

See's Candies, Payless, Supercuts 1, 2015 archival pigment print 48 x 127.45 inches
(print) 121.9 x 323.7 cm 49.88 x 129.5 x 2.5 inches (framed) 126.7 x 328.9 x 6.4 cm
Courtesy Alex Prager Studio and Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong



Alex Prager

Syrup with Medicine

糖漿配苦藥

Text : Christiner Chan Photo : Courtesy of Lehmann Maupin Gallery

Alex Prager's highly proficient artistic sense effortlessly lured her into the world of photography. Not only has she built a career on it, her interest also extends into filmmaking, placing her under the international spotlight of photography and film. Many of her achievements such as the 2012 Emmy award and publications in prominent magazines, including *New York Magazine* and *Vogue* have validated her professionalism and passion for her craft.

普拉格爾的藝術觸覺既敏銳又精湛，這種天賦毫不費力地將她捲進了攝影世界。她不僅將其喜好變成事業，更把它擴展到電影製作領域；使她成為攝影和電影界的國際焦點。她獲得的許多榮譽，例如 2012 年艾美獎，以及受《紐約雜誌》和《Vogue》等知名雜誌的採訪，無疑地證實了她的專業資格和對攝影的熱情。



Alex Prager is an American photographer and filmmaker born in the late 1970s, Los Angeles. She is known for her meticulously staged mise en scène. Prager started out as a photographer at the age of 21; now she is internationally recognized and has won countless international awards over the years as she matures in her craft. Her collaboration with Bryce Dallas Howard in the film *Despair* (2010) is one of her most renowned works, which is heavily influenced by the zeitgeist of 1960s Hollywood thriller, a recurring style recognized in her other works.

亞莉克絲·普拉格爾，70 年代末，出生於美國洛杉磯，攝影師兼電影製作人。她的影像以精細的場景及人物擺佈而聞名。從 21 歲時開始攝影創作，如今已是國際聞名，作品在世界各地知名的藝術場所展示。《Despair》（2010）是她與 Bryce Dallas Howard 合作拍攝的電影，也是她最著名的作品之一，電影深受六十年代美國好萊塢驚悚片的風格影響。該種風格也可以從她的其他作品識別出來。



Crowd #3 (Pelican Beach), 2013, archival pigment print, 59.5 x 92 inches 151.1 x 233.7 cm
Courtesy Alex Prager Studio and Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong

Prager has transformed many of her visions into reality with her Contax 645 that she has been using for the past 12 years. Besides taking aesthetically beautiful photographs, she cleverly uses them to stimulate the consciousness of viewers as her works challenge their perception of reality and raise awareness of voyeurism.

Prager is known for her provocative photographs that throws her viewers off balance. What our senses detect as odd emanates from familiarity. It is meant to mess with your mind as she said in her exhibition opening at the Lehman Maupin gallery, Hong Kong. One will surely find the line between reality and fiction obscured in her staged photographs and films. Though this can be unsettling, her works cradle you with the comfort of finding your own consciousness

普拉格爾對自己的相機非常鍾情，不會任意換新的。而她現在所擁有的 Contax 645 相機已經陪伴她十二年，更為她創作了許多作品。她不僅懂得拍攝優雅的照片，還懂得巧妙地利用這些照片衝激觀眾的意識，提醒觀眾們在現實中都正在以偷窺者身份觀察周邊實物。

她的作品以挑釁觀賞者的觀感而聞名，當你在她的作品中看到似曾相識的事物時，亦會同時感覺到怪異之處，這就是你的錯覺在打擾著你的感觀。正如她在香港立木畫廊的展覽開幕儀式上所說的一樣，她就是要逼使你質疑自己的感觀。讓你看出現實和虛幻之間的模糊界線。



Untitled (Parts 1), 2014, archival pigment print,
48 x 50 inches (print) 121.9 x 127 cm
Courtesy of Alex Prager Studio and Lehmann Maupin,
New York and Hong Kong

Scale Matters

Her work such as *See's Candies*, *Payless*, *Supercuts 1* (2015) creates a misconception that the photograph was natural, without post production. However, the brick wall is scaled up compared to reality. Noticing that certain components are either too big or too small to be natural, brings our focus to the brick wall. But according to Prager, it seems to be least appreciated out of her collection. Most

of her other works have crowds gathered together, and the masses have become spotlight. However, in this image, Prager deliberately spreads her subjects across the frame, diverting the focus away from the characters. The brick wall takes centre space, captivating and challenging the viewer's perception of reality and fiction. Are the people too small or are the bricks too big?

