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National ACT Review

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OPINION

Two shows, one painterly and one provocative are at PhotoAccess

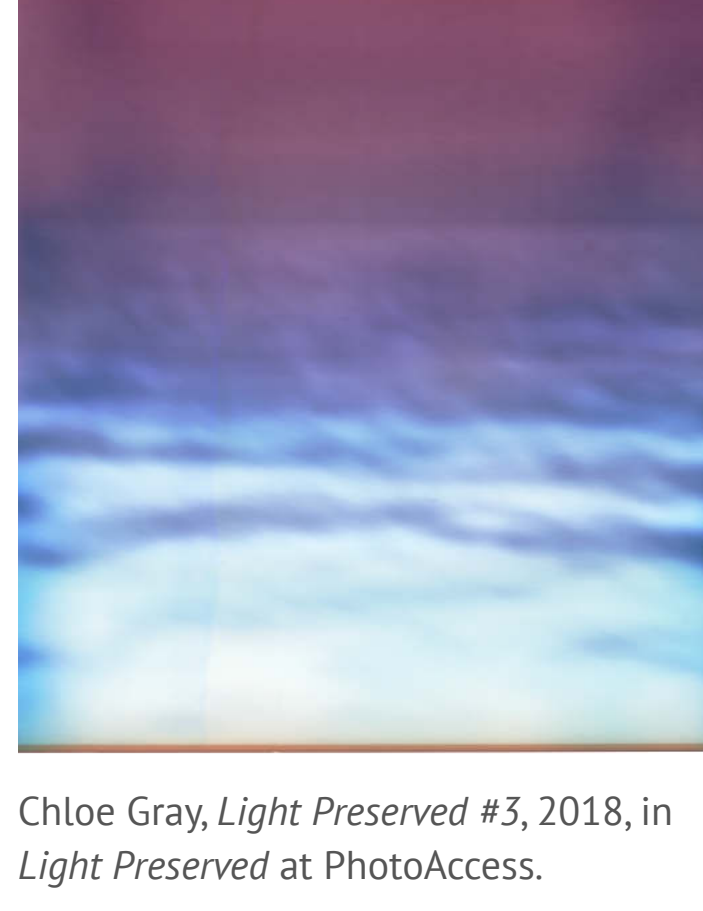
Peter Haynes

September 3, 2018 – 2.02pm

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Chloe Gray: *Light Preserved*. Diego Ramirez: *Postcard eXotica*. PhotoAccess at the Manuka Arts Centre, Cnr Manuka Circle and NSW Circle, Griffith. Until September 16.

In her artist statement Chloe Gray states that “*Light Preserved* is a delicate inquiry into the expressive ability of light” and that the works “speak to the medium’s core; the preservation of light by painting”.



Chloe Gray, *Light Preserved* #3, 2018, in *Light Preserved* at PhotoAccess.

She seeks to invest her work with a form of visual autonomy and remove it from a state of being “of something” into a state of simply being “something”. This is of course a particularly Modernist dictum and one that began as examination of contemporary painting in the 20th-century. One does not need to seek anything beyond the confines of the canvas - what you see is what you get.

The idea that photography should aspire to the condition of painting is arguably dated but Gray attempts to infuse the photographic process with graphic and painterly methods using light instead of ink or oils and in so doing create works whose subject is their process and their tool (viz. light).

The results are mixed and the overall exhibition is disappointing. That said there are some works that are formally and aesthetically resolved and whose resemblance to (some) Modernist painting would appear not to be accidental.

Unreal No. 2 and *Unreal No. 3* (Cat’s 3 and 2, seen previously at M16) are beautiful images in which the artist’s play with perspective and deep spatial recessions are very successful. The hovering and barely there forms create an insinuating spatial play that is especially effective in the portrait format that formally separates these 2 works from the other horizontally aligned works. It would be foolish of me not to refer to Mark Rothko’s extraordinary floating abstractions in the context of these works – the similarities are glaring.

