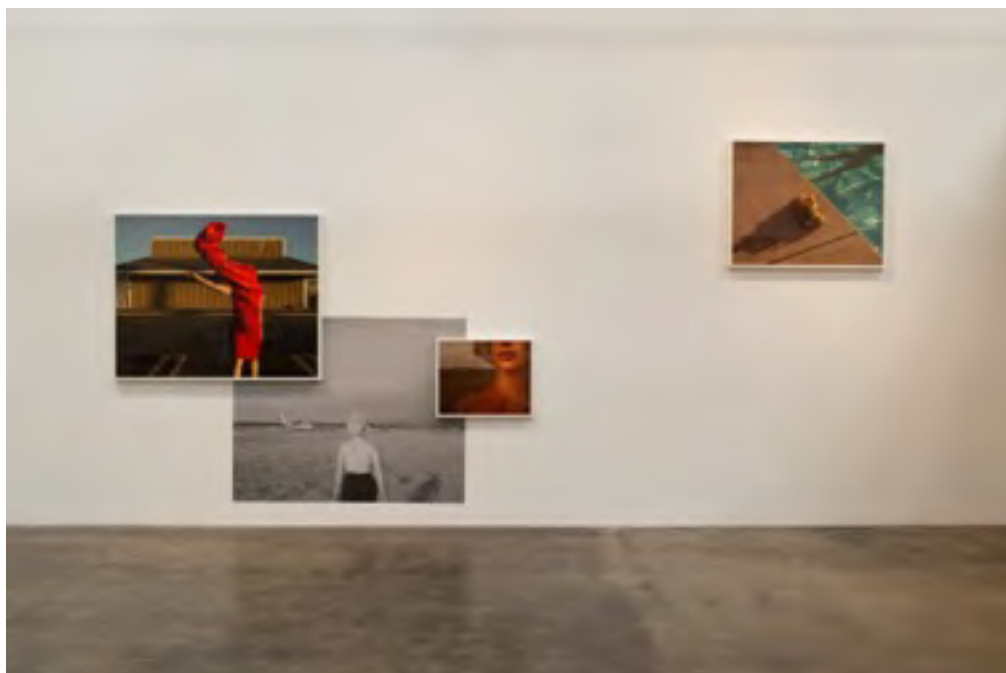
Klein works mostly in color, extracting rich gem tones from the saturated hues of afternoon light on her settings or sets. In an impeccably composed picture from inside a train, emerald pleated curtains open to a dusty, ochre expanse. The upholstered seats, aglow, match the green of the curtains and are flecked with the same gold of the distant view.



"Dining Room (Self-portrait)" offers a beautiful, moody study in primaries. Klein, in pale yellow, curls up on the sea-green carpet between a chair with red cushion and the blue blankness of a TV screen. The nicked corner of the wooden chair leg reads like a bruised knee, a subtle detail further texturing the inferred story.



Klein, who lives in Mexico City and L.A., installs her pictures with an eye toward reinforcing the sense of destabilization within them. She prints in a variety of sizes, overlaps framed atop unframed photographs, hangs framed pieces in offset pairings and mounts pictures in a diverse range of heights on the wall. The strategy is something of an affectation, but it does put the body on notice when experiencing the show — the Mexican artist's first in the U.S. — and makes it that much more involving.



TANIA FRANCO KLEIN: PROCEED TO THE ROUTE



By Aline Smithson
Lenscratch
December 26, 2019

"I lost my sense of home," Franco Klein says of her life lived between Mexico City, California and London.

Recently I had the great pleasure of attending an exhibition walk-through with Mexican artist Tania Franco Klein of her solo show, *Proceed to the Route* at the Rose Gallery in Santa Monica. Tania is a compelling story teller and provided an engaging narration and perspective of work that takes the viewer through a cinematic journey of internal and external road trips.

