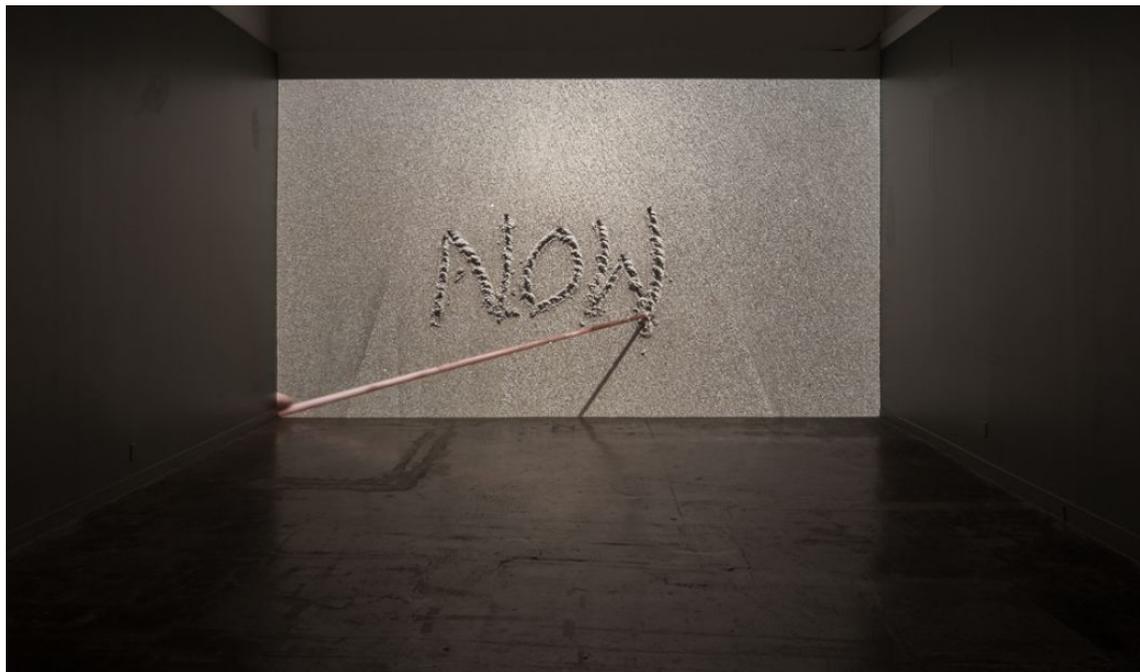


In the Now: Sam Falls at Ballroom Marfa

BY THEA BALLARD, ART+AUCTION | JUNE 07, 2015



Sam Falls's "Untitled (Now)" 2014, currently on view at Ballroom Marfa.
(Courtesy of the artist and Ballroom Marfa/ Photo ©Fredrik Nilsen)

Drawing from the sun-bleached environs in which his exhibition is installed, at Ballroom Marfa from March 14 to August 16, Los Angeles-based Falls here takes Donald Judd's unyielding geometry and lets it disintegrate in the Marfa sun. Works range from sculpture to video to sound, and most were crafted during a July 2014 residency in the West Texas art mecca. A room lined with crudely figurative patterns on earthy linen hangings — the fabric visibly worn after being left outside — recalls both 1960s Minimalism and the seemingly infinite stretches of fence that line the area's remote roadside cattle ranches. Acting as a counterbalance to these dissolving canvases are weighty tables, which once more reference Judd — here, his furniture making — and incorporate patterns drawn from tangram puzzles in a mix of monumental materials: copper, marble, steel, bronze. This combination cheekily, though reverently, proposes an alternative to the way art history seems intended to unfold in this sleepy town, institutionally and culturally indebted as it is to Judd and his immortal aluminum and concrete boxes.

Elsewhere in the exhibition, Falls lets go of this meditation on Minimalism, shifting his concern with temporality to a more general landscape. A pair of works site the word now: one, a gorgeous sound piece playing on a looping 12-inch record in Ballroom's main foyer, features a female vocalist singing the phrase alongside a four-piece band (the loop itself slightly frayed on the skipping LP). Unobtrusively wistful, whispers of the work can be heard as one moves about the space — a perhaps-incidental unifying element in a show whose varied mediums can, through their spatial seclusion, feel detached from one another. A video around the corner shows a section of beach on which the artist scratches *now* with a stick, rewriting the word each time the tide washes it away: a celebration of the ephemeral looped into permanence. Most pleasurable about this piece, though, is the way the camera lingers on a “now” Falls can't write — the glossy streaks of saltwater drying, patterns emerging in sand, moments that, however brief, continue to exist in repetition outside of this performance of sorts he captures on film.

Falls's habit of half-yielding to nature admittedly might feel contrived in a more cosmopolitan setting, but the way these works draw from and fold back into their surroundings has a charming effect — even bearing in mind that Falls is really (like so many art world types who place some claim to Marfa, whether or not they admit it) just a visitor to the area, as an outdoor installation, *Untitled (Life in California)*, reminds us. With its California plates, this red Ford pickup truck overrun with colorful blooming succulents reminds us on some level where the artist is visiting from. But, like Falls's other objects, it also bears evidence of its past and future — existing not just in space, but in time.

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