

Richard T. Walker:

the fallibility of intent

February 7–April 26, 2015



the predicament of always (as we are)
(left: film still; right: production still),
2014

Leading an outsider perspective to the limitless bounds of the American West, British-born, San Francisco-based artist Richard T. Walker navigates the complex intersections of language, music, and the human condition amidst the backdrop of the natural environment in *the fallibility of intent*. This current body of work addresses the limitations of language and builds on the artist's ongoing quest for a transcendent means of communication. Walker grapples with the challenges of connection—both with others and the natural world—and utilizes the visual and aural languages of moving images, sculpture, and instrumental sounds to push beyond the confines of words. The exhibition manifests through a two-channel video installation, photographs, and sonic sculptures comprised of neon, musical instruments, and lightboxes. Through this arrangement, the artist explores the cultural impulses to isolate ourselves from our surroundings and bridges his investigations with how we relate to others.

Walker first became seduced by the American West through early on-the-run road films such as Terrence Malick's *Badlands* (1973) and seminal '90s indie rock bands like Sebadoh,

Dinosaur Jr., and Pavement, among others, while growing up in Shropshire, a small rural area of England that borders Wales. The romantic sublime and the work of traditional Western artists such as photographer Ansel Adams and landscape painter Frederic Edwin Church of the Hudson River school also feature as prominent influences, as seen in the sweeping vistas that are hallmarks of Walker's work. Miles from civilization, Walker is always alone when he produces his films. He often sets out by car with a destination in mind but generally finds his end location at a point when his surroundings seem to envelop him entirely, his process mirroring the moment his work aims to untangle.

Walker also typically employs the concept of "Rückenfigur," a method embraced by nineteenth-century German romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich, in which a lone figure is seen with his back to the viewer, gazing out and pondering the expanse before him. In the film *the predicament of always (as we are)*, for example, Walker appears with his back to the camera (clad in his signature red t-shirt), speaking into a cassette recorder within the vast desert landscape of the White Sands National Monument in New Mexico. His monologue takes on an improvisational diaristic tone and easily vacillates



a paradox in distance (inverted) #1 (detail), 2014

between the use of “I,” “you,” “we,” and “us,” a technique that further invites the viewer to place themselves in the position of the artist.

As the film unfolds, Walker tosses his cassette recorder into the distance, giving up on words altogether. He then interweaves footage from his sojourns in the rocky deserts of Enchanted Rock State Natural Area in the Texas Hill Country, Big Bend National Park in West Texas, and various locations on the outskirts of Phoenix, Arizona. The artist turns his attention to the relationship between music and landscape, as evoked by a series of instruments that make cameo appearances throughout the film—Fender Telecaster guitars, Vox amplifiers, Casio keyboards, a xylophone—their utterances activated by the strike of small rocks being thrown by Walker off-screen. This playful hit-or-miss method of ambient sound-making evolves into a swelling melody, deftly cut and edited by the artist in a symphonic approach to layering images and sound. These objects reappear as formal sculptures within the gallery space, extending the inclusion of the viewer within the artist’s expansive *mise-en-scène*, made even more resonant amidst di Rosa’s glass-encased gallery space which bleeds into the surrounding landscape.

the fallibility of intent speaks to some of the fundamental questions in life—Why are we here? How do we live in the world?—and brings a renewed awareness and understanding of our sense of place within the environs of Northern California.

Walker’s strategy teeters between the humorous and melancholic, juxtaposing the sublime with what it means to be imperfect and ultimately human. To make sense of the world at all, sometimes we can only focus on a tiny bit of it, and look hard at what is close at hand to make it stand in for the whole. Like the close-ups of the artist’s hand holding up tiny etched cutouts of mountaintops to the real thing or the lightbox images which literally turn rocks into mountains, Walker’s work helps us to understand the things which are difficult to grasp otherwise—the majesty of the landscape, our innermost emotions—by distilling them into tangible, compelling images, objects, and sounds. In the way that an image can communicate things one could never express in words, the way the harmony of a song can capture an emotion that seems otherwise uncontainable, Walker’s work helps us to see better and to know more about ourselves than we might know otherwise.

—Amy Owen, Curator

Exhibition Checklist:

In the listing of dimensions, height precedes width precedes depth.

in defiance of being here #5, 2014
Neon, Casiotone MT-68 keyboard, rocks
50 x 49 x 28 in.

in defiance of being here #6, 2014
Neon, Casiotone MT-68 keyboard, rocks
50 x 49 x 28 in.

in defiance of being here #7, 2014
Neon, Casiotone MT-68 keyboard, rocks
50 x 49 x 28 in.

momentary together forever #1, 2014
Fender Squire Telecaster guitar, tripod,
Vox amplifier, Electro-Harmonics Freeze
pedal, rock, archival pigment print
Dimensions variable

momentary together forever #2, 2014
Fender Squire Telecaster guitar, tripod,
Vox amplifier, Electro-Harmonics Freeze
pedal, rock, archival pigment print
Dimensions variable

momentary together forever, 2014
Archival pigment print
12 x 18 in.

a paradox in distance (inverted) #1, 2014
Lightbox, tripod, Casiotone MT-68
keyboard
Dimensions variable
(lightbox: 24 x 24 x 5 in.)

a paradox in distance (inverted) #2, 2014
Lightbox, tripod, Casiotone MT-68
keyboard
Dimensions variable
(lightbox: 24 x 24 x 5 in.)

a paradox in distance (inverted) #3, 2014
Lightbox, tripod, Casiotone MT-68
keyboard
Dimensions variable
(lightbox: 24 x 24 x 5 in.)

a paradox in distance (inverted) #4, 2014
Lightbox, tripod, Casiotone MT-68
keyboard
Dimensions variable
(lightbox: 24 x 24 x 5 in.)

the plight of inconsequence #1, 2014
Archival inkjet print
24 x 16½ in.

the plight of inconsequence #2, 2014
Archival inkjet print
24 x 16½ in.

the plight of inconsequence #3, 2014
Archival inkjet print
24 x 16½ in.

the plight of inconsequence #4, 2014
Archival inkjet print
24 x 16½ in.

the plight of inconsequence #5, 2014
Archival inkjet print
24 x 16½ in.

the plight of inconsequence #6, 2014
Archival inkjet print
24 x 16½ in.

the plight of inconsequence #7, 2014
Archival inkjet print
24 x 16½ in.

the plight of inconsequence #8, 2014
Archival inkjet print
24 x 16½ in.

the plight of inconsequence #9, 2014
Archival inkjet print
24 x 16½ in.

the plight of inconsequence #10, 2014
Archival inkjet print
24 x 16½ in.

the predicament of always (as we are),
2014
2-channel HD video with sound
12 min., 4 sec.

All works are courtesy of the artist and
Carroll / Fletcher, London.

About the Artists:

Richard T. Walker (b. 1977, Shrewsbury, UK) is based in San Francisco. He holds a BA in Fine Art from Bath Spa University College (1999) and an MA in Fine Art from Goldsmiths College, London (2005). Walker received a fellowship at Kala Art Institute in 2007 and an Artadia Award in 2009, attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in 2009, and was an affiliate artist at the Headlands Center for the Arts from 2007–2009 and resident in 2011. Recent solo exhibitions include the Contemporary Austin, Texas; the ASU Art Museum, Tempe; and James Cohan Gallery, New York. Selected collections include Kadist Art Foundation, San Francisco, and K21, Düsseldorf. His website is www.richardtwalker.net.

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