Subjects as Props

When Prager shot the *Hand Model* (2017) she was intrigued by the idea of people as props. It became a train of thought that never went away. She saw that lively human beings can be seen as lifeless objects that she manipulates within her camera frame. A sculpture of a fabricated finger with long nail painted in red was produced afterward and juxtaposed with the *Hand Model* photograph in the exhibition. The artist revealed that it might be her favorite piece. Perhaps the obsession of exploring the idea of people as props have left her favoring this inviting piece.



Hand Model, 2017 archival pigment print 80 x 56 inches
(print) 203.2 x 142.2 cm 81 x 57 x 2.25 inches
(framed) 205.7 x 144.8 x 5.7 cm
Courtesy Alex Prager Studio and Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong

比例的重要性

普拉格爾大部分的作品都看似自然，沒有經過編輯，但以《See's Candies, Payless, Supercuts 1》(2015) 這幅作品為例，我們可以察覺到這只是一個錯覺。而圖中的磚牆特別高，與真實尺寸不成正比，原來作品的焦點在於背景的磚牆。據普拉格爾說，在展覽中，這幅作品似乎是最不被賞識的。其他作品大多都有聚攏在一起的人群，群眾明顯地變成了聚焦點；然而，她在這作品中刻意地將人群散開，似是要把觀眾的專注力分散到畫面每個角落。磚牆佔據了中心位置，捕捉著及挑戰觀眾對現實和虛構的感觀：到底是相中的人物太小還是磚牆太高呢？

人物與道具

兩年前拍攝《Hand Model》(2017) 的時候，她特然想到她的照片中的人物也成為了她的道具，這個想法一直在她的腦海裡縈繞。從另一個角度看，活生生的人也可以成為毫無生氣的死物，在相機觀景器內任由被她操縱。她亦製作了一個巨型手指雕塑，是《Hand Model》(2017) 照片中的手指的模型，並在展覽中與照片並列。普拉格爾透露這可能是她最喜歡的作品之一，也許這是因為她沉迷於人物作為道具的想法，讓她對這件引人入勝的作品深感興趣。

Perfection in Every Detail

Much preparation is put into every piece of Prager's work, which often involves many temporary actors and a massive selection of costumes and props – each specifically chosen for the photo. Prager is very particular about her creative process, almost as if playing the role of a goddess, meticulously staging every single actor from head to toe. She spends a lot of time with each of her characters, deciding on every detail that will be captured. From the position of each actor and their pose, down to the colour of the

wig and the freckles on an actor's face, Prager does not leave any component undetermined. She mentioned that if a wig is not the right shade of orange, it has to be dyed to the perfect shade a day before the photoshoot. Yet she admits that as much as she choreographs the photos and films, she has no full control of the reality at the moment the shutter captures her subjects. Left with what she described as "moments of reality", she spends months editing the images to create the perfect shot that she initially envisioned.

Face in the Crowd (film still), 2013, three-channel video installation, color, sound dimensions variable, duration: 11 minutes, 52 seconds
Courtesy of Alex Prager Studio and Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong



© Alex Prager

完美無瑕的細節

普拉格爾在每一件作品中都做足準備功夫，照片中的臨時演員與大量的服裝和道具都經由她悉心選擇。普拉格爾的心思細密，創作過程非常仔細和挑剔，就像飾演著上帝的角色，從頭到尾精心打造每一個演員的造型。她專注相中每一位角色，確保他們身上的每一處細節，都毫無破綻。從每個演員的位置、姿勢、假髮的顏色和演員臉上的雀斑等，普

拉格爾絕不會錯過照片所需的元素。例如，她提及到若果假髮的顏色不是心目中的橙色色調，必須在拍攝前一天染成合適的顏色。然而她承認，儘管她刻意地擺佈照片和電影中的元素，她卻無法完全控制在快門捕捉到那刻的現實。接下來，為了達成她幻想中的完美影像，她必須花多個月時間編輯這些她形容為「真實時刻」的照片。



© Alex Prager

La Grande Sortie (film still), 2015, single-channel video, color and sound, duration: 10 minutes
Courtesy of Alex Prager Studio and Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong

Tangle between Reality and Fiction

Even though knowing that the blood in fictional films is fake, Prager said she would still buy into it. She emphasizes that she sees things on an emotional level. Her staged works contradict reality, "Blurring the line between reality and fiction" as she said. Reality and fiction live together, having real feelings and emotions happening within a fictional world. Photographs are very emotional for Prager as she asks herself deep questions about things that are happening in her life through the works she created. Her work, such as *La Grande Sortie* (2016) is about problems she faces being on stage, having stage fright and anxieties towards

both loneliness and crowds. She added that "These very real emotions live in a very fake world". As one can imagine being frightened watching a horror movie, Prager's work emphasizes these real emotions that fiction creates.

