

# A C U R I O U S   H O R I Z O N

Christine Atkinson, Austin Irving, Rachelle Mendez

*Irvine Fine Arts Center | Summer 2020*

In the midst of an unabated global pandemic, waves of social unrest, and seemingly endless cycles of ecological catastrophes, the untenable material, environmental, and psychological schisms that have fomented in our lives have been irrefutably laid bare. It feels as though the metaphorical horizon beyond the quagmire of the present is just as unreachable as the line where the earth meets the sky. The exhibition *A Curious Horizon*, conceived months before the onset of the aforementioned cataclysms, presents a tripartite examination of ways in which control shapes and frays our relationship to ourselves and the world around us.

The exhibition features Austin Irving's photographs of uncanny doorways and austere architectural corners, whose engulfing scale and technical preciseness speak to their emotionally charged interiority. It includes Christine Atkinson's epoxy-encased flora precariously juxtaposed with synthetic sunset-hued gels, as well as a new series of poignant and timely sculptures made of chemically preserved wildfire ash. It features Rachelle Mendez's images of urban sprawl devoid of people and distinctive markers of time, re-presenting worn and hard-edged landscapes through an almost otherworldly light. These artist's works are tethered by their attention to the disparate power dynamics that have precariously built our inner and outer worlds, employing either a



Rachelle Mendez  
*Sunrise Blocks; La Puente*, 2018  
Fuji Crystal Maxima print  
36 x 24 in.  
Image courtesy of Rachelle Mendez

macro or micro-lens to explore how these inequities affect our relationship to natural resources and our notions of self.

Austin Irving's large-scale photographs *12th Ave & MacKenzie St, Vancouver, BC, Canada* (2012), *5th Cross Thindlu Road, No. 1, Bangalore, India* (2017) and *29th Street & 8th Ave, No. 2, New York, NY* (2016) from the series *CORNERED*, explore the theme of control





Austin Irving

*Grand Sierra, Mammoth, CA, 2013*

Type-C lightjet print

48 x 70 in.

Image courtesy of Austin Irving, Wilding Cran Gallery



vis-à-vis its effects on the human psyche. In each image of the series, Irving fixes her camera on the corners of nondescript interiors, transforming them into studies on the architecture—spatial and psychological—of confinement, straddling the boundary of ethereal and unsettling. Their scale and reductive palette of pristine whites and subtle greys evokes clinical cleanliness, examination, and categorization. As objects in space and emotionally evocative images, each photograph's matte coated finish absorbs all light thus producing a sense of temporal and bodily distortion similar to what one's actual body would theoretically experience in a black hole.

The large-scale photographs in the series *NOT AN EXIT*, including *Grand Sierra, Mammoth, CA* (2013) and *Eagle Rock, Los Angeles County, CA* (2013), depict closed doors and hallways leading to no discernible exit. Their affect blurs the line between constraint and personal agency. Whereas the works in *CORNERED* feel engulfing, *NOT AN EXIT* counterbalances by hinting towards the possibility of forward-moving potential. Irving's years-long project focusing on spaces of enclosure, suggest an obsessive impetus that speaks to the ways that the pathology of obsession, control's inseparable siamese twin, affects our body and psyche.

Pivot to Rachelle Mendez's photographs of Southern California's concrete sprawl, which imbue prosaic spaces with a poetic sense of longing and discovery. Produced through a sustained practice of observing the topography



Austin Irving  
*5th Cross Tindlu Road, No. 1,  
Bangalore, India, 2017*  
Archival Lightjet print  
40 x 50 in.  
Image courtesy of Austin Irving, Wilding Cran Gallery

of the suburbs, Mendez's photographs reimagine hard-edged landscapes as if they existed outside of our time and logic, devoid of the cacophony of people and cars, bathed in the light of an eternal dusk or dawn. Her photographs treat parking lots, industrial facades, construction sites and palm trees like uncanny portraits. Palm trees, for example, appear in many of her photos as decapitated figures, their tops cut off by the camera's lens as a reference for the way that a car's window crops and frames one's view. Her images shift the space of tension outdoors, where our society's century-long capitalist industrial project continues to pave over every inch of soil in order to reap financial profits from rent,



Rachelle Mendez  
*City of Industry Sketch*, 2019  
 Ink, watercolor, ironwater on canson deckled paper  
 18 x 24 in.  
 Image courtesy Rachelle Mendez

axes, human assets, etc. Her critique of the utilitarian logic of these spaces and their overall instability manifest in subtle gestures. Works such as *Orange Vertical; Brea* (2017) juxtapose orange and yellow hued concrete walls, colors evocative of quintessential Southern California summer skies, with foreboding shadows that seem to pierce into them.

Within the conceptual framework of the exhibition, Mendez's photographs function as a pivot between the interiority of Irving's works and Christine Atkinson's macro examination of control as it pertains to our relationship to the environment. *Mendez's City of Industry Sketch* (2019), for example, transforms an everyday industrial facade into a painterly sketch of decay.

