

Stephanie Washburn's collages, other works mesmerize, puzzle

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Stephanie Washburn's "Telltale (Fire 2)," 2013, digital C-print, 32 x 50 inches. (Mark Moore Gallery)

In her second solo show at Mark Moore Gallery, Stephanie Washburn invites visitors into a world where things don't make sense. Lots of things in the real world don't make sense. So you might think that Washburn's show, "Walking Back the Cat," is not all that different from everyday reality. But it is.

A curious calm suffuses the installation. It makes you think that making sense is overrated.

There's a dumb, figure-it-for-yourself honesty to Washburn's seven collages. Each consists of an old black-and-white photograph, either a landscape or an interior, to which she has attached a bit of bubble wrap, a black trash bag, a strip of synthetic fur, a scrub brush's bristles, the mouth of a carefully cut plastic bottle or a sliced-in-half tennis ball, its symmetrical sections forming a pair of fleshy depressions.

Conventional Surrealism comes to mind. But Washburn's juxtapositions are too neutral, even bland, to buy into the over-dramatized shock tactics of 20th century Surrealism. Her five color prints also begin simply. Washburn starts by turning on her television, which has been set, face-up, on a table. She then arranges minimal still lifes on its screen, using a rock, a wig, some wool or bits of paper burning so brightly they appear to have been soaked in lighter fluid.

Printed large, the resulting photographs are mysterious landscapes that confound distinctions between fact and fiction, virtual and real, true and false.

Both mesmerizing and puzzling, Washburn's odd documents neither scream for attention nor pretend that modern life is a nonstop crisis, each episode more urgent and demanding than the last. Instead, her art's kinky tranquillity makes you want to keep looking long after you have stopped wondering what it all means.