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Staged, painterly images from a Connersmith regular

By Kriston Capps • February 21, 2014



Maria Friberg, "calmation," 2012

"The painter constructs, the photographer discloses," Susan Sontag wrote in her 1977 required-reading collection *On Photography*. And it was true, for a moment. Since the late 1970s, leading photographers have rebelled against this notion; Jeff Wall, Cindy Sherman, and Gregory Crewdson all set about building perfect photographs and tearing down the medium to its foundations. Maria Friberg, a latecomer to this campaign, is something of a revanchist: Her photographs are staged yet unfailingly painterly.

Friberg's fourth solo show at Connersmith, "between solitude and belonging," might have been named "between construction and disclosure," so critical is this tension to her work. The artist's "duration" series finds her staging her photographs in dated but

splendid interiors. In these photos, which look as though they're all set in different Beaux Arts-era residences, Friberg captures youthful adults and children, mostly handling portable electronic gadgets. All of the figures are staged in states of repose, as if they are engrossed in but exhausted by their digital lives.

Yet the photos themselves form a sort of digital surface. The glare from Friberg's glossy laminated prints is so strong, they come to resemble the very devices they are lamenting. In "duration 1," a figure who kneels before a laptop is backlit by light streaming through narrow, arching windows; the inky black print is as shiny as the screen on a new MacBook. The figure kneels before the device; the viewer kneels before the photograph.

For "duration 8," Friberg stages a group of kids holding mobile devices in front of a six-panel window. Through the window, across the way, more windows can be seen—and in those windows appear the reflections of windows. Clearly Friberg is as interested in the surfaces she discloses as in the commentary she constructs.

The extreme veneer of Friberg's prints serves as a subtler element in this series than it did in the "still lives" photographs of crushed cars (one of which is on view in this show), another successful project. But as with the work she's done since 2005, an unfortunate noisiness resides in all her prints. The resolution of her photographic pieces on digital displays never rises to the level of a Retina screen, to extend her own metaphor. That's a problem with the disclosure of her photographs, and it affects what she is otherwise so great at building.