



PROFILE

IT MIGHT INITIALLY be perplexing to step into Florian Maier-Aichen's new exhibition at Blum & Poe if all you know about him is that he's a landscape photographer. There are certainly a few classic black-and-white photographs, but on the lofty white walls are also hung suspiciously abstract canvases marked more by abstract line and shape than hill and river, and while other photographs contain harbors and valleys, they are also slightly "off" — colors are heightened or blanced, and the "God's-eye" perspective on some works is dizzying or bizarre. However, all of these seemingly disparate works come together through the understanding that Maier-Aichen, here, as in most of his work throughout the last couple of decades, is interested in more than just landscape and photography as we think we know them. Through his experimental use of photographic technology old and new, Maier-Aichen explores the shifting nature of truth, humans' impact on the environment, and the poetic and allusive possibilities of the landscape.

Maier-Aichen splits his time between his home country of Germany and Los Angeles, where he first arrived in 1999. Both locations inform his work, the former referencing the romantic Germanic landscape tradition of painting and photography, and the latter referencing the sprawling metropolises of the modern era.

Several works from the Blum & Poe show are clearly in the romantic tradition of his Germanic forbearers, playing with photographic techniques to render the images more painterly and thus more artificial. In *Untitled (Andermatt)*, the artist recreates one of Eduard Spelterini's famous black-and-white photographs of the Swiss Alps, rendering it in brilliant tricolor photography. The verdant hills are not just green, but also a glowing red. The surreal colors coupled with the aerial perspective of tiny houses set between precipitous mountains lends the image a fairytale quality, but one that is a bit disconcerting. Another photograph of craggy, snow-covered peaks and windy roads isn't as straightforward as it ought to be; half of the image is blacked out, with the artist's digital scribble snaking through the black mass, mimicking the mountain roads. Maier-Aichen told *Art in America* that adding the element of the handmade to his photographs was not anathema to the medium — "It's not a big deal to incorporate drawing and the hand into photography — just remember how painstakingly manual a process photography was in the 19th century, and how highly retouched and enhanced photos were just by default."

His photographs of Los Angeles and its environs, however, best encapsulate Maier-Aichen's interest in various photographic techniques, including the touch of the artist's hand, and how such works can manifest themselves in ways that capture the essence of a place more than simple documentary photographs can.



**FLORIAN MAIER-AICHEN • HALBES BILD, 2014**  
SILVER GELATIN PRINT; 60 7/8 X 49 1/8 INCHES FRAMED; EDITION OF 6, 2 AP  
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST; BLUM & POE, LOS ANGELES; GAGOSIAN GALLERY, NEW YORK;  
AND 303 GALLERY, NEW YORK

**FLORIAN MAIER-AICHEN**  
**UNTITLED, 2014**  
SILVER GELATIN PRINT  
19 9/16 X 19 3/4 INCHES  
EDITION OF 6, 2AP  
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST;  
BLUM & POE, LOS ANGELES;  
GAGOSIAN GALLERY, NEW YORK;  
AND 303 GALLERY, NEW YORK



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Maier-Aichen has photographed Los Angeles many times since he moved there, occasionally revisiting many of the locations. He focused his lens on Pacific Coast Highway, deviating from the standard representation of serene blue ocean and rolling green hills and instead featuring a murky ocean and blood-red hills that looks like some apocalyptic scene from H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds*. In 2011's *La Brea Avenue in the Snow*, the artist photographed the charming Tudor-style houses he'd first seen in a book and manipulated the image by adding old cars and creating snow by drawing it into the image; it's a magical work, but, as denizens of the perennially-warm Los Angeles know, one that is certainly fictive.

He also invoked the tradition of American landscape painting and photography by taking the region's mountains, such as Mount Baldy and Mount Wilson, for his subjects. One of the images of Mt. Baldy appears to be a serene nighttime scene, but a closer look reveals something slightly off-kilter about the mountain; in fact, Maier-Aichen used the "day for night" technique of 4 x 5 black-and-white infrared film to create an inverse image, and one that is rather ominous. In *Untitled (Mount Wilson)* from 2002, the curved shadows of the mountain peaks foreground the photograph, but the vast expanses of the city dominate the work, with the ethereal dots of light and coruscating marine layer (enhanced by the artist's digital brush) overwhelming the dark of night and asserting the power of the built environment over that of nature.

