

David Maisel @ Haines Gallery

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“GM3” (detail), 2010, C-print, 30 x 40”

Francisco as their source material. For *History's Shadow*, Maisel has selected X-rays of antique objects from vases to horse sculptures to dismembered stone heads. The process of X-raying art objects is common for art institutions to manage internal damage or to verify authenticity. (Francisco Goya's [Portrait of a Woman](#), for example, was famously determined to be a fake using X-ray technology.) By photographing positive transparencies on top of a glowing light box, Maisel further illuminates the already ghostly images

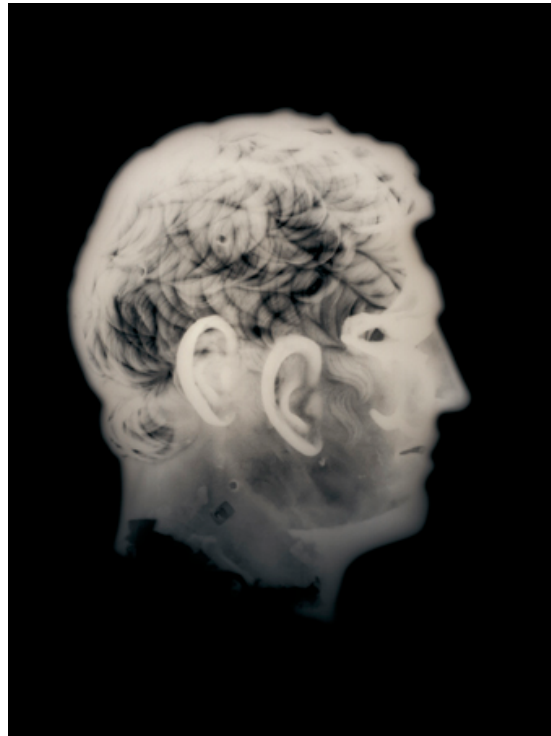
There is a unique relationship between photography and the invisible. Beginning in the late Victorian era, “spirit” photographers used tricks — like double exposures and treating photographic plates with radiation — to make visible “auras”, phantoms, and the otherwise otherworldly realm. When the X-ray was discovered (accidentally) by Conrad Rontgen in 1895, it helped to establish photography as a legitimate tool for medicine, rather than a gateway to the supernatural. Yet its effect — imagining something inherent that eye cannot otherwise see — echoed the paranormal qualities at play in occult photography. As history would have it, the technology which should have disproved the methods of spirit photographers was instead adapted into their repertoire. Indeed from the pragmatic and the fantastical, the X-ray has served many overlapping functions.

In his new show at the Haines Gallery, Bay Area-based photographer David Maisel explores that ghostly space between the purposeful document and the otherworldly trace, crafting a series of photographs that use X-rays from the archives of the Asian Art Museum of San

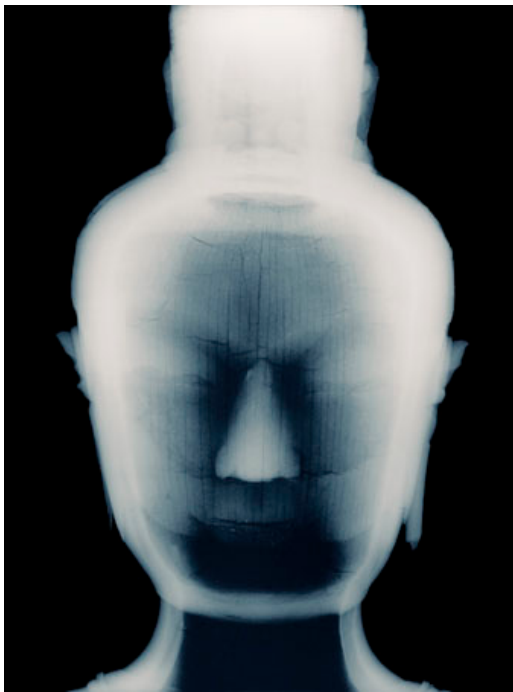
from within; with their glowing layers revealed, the objects appear almost three-dimensional. At 16 C-Prints ranging between two sizes, 17" x 22" and 30" x 40", the show feels thorough and full.

X-rays, of course, show both sides of the same object, creating an illusion of three dimensionality in a field of recessive blackness. *GM10* is a good example of this phenomenon: a stone head in profile, both ears are made visible by the imaging process, creating the effect of a double-exposure. The non-representational objects appear strikingly corporeal, dense with matter and internal circuitry and bruising. Even X-rayed vases, such as *AV4*, seem to have a spinal cord and pulmonary arteries. The effect is beautiful and eerie.

Some of the images are particularly haunting. *GM16*, a large print of a sculpted male head, which seems to look out with blank eyes, captures a state between transparency and opacity, present and past. The exoskeleton is not fully see-through, and as a result, the bust appears to glow around the edges. It recalls the photographer [Garry Schneider's](#) nudes, which are, conversely, lit from without rather than from within; they're made in the dark at long exposures, using only a handheld flashlight to unevenly illuminate the subject. Images like *GM16* interrupt any predictability of the electromagnetic imaging process, and allow for a more metaphysical reading of the work.



"GM10", 2010, C-print, 40 x 30"



"AB1", 2010, C-print, 40 x 30"

Perhaps most subtle of all are the shifts in color between images. Instead of the presumed black and white range, the colors shift between cyan, beige, and yellow patinas. I am not clear if Maisel achieved this effect in the printing, or if somehow the X-rays were tinted at the time he photographed them, but it works as a mood-maker. The colors themselves feel aged and faded, resonating with the meaning of the object they capture.

Because the images are printed photographs (as opposed to photograms), Maisel can play with size and composition. The sculptural heads and vases appear to remain close to life-sized, but what about the miniature headless body in a sea of deep black in *History's Shadow GM20*? Or the horse's twisting body, apparently quite large, in *GM3*? The artist offers little clue as to their real scale; this disorientation is welcome within an otherwise consistent presentation.

This subject matter is well rooted in Maisel's long-standing interests. In his 2008 body of work [Library of Dust](#), the artist photographed rusting copper canisters, each containing the unclaimed remains of a cremated

psychiatric hospital patient. As both of these bodies of work demonstrate, Maisel has found a perfect vehicle in photography. It's a medium that can satisfy his curiosity with the beauty and seduction of

surface, while ultimately reinforcing the inescapable fact that, despite our best efforts, we can never *quite* see the inside of a thing.

– CARMEN WINANT

David Maisel, "History's Shadow", through June 4, 2011 @ [Haines Gallery](#).

Cover: "AB8a" & "AB8b", 2010, archival pigment prints, each: 40 x 30"

Conversation between David Maisel and founding curator of photography at the [Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco](#) and chief curator of the de Young Museum, Tuesday, April 26, 2011, 5:30 – 7 p.m.

Conversation begins @ 6 p.m. RSVP: allie@hainesgallery.com