Presented like a set of film stills, the exhibition allows the viewer to create their own navigation of these psychological tableaux, shimmering with brilliant mid-century colors and shafts of light that illuminate small novelas. The photographs examine self in the digital age, considering the insidious nature of technology keeping us on course and the performative stresses that come from living life online. There is a sense of searching in these film-noir tales, filled with desire to live different lives, to discover new incarnations, and most importantly, to get lost. *Proceed to the Route* aptly describes not only work that has veered off

course, but a unique presentation of framed and unframed work, sometimes overlapping, and hung at different levels, that has a landscape all it's own.

The exhibition runs until January 18th, 2020. Tania also has a new monograph, *Positive Disintegration*, published by Editions Bessard.



I am lost. But my map seems to know where I am going.

But am I lost? Is being lost even possible in this place that knows it all?

I want to stop. But she insists; Proceed to the route. Proceed to the route.

Somewhere in between the outskirts and progress.

Between the mountains and the signs.

Where the landscape turns gray and leaving becomes the most obvious possibility.

I forgot how to be lost. I live in that time where disappearing means putting an airplane sign on the screen.

I insist. I want to walk the road without knowing. I want to get lost. I finally have the courage to press the break. I get down from my car and leave her behind. She can't stop being herself though. As I walk far I can hear her still saying. Proceed to the route



Proceed to the Route

The map as a representation of the territory, and the internet as a representation of life.

Proceed To The Route takes its name from the popular quote which starts every journey in Google Maps and which appears as a reminder every time a wrong turn is done.

The roads and freeways once shaped the paths of progress. Today, those roads are mostly visited by passengers who rarely know where they are going but flow at a fast pace without stopping. Having access to the knowledge to go anywhere, and still knowing nothing. Progress has overpassed us, leaving a state of nothingness and confusion in our eclectic-overconnected reality in which history runs faster than the seconds on the clock.

It is in the emptiness of the countryside that one can situate an encounter of an old lifestyle that still waits for its abandonment and containment, reflecting the new growth of a central capitalist system.

The drifters and travelers, all passing through some state of nothingness, that share private moments in public spaces, are a clear example of the ephemeral, crowded, and at the same time almost empty, leftovers of contemporary cities.



Tania Franco Klein (b. 1990) started her photography praxis while gaining her BA Architecture in Mexico City, which took her to pursue her Master in Photography at the University of the Arts London.

Her work is highly influenced by her fascination with social behavior and contemporary practices such as leisure, consumption, media overstimulation, emotional disconnection, the obsession with eternal youth, the American dream in the Western world and the psychological sequels they generate in our everyday life.

Franco Klein's work has been reviewed and featured by international critics including Aperture Foundation, The British Journal of Photography, I-D Magazine (UK), The Guardian, Paris Review, Der Greif, Fisheye Magazine Vogue Italia and has been commissioned by clients like New York Magazine and Dior.

Her work has been exhibited across Europe, USA, and Mexico, including international fairs such as Photo Basel, Photo London, Photofairs SF, Getxo Photo and during the Los Angeles Month of Photography. She has obtained the Sony World Photography Awards in two consecutive years, The Lensculture Exposure Awards, The Felix Schoeller Photo Award of Germany Nominee, FOAM Paul Huf Award nominee, and recently received the Photo London Artproof Schliemann Award as the best emerging artist during Photo London fair 2018. Her first U.S. Solo Exhibition opened in the fall of 2019 at ROSEGALLERY, Santa Monica.

<http://lenscratch.com/2019/12/tania-franco-klein-proceed-to-the-route/>

Photographer Tania Franco Klein asks if we can ever truly disconnect



Published 13th December 2019
Jacqui Palumbo, CNN

A woman in red stands in a vacant parking lot, fabric billowing in an upward arc to obscure her face. She extends her right arm outward, hand gently cupped, guiding the viewer toward the direction they might take. The low-slung ochre building behind her and her cherry-hued pencil skirt could be from the past, but no details pinpoint a specific place or time.

This is the image that began Mexican photographer Tania Franco Klein's "Proceed to the Route" (2018--ongoing), a series that saturates dystopian unease in the warmth of nostalgia.