Prager is concerned with how people can easily be drawn into her works. Sometimes when one is faced with reality, they cannot look at it for an extended period. But fiction, like distance creates a space that makes reality easier to process. Looking at reality within fiction, "is like syrup with the medicine," as she puts it.

混淆現實與虛幻

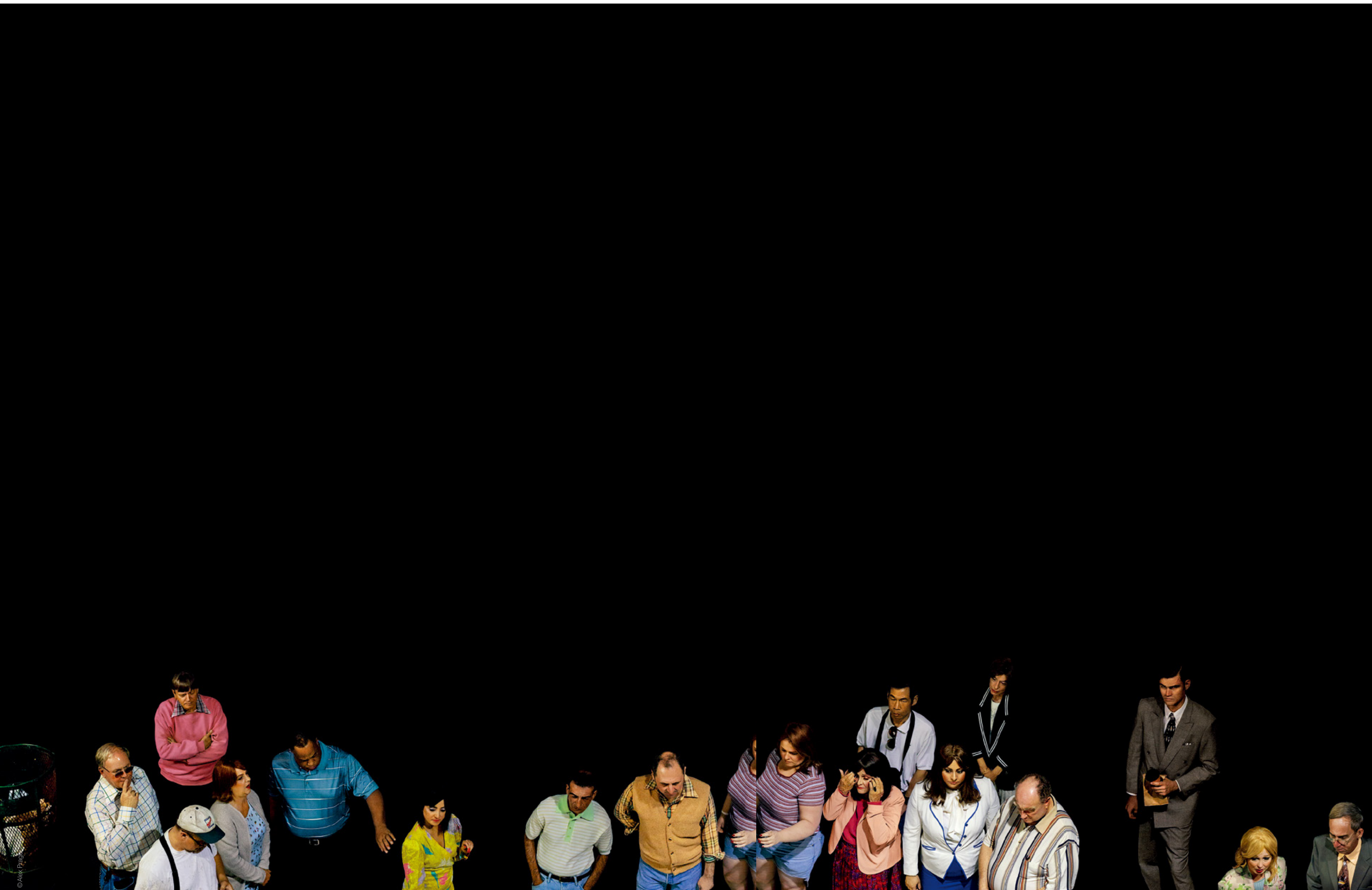
儘管知道虛構電影中的鮮血是假造的，普拉格說她仍然會相信是真的。她強調自己通常都是在情感層面上觀察事物。她的作品大多都是非常刻意的擺佈，與現實相矛盾，正如她所言，「現實與虛構之間的界線」模糊了。現實與虛構世界是並存的，我們能在虛構的世界中產生跟現實絕無區別的感情和情緒。照片對普拉格來說附帶情感，因為她會通過自己的作品去探索自己人生中所發生的事情。她的作品，如《La Grande Sortie》(2016)，是關於她在演講台上所面臨的焦慮，以及對孤獨的憂慮或面對著大量人群所產生的恐懼。她補充說：「這些逼真的情感活在一個非常虛假的世界裡。」我們可以想像到，看恐怖片的時候所感受到的驚嚇情緒是真實的，然而故事純屬虛構。