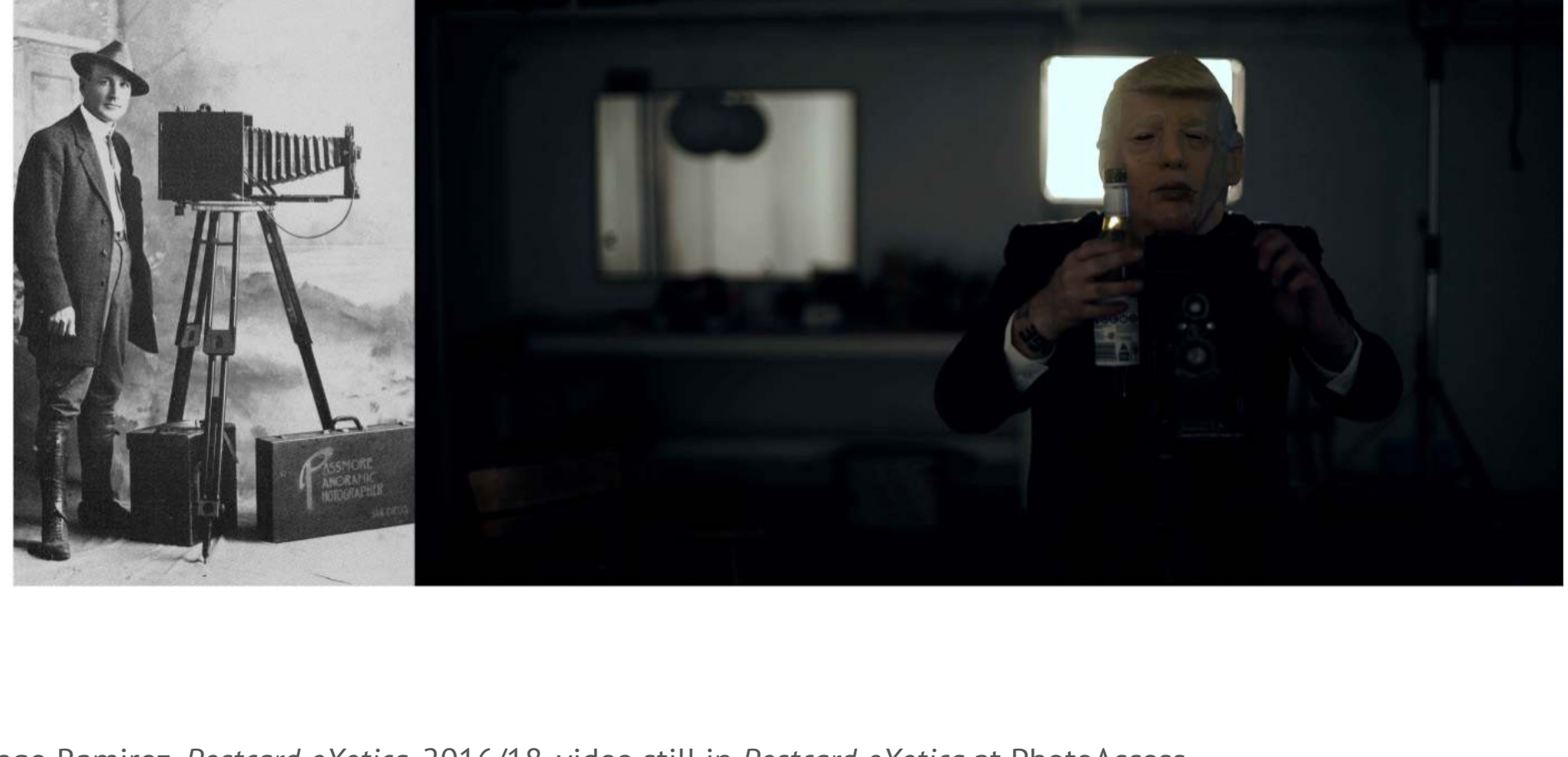
Of the other nine works in the exhibition, *Light Preserved No.6* (Cat.7) is perhaps the most “painterly”, and uses light and shade (chiaroscuro?) in very positive ways. For me the other works for the most part remain exploratory. They present with little or no structure and as parts of a whole that is not there. Each has the quality of being an exercise, a characteristic not helped by the scale and the overwhelmingly horizontality of (most of) the exhibition.