At first glance, one might not think that Klein is examining our modern digital age -- the works appear as if they predate home computers -- but Klein wields ambiguity to evoke memory and a creeping sense of disquiet in photographs that ask if it's possible to truly disconnect.

Klein's practice primarily features cinematic self-portraiture, though her starting point for this particular body of work was a portrait of someone else. She had been preoccupied with the idea of Siri, a faceless, digital female voice guiding our lives -- this image seemed to represent her in physical form. But after taking the photograph in a parking lot, she had little clarity as to what to do next.

The series didn't fully reveal itself until she was on a meandering road trip with her boyfriend through the Californian desert. They lost their internet connection and yet Siri diligently repeated: "Proceed to the route. Proceed to the route. Proceed to the route. Proceed to the route."

The real life Siri?



Klein explores the idea of hyperconnectivity through the western microtowns that have been left behind as urbanization has concentrated the country's population -- and high speed internet connections -- in major cities. She was drawn to "these in-between places," she said in a phone interview, and sought them out across California, Colorado, New Mexico and Utah.



As her own female protagonist, Klein is always alone, her face often obscured by shadow, cropped in the frame, or turned away from the camera entirely. There's no sense of freedom in the images -- the title is a reminder that even in this narrow world, seemingly devoid of human presence, she has little free will.

It's a familiar feeling today, as the internet becomes more consolidated under a handful of dominant social media sites that we rely on for human connection. "We're participating in this system where we want to be rewarded for what we are, who we are, and what we do constantly," Klein said. "Disconnecting is this dream, something you can't achieve fully."



In just three years, Klein has become an emerging artist to watch. She is now represented by Rosegallery and has exhibited internationally at major festivals and fairs. She's won awards from LensCulture, Sony Photography Awards and Photo London.

Klein began examining modern anxieties following her graduation from London's University of the Arts MA program in 2016.

After London, she became restless, moving between Madrid, Israel, California, and Mexico for one to two months at a time. Unmoored, her anxiety and depression began to grow. It wasn't just her, she realized -- many of her friends, living all over the world, were experiencing the same extreme unease over the future. In a bookstore in Madrid, she found the book "The Burnout Society," by South Korean-German philosopher Byung-Chul Han, and it spoke to her -- the idea that as a society we are obsessed with performing, multi-tasking, optimizing, and self-improvement, fueling a collective and deeply rooted sense of anxiety and isolation.

"We could always be learning something, like on your phone learning languages," Klein said. "The world is in the palm of your hand and you can have access to everything. Every second of your life has to be productive -- it's like we've become production tools."



That concept became the underlying concept for her series "Our Life in the Shadows" (2016--2018) in which exhaustion and malaise overshadow the rich jewel tones and shadowy environments as people go about their everyday lives. She published the body of work in the book "Positive Disintegration" this year with French publisher Éditions Bessard.



In all of her work, Klein shows an interest in ambiguous spaces, characters and time.

"My world is more psychological, emotional and intimate," she said. "I'm not trying to create a story." There are no beginnings or endings, no single narrative thread, but all scenes exist all at once for viewers to unravel. At Rosegallery, she frames some works and prints others as wall murals, letting images overlap and intersect.

There is no real escape in Klein's work, no solace in the beauty of the land. Her interiors "are emotionally claustrophobic," she said, but her protagonists outside find little respite -- they are "trapped in these barren landscapes." In these non-places -- a term coined by French anthropologist Marc Augé -- people relinquish their identity in locations where the only point is to simply pass through.

Klein invites viewers to stay in these transient spaces and reflect on the stressors of contemporary life. "You cannot fully escape and fully disconnect from everything, but how can you (find) balance?" she asked. In "Proceed to the Route," she found her path by roaming into the unfamiliar. Perhaps we too can find fulfillment by deviating from the route.

"Proceed to the Route" is exhibited as part of Klein's solo exhibition at Rosegallery through January 18, 2020.