

William Toney

William Toney's work begins with eyes cast down exploring the street in search for the detritus that signifies a neighborhood. He collects found specimens for his photographic "stilllives." It may be a pack of cigarettes or Styrofoam cup with an interesting color or design. The objects reveal something of the distinct neighborhoods he explores.

He takes these castoffs and combines them with discarded flower displays gathered from his day job at the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art. Peppering personal objects such as sneakers, haircutting accessories, or a dollar bill, Toney diligently arranges them on a flat surface. In the beginning that meant the top of his bedroom dresser, lately it's been a larger table top in the studio he maintains at The Drugstore.

Toney's technique is intensive. He creates a backdrop, and using a variety of gels, manipulates light to a painterly wash. By illuminating and celebrating the ordinary objects, he turns them into lush and mysterious collages. He uses a medium format camera and limiting himself to 20 exposures, he meticulously changes the lighting and composition after each shot. He scans the images into Photoshop and cleans up the film looking for the one shot.

Stillife (white) is a soft color palette. The backdrop, a creased sheet, mimics a grid - an uncanny reflecting surface of delicate, colorful washes. The piece is reminiscent of a shrine, the kind found at the side of a road. At the base, a button with the face of Jackie Robinson is propped against a sneaker that disappears behind the edge of a Styrofoam cup. A pastel wash appears on a folded white tee shirt. Dead flowers couch a cigarette carton and a plastic drinking cup smudged with dirt. Carefully placed clipper guards resonate with communal stories and rituals. The baroque composition intimates more outside the frame than the eye can discern.

The clipper guards that appear in *Stillife (white)* become central players in *Stillife (BLK)*. Their riotous color against the dark background elevates their linear forms. Suspended in the composition they draw allusions to the barbershop. A box of cigars anchors the left side, its texture and colors project the paradox of advertising - "mild wild cigars, honey berry flavored, all natural tobacco." The Nike Swoosh logo appears on the back of a sneaker; across the image echoes a cold white swoosh from an upside down Newport box. A folded dollar bill reveals the word 'RICA and below, almost out of the frame, DON'T appears - a warning, a proclamation?

Stillife (Purple) is an image composed in the studio and reflects the dynamic space and distance given to the work. The table is bigger, and the distance from photographer to subject more pronounced. Color stars in this composition, infusing the dead flowers with a joyous range of warm and cool tints. Sticky sweet in its feel, the composition vibrates in wacky abandon. Layered blades of foliage explode in raucous vibrancy like a fireworks display. The soaring Air Jordan logo on the shoe is

repeated in the fan-like spread of a tropical plant. The street is evident in the cups, slips and stubs gathered from a walk into a neighborhood. For Toney each image is a moment of reflection, "between the world I inhabit and the way others view it."

Jose Faus