Those liminal spaces where nature meets civilization appear several times in the new works at Blum & Poe. *100-mile photograph* takes a familiar aerial view of Los Angeles as seen from the mountains, looking out across the valley of houses, buildings, and freeways to the ocean in the distance. Here, though, the landscape is tinged with that same eerie red, evoking science fiction, disease, or the apocalypse. The ocean is covered with blurry, low-hanging clouds, diminished and passive in the face of the destruction brought by humankind. Similarly, *Halbes Bild* depicts the desiccated Salton Sea (California's biggest lake, created accidentally and now a certifiable ecological disaster zone), with the Sea an inky, abyssal black, and the surrounding terrain appearing like a surreptitiously-snapped satellite photograph. Most curiously, a lunar-like white mass is in the top right corner, with three slender tendrils dripping down. Maier-Aichen created this ambiguous shape with a chemigram, a photographic technique that does not actually require a camera, with the artist instead painting on light-sensitive paper in order to render an image. The addition of this not only reinforces Maier-Aichen's flexible interpretation of the art of photography, but adds to the image's surreal, disturbing mood.

The Port of Long Beach, a favorite subject of Maier-Aichen's, is given similar treatment. The aerial shot of the maze of shoreline where the ocean abuts

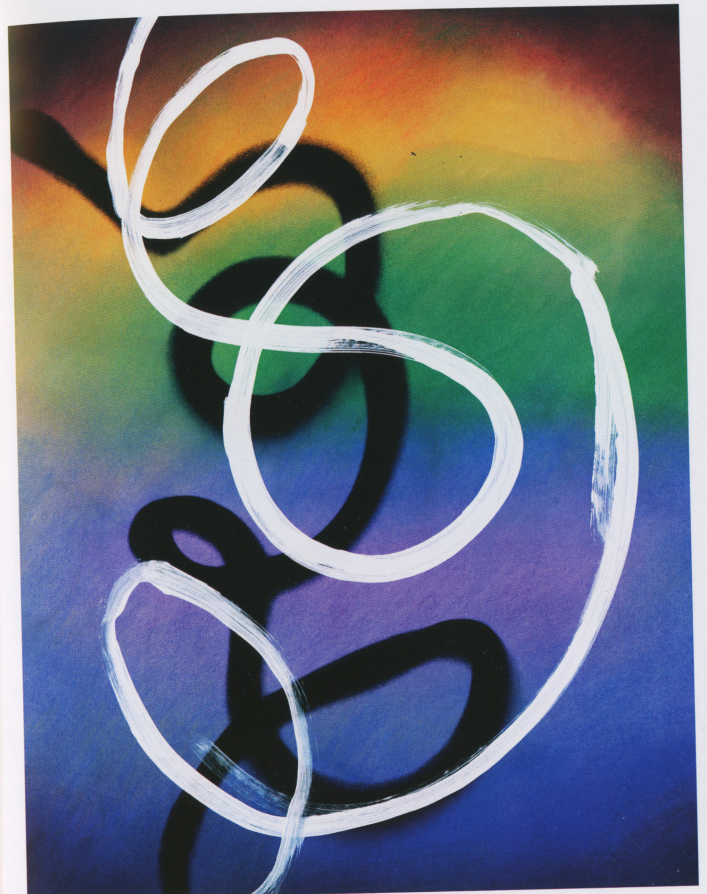


FLORIAN MAIER-AICHEN • 100-MILE PHOTOGRAPH, 2014  
C-PRINT; 101 X 80 1/2 INCHES FRAMED; EDITION OF 6, 2 AP  
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST; BLUM & POE, LOS ANGELES; GAGOSIAN GALLERY, NEW YORK;  
AND 303 GALLERY, NEW YORK

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the heavily-developed city and port is a negative image, with the water a milky-white and the cityscape gradations of ashy grays. There are clouds in the sky, which takes up almost half the photograph, but the clouds don't quite make sense—they're too blurry, too globular. Unsurprisingly, they were added later by the artist, and pasted and rephotographed on top of the negative image. The effect is, again, disconcerting—there seems to be something amiss, the roiling and futuristic clouds indicative of some grand peril on the horizon.

It is no wonder why Maier-Aichen, like Ed Ruscha, David Maisel, and John Baldessari among others, is fascinated with Los Angeles and its local surroundings. The interminability of its freeways and suburbs, its all-consuming expansion to the farthest geographic edges, and its fraught relationship with the natural resources needed to sustain an always-burgeoning population are conducive to ruminations on our impact on the environment and the conditions that might just bring about the demise of the human race. However, the region also yields stunning vistas that conjure up nostalgia and affection for the beauty of the landscape that attracted so many 19th and 20th century settlers. Maier-Aichen plays with both the alluring and the apocalyptic associations of the place, both enticing us with the fantastical and improbable beauty and poetry of his images, and inducing a shudder of premonition that his eerie images might portend an ominous future.



**FLORIAN MAIER-AICHEN • UNTITLED, 2014**  
DYE TRANSFER PRINT; 37 1/2 X 31 1/4 INCHES FRAMED; EDITION OF 6, 2 AP  
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST; BLUM & POE, LOS ANGELES; GAGOSIAN GALLERY, NEW YORK;  
AND 303 GALLERY, NEW YORK