

DAVID POLITZER

David Politzer is an artist based in Houston, TX. He received his MFA in Photography from Syracuse University and a BS in Art from Skidmore College. David also studied at the Glasgow School of Art and the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture.

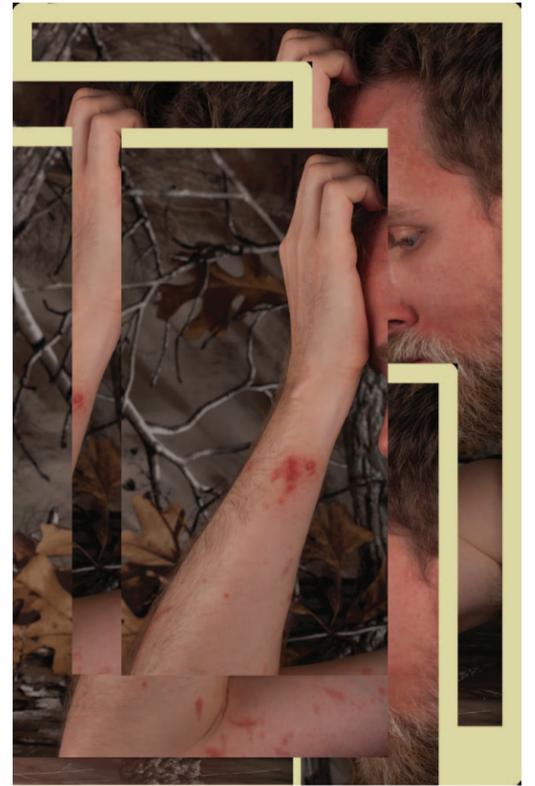
Solo exhibition venues include Artspace (CT), Museum of Northern Arizona, Real Art Ways, Roswell Museum and Art Center and Lawndale Art Center. Group show and screening venues include the Bronx Museum of the Arts, New Mexico Museum of Art, the Soap Factory, Southern Exposure, Vox Populi, video_dumbo and Gallery Korea. He was an artist in residence at Djerassi, Yaddo and Roswell Artist in Residence.

Politzer also teaches in the Photography and Digital Media Program at the University of Houston.

David Politzer, *Portrait Abstracted*

“Exhilarating to find places but then I see his images in the bathroom and I think that’s what they’ve become: kitschy charming records of a romanticized bygone era that never existed in the first place. It’s all a lie.”

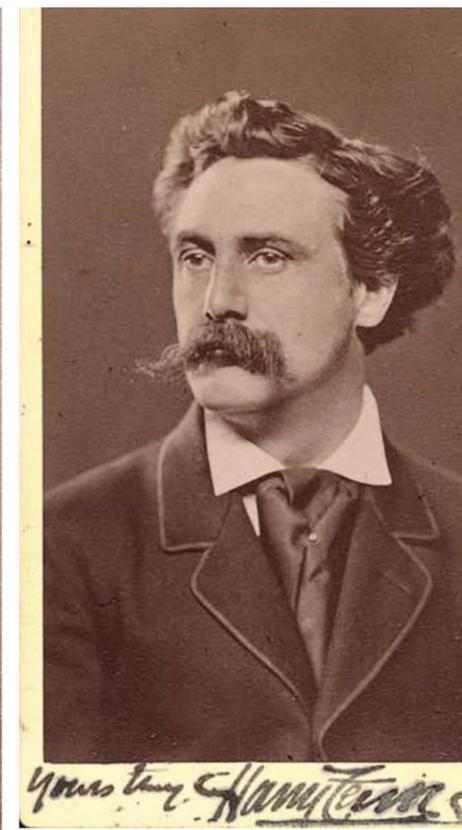
–David Politzer



VIEWERS GUIDE

1. Have you visited a place that you first experienced through pictures? How did the experience compare to the image?
2. In what ways do you think our contemporary experiences with the landscape are different from people in the nineteenth century? How might these differences influence our understanding of nature?
3. Do you have a relative or personal idol who you want to better understand? How would you go about that journey?

At right, l-r: David Politzer, *Mauch Chunk Urinal*; Portrait of Harry Fenn, detail. Cover: David Politzer, *Main Sequence*.



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HARRY FENN

IS IN

THE BATHROOM AGAIN

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SUMMER ARTIST IN RESIDENCE
AUGUST 4–26, 2017



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The etchings that artist Harry Fenn created for the 1872 publication, *Picturesque America*, have become ubiquitous images of our country's natural beauty. At a time when the nation was emerging from the civil war, these now familiar vistas were important tools of propaganda, presenting a vision of the beauty, virtue, and endless prospects of the country's natural landscape. Today these prints are found in the visitor centers, restaurants, and restroom walls of the sites they celebrate. For artist David Politzer, attempting to recreate some of Fenn's most recognizable vistas has become an exploration of the complexities and challenges inherent in depictions of the natural environment. How does the promise of an image compare to the experience of the place being represented? Can an artist truly capture the awe and wonder of a place of great beauty? In addition to exploring these questions, the work presented in this exhibition is highly personal. This project has been a means for Politzer to better understand his great-great grandfather, Fenn. Politzer's own identity as an artist, teacher and avid hiker are intertwined with his sense of kinship to a man he knows little about. In a journal entry from June 27, 2017, during a trip through Hot Springs, NC Politzer asks himself, "Am I trying to find a connection to him (Fenn)? Or to his work? Him as a man? Or his work as a record of a history of nature?" Each of these questions underlies the images Politzer has created and provides the viewer with multiple points of entry into this rich body of work.

While Politzer has visited many of the sites Fenn captured, this exhibition focuses on the area around Lookout Mountain in Tennessee and the French Broad River in Western North Carolina. The room sized mural is a composite of various Fenn images, reconfigured to focus on Politzer's interest in the skewed perspective Fenn often imposed on his landscape as well as emphasizing the solitary and sometimes menacing figures found throughout the images in *Picturesque America*. Do these figures represent Fenn in the landscape? Are they stand-ins for the viewer to imagine themselves in this space? Or is Fenn creating a narrative, open to interpretation?

Furthermore, what do these images reveal about the man who made them? In another journal entry Politzer states, "Fenn only went so far. Did he climb? Did he leave his carriage? Did he have assistants, guides, a caravan, etc? I've admired him and his work for so long but was he more than an opportunist cherry picking from the already established tourist spots?" While most of the scene's Fenn depicted in his landmark publication can be viewed today, they have dramatically changed as a means of accommodating tourists making it impossible for Politzer to understand the land in the way Fenn experienced it. A video of footage collected on his journey and projected on a monumental mustache (emulating Fenn's impressive facial hair), reveals the extent to which contemporary encounters with the natural environment have been manufactured for the ease of tourists. These encounters with nature are in large part Fenn's legacy, a fact that Politzer seems to struggle with.

Despite the disappointments and frustrations of Politzer's journey, his sense of humor and patience and desire to look afforded him moments of genuine wonder with the places Fenn depicted. Five vertical panoramic photographs, installed throughout the gallery offer a glimpse of Politzer's experience. While the photos are not necessarily of the same vantage point Fenn captured, they represent moments of connection, reverence and artistic continuity over generations.

ANNAH LEE, DIRECTOR OF ARTISTIC PROGRAMS

Top-bottom:
David Politzer, *Sunset Rock*,
detail; Harry Fenn, *Lookout
Mountain View from
the Point*, detail, from
Picturesque America.

