

What's up at Boston-area art galleries

By Cate McQuaid | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT JUNE 11, 2013

Gallery Kayafas

Caleb Charland *Backscatter*

Maggie Stark *Still/Time*



Time-lapse still: "Still Time" video. 2013. 30 x 22" Archival Ink Jet Print ©Maggie Stark

Maggie Stark, also at Kayafas, took inspiration from the 2009 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall for her videos and photographs. She uses playground motifs to explore division and duality in crisp, understated, strictly choreographed works freighted with menace.

The "Still/Time" video and photos feature barely illuminated seesaws as people walk back and forth across them. Stark abstracts the scene; most of what we see is the rise and fall of the seesaws in a metronomic tick-tock. The performers are in the dark, but they wear headlamps that trace paths of light through the dimness. One photo from this series, with the sharp angles of the seesaw below and the wavering lights above, makes a stunning match to Charland's "Attempting to Paddle," but the moods, and the contexts, differ substantially. Stark uses play to delineate how fear and safety jockey in the human psyche. Charland simply plays.



Attempting to Paddle Straight at the Moon. 2012. 32x40" Archival Pigment Print
©Caleb Charland

Caleb Charland, a Mr. Wizard for the photography set, has an exhibit documenting some of his science experiments up at Gallery Kayafas. How many potatoes does it take to power a lamp? What does the life cycle of a lima bean look like? What happens when you drip hot candle wax on photographic paper?

Unlike Mr. Wizard, who had a science show for kids in the early days of television, Charland's endpoint isn't knowledge. It's beauty. To light up that lamp, he didn't merely plug it into dozens of potatoes. He found a potato field. The lamp in the uncanny "Potato Power, La Joie Growers LLC, Van Buren, Maine" takes on an eerie glow in a dusky blue light thanks not only to the spuds, but to a long exposure that gathered what light there was on film, and made a sparkling canopy of stars arcing overhead.

Some of Charland's exploits are more like Zen riddles than science. He set his camera and tripod in the bow of a canoe for "Attempting to Paddle Straight at the Moon." Who can paddle a canoe in a straight line? Again, a long exposure plays a crucial role. The canoe's prow points like an arrow at a boulevard of light, the moon's reflection on the water. But the moon itself is a horizontal squiggle in the night sky, galumphing back and forth with the boat's inevitable motion.

In the end, Charland's experiments are more explorations with camera, film, and photographic paper than they are investigations of the natural world. Maybe that's why the results are more like magic than science.