普拉格爾關注的是怎樣能讓自己的作品吸引觀眾。人們總不能長期面對著現實，因為它的殘酷往往會把我們煎熬得難以面對。但是，虛構的世界成了我們的管感與現實之間的緩衝。從虛幻角度觀看現實，就如「山渣餅配苦藥」的道理一樣，雖然現實像藥般苦苦的，但虛構空間就如山渣餅般成為了甜甜的隔膜，讓我們容易接受現實。



© Alex Prager

La Grande Sortie (film still), 2015, single-channel video, color and sound, duration: 10 minutes
Courtesy of Alex Prager Studio and Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong



Shopping Plaza 1,
2015 archival pigment
print 59 x 90 inches
(print)
149.9 x 228.6 cm
59.94 x 90.94 x 2 inches
(framed)
152.2 x 231 x 5.1 cm
Courtesy Alex Prager
Studio and Lehmann
Maupin, New York
and Hong Kong



Applause, 2016 single-channel video, color duration: 10 seconds 12.5 x 19.5 x 3.63 inches (framed) 31.8 x 49.5 x 9.2 cm
Courtesy Alex Prager Studio and Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong

Photography and Film

Every element within a frame is as authentic as the second they were captured and it invokes real emotions. Despite the edits, Prager insists that "Everything started in camera". One of her favourite works is *Applause*, 2016, which is a 10

second footage of people applauding to a performance. The looping of the applause creates an illusion of an endless applause which encapsulates the moment of admiration, a moment that cannot be recreated with any editing tools.

Despair Film Still #2, 2010, c-print, 16 x 20 inches 40.6 x 50.8 cm
Courtesy of Alex Prager Studio and Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong



攝影與電影

照片裡的每個元素都與被捕捉那刻的現實一模一樣，並能引發起真實的情感。儘管她的作品都經過編輯而成，普拉格爾堅持「一切都從相機開始」。所創作的短片當中，她最喜歡的是《Applause》（2016），它是一段長達十秒鍾不停地循環播放，產生了無盡無限掌聲的幻覺。普拉格爾的手指一按，捕捉了觀眾致謝的美妙時刻，而這個時刻從此都不能以電腦軟件的編輯工具再造。

觀眾的貢獻

把照片中的所有額外東西刪除後，迫使觀眾利用自己的想像力為她的作品貢獻屬於觀眾個人的旁述。以《Shopping Plaza 1》（2015）和《Hawkins Street》（2017）為例，普拉格爾故意把背景中的物體刪除並填黑，讓焦點集中於色彩鮮豔的人物，當中的留白豐富了觀者的想像力。©

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Contribute as Audience

Stripping away all the extra bits from a photo forces you to contribute your own narration into her works. For instance, in *Shopping Plaza 1* (2015) and *Hawkins Street* (2017), Prager intentionally blacks-out some objects in the background, leaving the main subject brightly illuminated with vivid colours. This compels her viewers to draw a narration from their own imagination.



Hawkins Street, 2017 archival pigment print 12.97 x 24 inches (print) 32.9 x 61 cm 13.97 x 25 x 2.25 inches (framed) 35.5 x 63.5 x 5.7 cm
Courtesy Alex Prager Studio and Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong