

VISUAL ART

CHARLES DESMARAIS *Art*

Debut pushes photography's envelope

Richard T. Walker's debut exhibition at FraenkelLab is an inchoate but engagingly energetic response to photography's last gasps of cultural authority.

Starting where landscape photographers of the last century left off, Walker makes elegant sculptural and pictorial assemblages that pump up the grandeur of mountain topography, only to prick that bubble, literally as it reaches its peak. Entering the exhibition, you can't help but think of Ansel Adams and his elaborately seductive Sierra Nevada fictions — all knife-edge focus and startling contrasts, infused with metaphor.

But where the light glowing within an Adams photograph, coming from behind a bank of clouds, is made to seem divine, Walker gives us, in a work titled "An Outline of a Thought as It Refers to Its Inner Self," a neon-tube faux monolith wrapped around a single bare branch.

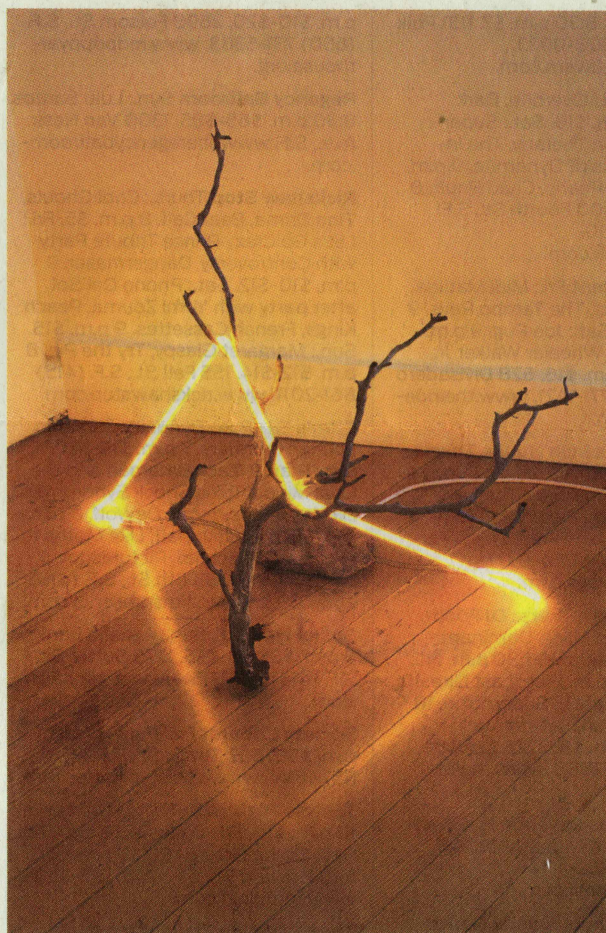
In "An Elusive Equivalence," an insignificant stone is likened to a far-off crest, depicted in both a photograph and an engraving. A clumsy hand gesture

Richard T. Walker: Contingency of an Afterthought: Through July 16. FraenkelLab, 1632 Market St., S.F. (415) 347-8366. <https://fraenkelgallery.com/fraenkelab>

grants the simple rock a makeshift claim to the sublime; a photograph is elevated to the plane of art; the credibility of multiple pictorial layers is tested.

The show presents a collection of works in a range of media, including video and something approaching music, precisely arranged into a larger holistic installation. It's all a bit too controlled, too delicately balanced — you'd like to think the work could survive some jostling, a few bounces both physically and intellectually. But the risk he incurs in striving for such equilibrium leaves you excited to see where Walker is headed next.

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Fraenkel Gallery photos

Top: The Richard T. Walker exhibition includes this multimedia installation. **Above:** With "An Elusive Equivalence" (2016), Walker likens a stone to a far-off crest with a clumsy hand gesture granting the simple rock a makeshift claim to the sublime. **Left:** "An Outline of a Thought as It Refers to Its Inner Self."