Christine Atkinson's installation *Of Paradise III* (2020) draws upon issues of ecology, history, and myths of the American West. Comprised of palm fronds encased in epoxy propped on c-stands and backed by purple and magenta gradient gels which are

precariously balanced on clear wire, the work's visual seductiveness partly hinges on its physical instability. It's staging alludes to our mediated understanding of nature and Atkinson's choice of materials are informed by colonialisms shaping of California's landscape.

Atkins' trio of sculptures made of epoxy-encased wildfire ashes collected from 2019's California wildfire season titled *Fragmentation, Three* (2020), *Fragmentation, Two* (2020), and *Fragmentation, One* (2019), present somber and urgent statements on how our misuse of natural resources are making basic conditions for life unsustainable. Their jagged yet sleek edges, packed with earth, hair, and unidentifiable detritus evokes an uncanny sense of looking at the remains of our not-so-distant future. The danger of our collective dissociation from our actions on nature are similarly echoed in Rachelle Mendez's *Fire Season; Central California* (2018) and *Two Counties/Tule Fog* (2019). *Fire Season* shows a cloud of black smoke rising from behind two concrete barriers; the dark and dream-like *Two Counties/Tule Fog* depicts dark fog and overlapping tree silhouettes obscuring the sun.

As a cohort of artworks situated in an exhibition space that has mostly been closed due to the coronavirus pandemic, the works in *A Curious Horizon* seem to veer on the edge of being prophetic. Yet they are the result of discrete sensibilities that have long been attuned to the fraught parameters that contour our worlds. In their respective ways, they prompt us to consider where and how control manifests in our daily lives, where our agency lies, and what our responsibility is in wielding it.

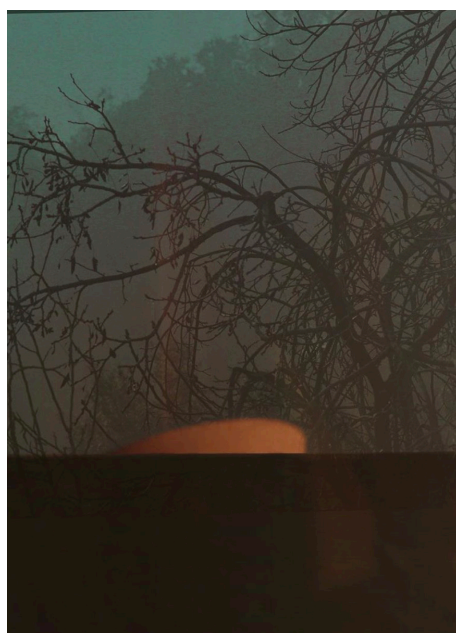




Rachelle Mendez  
*Orange Vertical; Brea*, 2017  
Inkjet print  
16 x 20 in.  
Image courtesy Rachelle Mendez



Rachelle Mendez  
*Fire Season; Central California*, 2018  
 Type-C lightjet print  
 12 x 8 in.  
 Image courtesy Rachelle Mendez



Rachelle Mendez  
*Two Counties/Tule Fog*, 2019  
 Type-C lightjet print  
 12 x 8 in.  
 Image courtesy Rachelle Mendez



Christine Atkinson  
*Fragmentation, Two*, 2020  
 Epoxy, wildfire debris, salt  
 6 x 6 x 6 in.  
 Image courtesy Christine Atkinson





Christine Atkinson

*Of Paradise III*, 2020

Strelitzia Nicolai leaves, epoxy, green, yellow, black dye, clear plastic inkjet film, mono-filament cord, c-stands, sand bags

Dimensions variable

Installation view, T-B, L-R:

Austin Irving  
*29th Street & 8th Ave, No. 2,*  
*New York, NY, 2016*  
Archival lightjet print  
37 x 50 in.

Austin Irving  
*5th Cross Tindlu Road, No. 1,*  
*Bangalore, India, 2017*  
Archival lightjet print  
40 x 50 in.

Christine Atkinson  
*Fragmentation, Three, 2020*  
Epoxy, wildfire debris, salt  
6.25 x 6 x 6 in.

Christine Atkinson  
*Fragmentation, One, 2020*  
epoxy, wildfire debris, salt  
6 x 6 x 6 in.

Christine Atkinson  
*Fragmentation, Two, 2019*  
epoxy, wildfire debris, salt  
6.75 x 6.75 x 6.75 in.



Installation view, L-R:

Austin Irving, *Garden City Hotel, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 2009*, Type-C lightjet print, 48 x 70 in.  
Rachelle Mendez, *Strategic Stones/Urban blocks; Indio, 2017*, Lightjet C-print Kodak Endura, 30 x 20 in.





## A CURIOUS HORIZON

Christine Atkinson

Austin Irving

Rachelle Mendez

Installation view, L-R:

Rachelle Mendez, *City of Industry Sketch*, 2019, Ink, watercolor, ironwater on canson deckled paper, 18 x 24 in.

Rachelle Mendez, *Olinda Oil Pump; Brea*, 2019, Mixed media, 14 x 11 in.

Christine Atkinson, *Of Paradise III*, 2020, Strelitzia Nicolai leaves, epoxy, green, yellow, black dye, clear plastic inkjet film, mono-filament cord, c-stands, sand bags, dimensions variable

Written by Virginia Arce, Summer 2020

Installation images by Yubo Dong