

## ARTFORUM

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### LOS ANGELES

## Marie Jager

PEPIN MOORE

The passage of time is a major leitmotif of Thomas Mann's 1924 novel *The Magic Mountain*. Indeed, one chapter of that bildungsroman, set in a sanatorium in the Swiss Alps, is even titled "Excursus on the Sense of Time." Really an excursus on the procedure for properly wrapping oneself in a blanket, that section quickly develops into a dialogue about the relativity of time, as two characters grow ever more aware of it during their attempted recoveries from tuberculosis: "Emptiness and monotony," writes Mann, "may stretch a moment or even an hour and make it 'boring,' but they can likewise abbreviate and dissolve large, indeed the largest units of time, until they seem nothing at all."

Borrowing Mann's title, Marie Jager's recent exhibition at Pepin Moore was likewise concerned with the passage of time, but the works gathered presented less an excursus than a demonstration of temporal forces, marshaled and rendered visible. *Queen Alexandra Sanatorium (Davos)* (all works 2011) is one of three pieces featuring an image of the imposing modernist building (currently serving as a hotel) thought to have inspired the setting of Mann's novel. For each of these works, a photograph of the sanatorium was made on architectural blueprint paper, each sheet partially masked, then exposed to the sun for an undisclosed amount of time, allowing a discernible triangle of the paper to fade. The effect of replacing the artist's proverbial hand with sunlight is surely a slight gesture, but also an efficient one. After exposing the prints for several weeks, Jager reclaimed authorship by removing them from the sun and suspending the process.

Similarly, the gradual accumulation of dust across three small vertical canvases resulted in handsome near-monochromes of consistent, all-over grayish marks that, on first inspection, appeared to be graphite or watercolor. One of these surrogate paintings, *Landscape Painting (Elysian)*, features a subtle "frame" of lighter gray at its edges—an impression of the stretcher bars beneath—presumably caused by the

weight of particulate pollution or other environmental effects on the canvas that had previously lain flat.

The title of these paintings refers to Los Angeles's Elysian Park, which is home to Dodger Stadium as well as the lesser-known Barlow Respiratory Hospital, established in 1902; the park is also not far from this Chinatown gallery. A series of historical images of the Barlow institution, again reproduced on blueprint paper but here mottled by rain, neatly articulates a parallel between the two sanatoriums; a slide show of Jager's casual photographs of the decrepit facility, presented in the gallery's loft space, revealed the artist employing a more familiar documentary approach—one that recalls Robert Smithson's slide lecture *Hotel Palenque, 1969–72*, itself a wry excursus on time. Titled *A Hundred Years (Barlow Respiratory Hospital)*, Jager's randomly sorted images of the building and its grounds—cracked concrete steps, a roof in shambles, mature trees now overgrowing their plastic pots and barrels, stumps, rust—all depopulated, so swiftly signify entropy and decay that it seems hard to believe that the clinic is, in fact, still in operation.

The slogans BUILT INTO THE SUN and OCCULT TOURISM appear bluntly stenciled with spray paint onto two other canvases yet operate like heavy-handed captions, and, given the light touch applied to the rest of the show, these felt out of place. Jager has frequently drawn from literary sources (having previously adapted Karel Čapek's visionary 1921 science-fiction play *R.U.R. [Rossum's Universal Robots]*, and M. P. Shiel's haunting global-disaster narrative, *The Purple Cloud* [1901]), yet her most compelling work takes us outside the precincts of language, exploiting the poetic possibilities of unexpected materials (rain, soot, sunlight) that simultaneously evoke the sublime and the mundane. It's clear that this artist pays attention to both, almost in equal measure, as the minutes, hours, and days pass by.

—Michael Ned Holte



Marie Jager, *Queen Alexandra Sanatorium (Davos)*, 2011, sun on architectural blueprint, 26 x 47".