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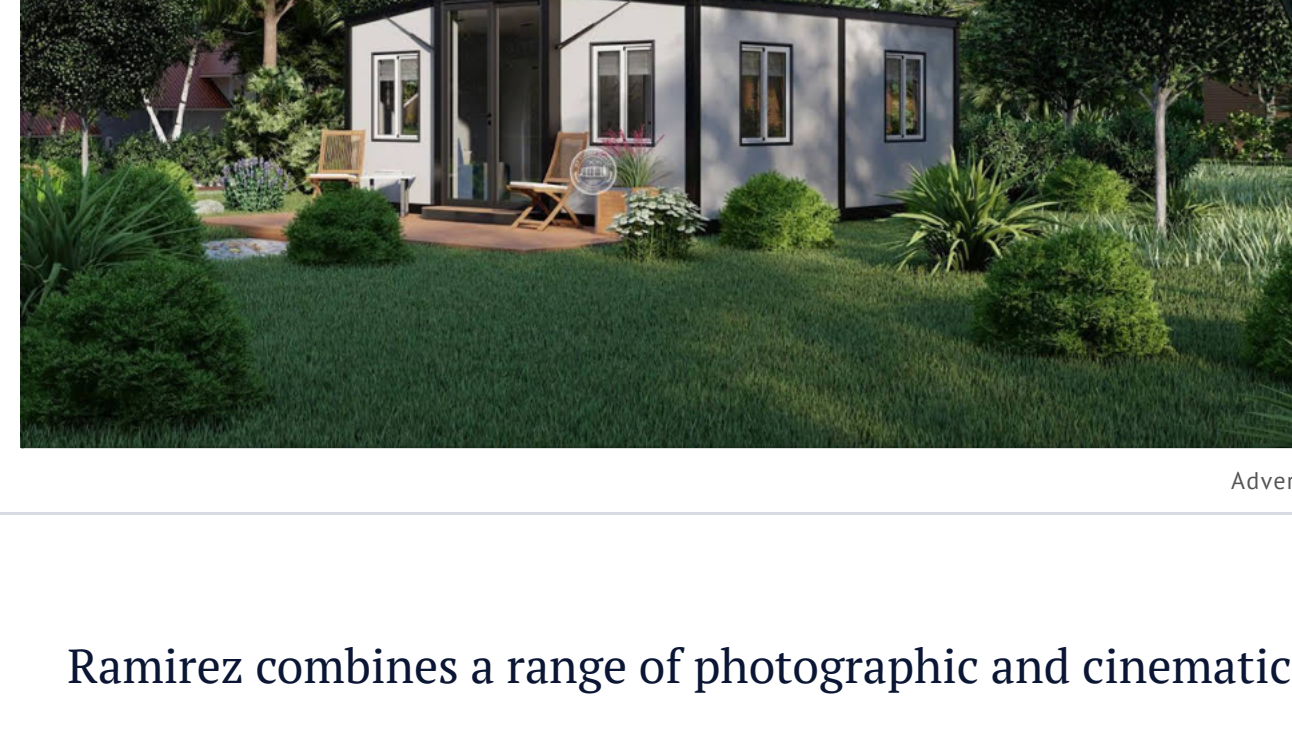
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Diego Ramirez, *Postcard eXotica*, 2016/18, video still in *Postcard eXotica* at PhotoAccess.

Diego Ramirez’s *Postcard eXotica* is a 30-minute “cinematic re-enactment of a collection of found photographs”. It is presented as a moving collage of postcards, vintage film extracts, contemporary video and documentary films. It is visually and thematically absorbing in the elision of form and content, and clever, pointed and current in the potency of its message.



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Ramirez combines a range of photographic and cinematic devices and delivers them in a form of soft barrage that is immediately engaging and provocative. There are numerous highlights including: the appearance of Murnau’s *Nosferatu*; a drunken Donald Trump (or at least an actor in a tawdry Donald Trump mask); folkloric and ethnographic footage of Mexican “types”; Christian festivals with a Mexican context; a matador donning his suit of light; and the list goes on.

Certain elements reappear throughout the work to underscore contemporary relevance. So for example the Donald Trump character appears a number of times, each time getting progressively more involved with his bottles of wine (or whatever). The interspersing of black-and-white with colour is also very effective in moving the viewer from the “historic” to the contemporary.



Diego Ramirez, *Postcard eXotica*, 2016/18, video still in *Postcard eXotica* at PhotoAccess.

There is a lot happening in Ramirez’s 30-minute deliberation. The format keeps the viewer alert to the constantly changing scenarios and the clever associations that the artist makes to elucidate his thesis. I found this work challenging and provocative.

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