

ARTFORUM

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Maximilian Schubert

OFF PARADISE

The spirit of Felix Gonzalez-Torres presides over Maximilian Schubert's show "Doubles" at Off Paradise, not in any easily identifiable formal way, but rather as a kind of genius loci—a sense of refined, melancholy simplicity and intelligence that suffuses the eleven works on view. The presence of Gonzalez-Torres, now nearly twenty-five years gone, is not unbidden. As he began to produce the works for the show, Schubert and Natacha Polaert, the gallery's founder and director, made an unusual request of the late artist's foundation: a loan of one of his pieces, to be installed not at Off Paradise, but in Schubert's Brooklyn studio. The sculpture, "*Untitled*" (*March 5th*) #2, 1991, a pair of bare lightbulbs on long white cords evoking Gonzalez-Torres and his partner, Ross Laycock—who died the year the piece was created—and titled after Laycock's birthday, was hung in a corner of Schubert's space. Although the explicit effects of this séance by artifact are unquantifiable, there's no question that what he made in the glow of Gonzalez-Torres's quietly heartbreaking memento mori radiates a similarly mournful poetry in its consideration of fragility, creeping disintegration, and the inevitability of loss.

"Doubles" is dominated by eight works that initially appear to be grisaille canvases, their surfaces creased, puckered, and bearing delicately drawn networks of fine dark lines that occasionally gather into small fissures. Upon closer inspection, however, the works in the series "*Untitled (fracture)*," 2014–, reveal themselves to be sculptures: polyurethane casts of stretched linen that have been broken and then painstakingly, if incompletely, reconstructed to look like paintings. Schubert's naming protocol nods to Gonzalez-Torres, whose titles were similarly designed—all initially "*Untitled*" and then, after a crucial deferral, particularized with a qualifying parenthetical. But Schubert's decision to withhold differentiating titles altogether from the individual pieces here goes further still, suggesting not just kinship between them, but proposing that they be understood as a single, collective entity. This community of objects, then, might be read as instantiations of one body, a body on which the

View of "Maximilian Schubert," 2020.
Foreground: *Stations*, 2020. Background: *Untitled (fracture)*, 2020.



signs of both damage and care can be detected. And like a form of *tratteggio*—the method of art restoration that advocates mending an image or object in such a way as to make the repair plainly visible, in order to honestly admit the forms of decay and injury that inevitably accrue with the passage of time—Schubert’s strategic ministrations eschew any desire for camouflage or perfection.

The corporeal presence conjured by these sculptures is made more vivid still in a pair of hanging boxlike containers that themselves each hold a pair of small, sterling-silver forms. Schubert cast these objects, nestled together in each frame like two little blankets, from hunks of clay that he had handled in the studio, his fingerprints and mark-making recorded by their soft surfaces, then translated into metallic permanence. This memorialization of infrathin bodily traces recalls Gonzalez-Torres’s 1991 billboard work, “*Untitled*,” featuring an image of an empty bed upon which the impressions of two figures remain—a recording of absence, made ever present. Meanwhile *Stations*, the most recent in a series of constructions involving propane tanks that Schubert has been making since 2017, completes a circle back to Gonzalez-Torres’s “*Untitled*” (*March 5th*) #2. Set on the floor in the middle of the gallery, the large white reservoir is fitted with a length of aluminum tubing that curls and twists in the air above it like a deformed thought bubble. The tube is crimped in a few places along its meandering course, the action creating small holes from which tiny licking flames escape. Just as the bulbs in Gonzalez-Torres’s sculpture live only as long as their filaments, the existence of these small hot lights is entirely dependent on the supply of the fuel that feeds them. The effect is a fittingly elegiac tribute to the artist who inspired the show and a confirmation that Schubert is no mere epigone, but rather a maker attuned in his own unique way to both the sweetness and sadness of finitude.

—Jeffrey Kastner