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ArtSeen

# Colter Jacobsen: Essays

by Maddie Klett

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A small bird of gold gum wrappers hangs above the door of Colter Jacobsen's *Essays*, the San Francisco artist's first solo exhibition in New York in a decade, on view at Callicoon Fine Arts. I met Jacobsen while living in California, and the bird is likely a product of his personal collection of metallic wrappers, recalling a magpie's attraction to shiny things (which may explain its avian shape). The sculpture is deliberately left off the checklist, and its position and subtlety exemplify the "I put it there one day and it stayed" tone that permeates this installation of largely unframed photographs, sculptures, and drawings made of or on found materials: *Calendar (X)* (2018), is a cardboard rectangle tagged with pink spray-paint leaned against the gallery's storefront window; *Some, but not all, of my 8's (from Uncle Steve)* (2018) is made of coupon book clippings of the number eight.



Colter Jacobsen, *Sunset Repair (Walgreens)*, 2008. Found photograph, inkjet print  
7 × 9 1/4 inches. Courtesy the artist and Callicoon Fine Arts, NY.

Despite living at the center of tech development and corporatization, Jacobsen gravitates towards untrendy, outdated means of production—copy stores and drugstore photo counters. He collects duplicate prints people toss after getting film developed, and for *Sunset Repair (Walgreens)* (2008), displays a damaged, discarded photo of a sunset alongside the pristine print produced with Walgreen's digital repair service. Neither obsolete nor relevant, these places are the retail middlemen that Silicon Valley's direct-to-customer startups are attempting to phase out—the physical storefronts that may soon reside in our collective memory.

Memory is an important theme to Jacobsen, perhaps best known for his "memory drawings," for which he draws an image from a found photograph, puts the drawing away, then re-sketches it. Displayed side by side, the drawings map his memory's uncanny slippages. *Trevi Fountain 1 (hippocampus)* (2018) depicts the part of that Roman attraction where a male figure jockeys a horse from slightly different vantage points. When drawing from memory, Jacobsen reverses the perspectives so that they mirror each other, the

originals' distinct angles disappearing in their duplicates, marking how the artist's recollection of each converged.

Jacobsen began experimenting with time as a constraint in 2003, with his "Woods in the Watchers," one-hour timed drawing series for which he would give himself one hour to draw found images of men wearing watches—and often nothing else—sourced from personals in old gay-interest magazines. Jacobsen, who identifies as gay, got the impetus for the series in the early 2000s, when the early social networking site Friendster was a platform for cruising. He became curious

about how gay men found each other before the internet's mediation, and in response, made twenty-four drawings (one for each hour of the day) of men on the back of file dividers and other found papers. The show includes a new drawing from the series, Tim time (Woods in the watchers, one-hour timed drawing #28), (2018). In his fresh-faced depiction of Tim Dlugos—a poet purportedly fond of cruising—Jacobsen seemingly runs out of time, leaving Dlugos's bespeckled right eye unfinished.

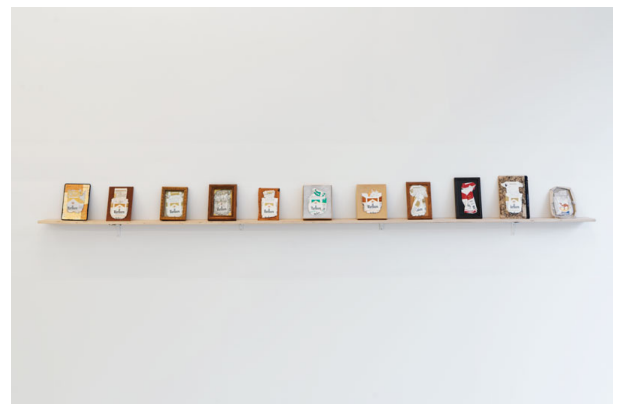
Fags for Joe & Bill (2018) is a series of mounted cigarette cartons dedicated to the late poets Joe Brainard and Bill Berkson—the latter, Jacobsen's professor at the San Francisco Art Institute. His nod to Brainard is helpful for unpacking a queer subtext in his time and "memory drawings." Besides nodding to an age-old anti-gay slur, the cigarette cartons may also reference Brainard's 1972 zine *The Cigarette Book*, which includes comics and texts about smoking, and features a line from Brainard's seminal book-length poem *I Remember* (1975): "I remember my first cigarette. It was a Kent. Up on a hill. In Tulsa, Oklahoma. With

Ron Padgett."<sup>1</sup>

Brainard's repetition of the title phrase in *I Remember* distinguishes between a then and a now, between his childhood in middle America and his adult life in New York. In certain moments, he recollects being closeted, emphasizing how coming out is something that happens—it has a before and an after. In his memory and timed drawings, Jacobsen imposes a before and an after upon the act of drawing. I am struck by how the artist's hyperawareness of time's passing calls attention to its ostensible burden for the queer community, the act of coming out forcing one to divide one's life—or at least one's outward assertion of identity—into two, distinct eras.



Colter Jacobsen, Trevi Fountain 1 (hippocampus), 2018. Graphite on paper, 5 3/4 × 16 inches. Courtesy the artist and Callicoon Fine Arts, NY.



Colter Jacobsen, Fags for Joe & Bill, 2018. Found cigarette boxes, frames, Dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist and Callicoon Fine Arts, NY.

This mapping of time and memory also acknowledges our collective amnesia of the recent past: the year 2008 may be stranger to turn over in our minds than 1998 or 1988. His pile of “8s” highlights that the majority of works here date either from 2008 or 2018— years that bracket our last decade, and reflect the amount of time since he last showed in New York. Like Walgreens photo processing or gum wrappers, Jacobsen calls attention to the strangeness of the proximate past, finding and collecting the pieces of our present that we have committed, or likely will commit, to living memory.

## Notes

Joe Brainard, *The Collected Writings of Joe Brainard*, ed. Ron Padgett, (The Estate of Joe Brainard, 2003) 249. .

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