



Dreyfus Lathing Altar No 1, 2006, UltraChrome archival print (from film), diptych.

PAUL CLANCY

City Unconventional: Providence's photo-archeologist continues his search for the soul of a building.

When I first arrived in "Downcity" Providence one Saturday in July, 2007, Paul Clancy was the first person that I encountered. I remember this clearly, because the sunlit movie set of this hauntingly beautiful, yet so often underserved urban streetscape was utterly deserted.

With the art-deco "Superman Building" towering overhead, there was something disquietingly post-apocalyptic about the summer scene. I ducked into the then brand new AS220 Project Space to reorient myself. On display in the group show "Describing the Dreyfus," were Paul Clancy's haunting photomontages: a highly interpretive archive documenting the renovation of the Dreyfus Hotel, now housing, among other things, artists' studios, the Local 121 restaurant and the gallery I was taking refuge in. Manning the space was the soft-spoken artist himself, interpretive archivist to the past and future of Providence's skyline.

Fast-forward to October 2008 and I'm a few blocks away, talking shop over coffee in Clancy's live/work space – one of 35 now offered to the artists-in-residence of AS220's expanding downtown arts complex. A reflection of the buildings that Clancy so thoughtfully tributes, his improbably high and narrow studio loft, a former stairwell, is lined with tall bookcases; it houses photographic equipment, handmade

lenses and debris rescued from the various sites making way for Providence's architectural future. Marrying specifically addressed detritus with altered prints of local architecture, Clancy created his first ever installation this past summer for the Providence Art Windows Invitational, on suspended lathe wall panels now gracing the stairwell.

A self-taught photographer with a 20-year portfolio of commercial work under his belt, Clancy the artist ascends only reluctantly into the digital world. His medium of choice is Polaroid film, a material avoided commercially due to its unpredictable, "iffy" nature, not to mention that it is no longer manufactured. I ask Paul if this poses a problem for him.

"That's kind of it. I've always been attracted to things that are not the norm. And, shooting Polaroid film, which is 'technically' bad, but – beautiful...that has a lot of poetry in it."

There is a sense of nervous destiny surrounding development's encroachment upon the historic fabric of this long-distressed region. While celebrated urban renewal projects like Waterplace Park, Providence Place and even AS220's own "adaptive re-use" renovations have helped to pin Providence on the map as a "Renaissance City," there are silent casualties of this surge

that bear the weight of stone and history. Capturing specific moments of loss that make up this legacy is what Clancy feels compelled to document, through photographic artistry itself steeped in the mystery of the ephemeral.

"I'm sort of obsessed with the history of things, whether it's [a] building that's going to be demolished, or [a] building that's going to be rehabilitated," Clancy explains.

"Somebody should remember the way it was before it [becomes] the way it is. And then, hopefully, that photograph becomes an artifact, and not just a photograph. And that object might actually become something that will change over time."

High-resolution scans from Clancy's film archive yield unpredictable and ancient looking prints on Hahnemühle Photo Rag paper, on which he

has begun to experiment using various varnishes and mediums. His most poetic work possesses a stereographic, reliquary quality, with overlapping still frames presented as diptychs or optically seamless hybrids, as in the Dreyfus series.

The temporally bound film that Paul has shot over the years lends itself to slow-cooked interpretation and material experimentation. In storage, exposed film continues to oxidize and change over time. "Which is not a big concern of mine, actually," notes Clancy. "Archival is good, but I also like things changing. And I think that's going to become more and more important."

Paul Clancy is represented by The Gallery at 17 Peck, located on Providence's historic Federal Hill.

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