

**Amanda Means
at Ricco/Maresca**

After years of photographing in the landscape, Amanda Means brought nature into the darkroom by placing flowers inside her enlarger and projecting light through them directly onto photographic paper. In this "direct print" process there is no negative, but unlike photograms, in which objects are placed directly onto the photographic paper, a lens is utilized, allowing for variations in the size of the image. Using this method, Means created images of individual flowers that seem lit from within as if they have an auratic glow.

In her most recent series, she changed from flowers to a subject that really does glow from within, electric lightbulbs. This makes sense in the world of artistic dream logic, since some flowers come from bulbs. One also notes a shift from the petaled femininity of flowers to the tumescent masculinity of bulbs. They are posed upright in every shot.

This show contained mostly 24-by-20-inch black-and-white gelatin silver prints and color Polaroids. There were also two gelatin silver prints about twice the prevalent size. In all the work, Means applies the technical skills acquired during her years as a master photographic printer to the creation of subtle references to clichéd images associated with the sublime and the grotesque, and with cinema. Many of these effects were achieved by lighting the filaments of the bulbs for different lengths of time during exposure. Light Bulb 20 (2001), for example, was illuminated for a long time. The result is that the large dome of the bulb is surrounded by a gray round and filled with a deep black cloud. The atmosphere within the bulb is reminiscent of a moody, romantic landscape, but is rendered terrariumlike in its containment. This image contrasts sharply with Light Bulb 2 (CP), 2001, in which the bulb appears to be covered in tiny hairs, like a swollen testicle.

The Polaroids, many of them executed with color filters, approach the garishness of a Brian De Palma film. In *Light Bulb 00010C* (2001), the glass dome is surrounded by a midnight-blue atmosphere and filled with a yellow, bilious fog through which the plastic filament holder is viewed as if underwater (an additional effect of lighting the bulb for long periods). In another color Polaroid, the filament glows through the purple darkness like a UFO.

All of the work call forth a kind of awe at the artist's technical prowess. But as with Means's earlier landscapes (and unlike the more recent flowers), one detects a skepticism, a willingness to stare down virtuosity. Seen in this way, Means's choice of subject- a lightbulb not unlike the one in her enlarger- enhances the imaginative qualities of these photographs with a self-reflexive tension.

- Joe Fyfe

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