

# Art in America

October 2006

## Matthew Pillsbury at Bonni Benrubi

Since the 19th century, photographers have employed the view camera, long exposures and available light for photographic studies of architecture and landscape. The exhibition "Time Frame"—the product of a trained,

modern eye, a large-format camera and quite long exposures—offered the work of Matthew Pillsbury, a New York photographer in his early 30s. The show included several black-and-white pigment ink prints from the series "Museum Hours," commissioned by the *New York Times Magazine* in October 2004, along with images culled from his series "Screen Lives" and "Zero Hour." It added up to an absorbing body of work.

Pillsbury acknowledges his debt to Hiroshi Sugimoto's celebrated long exposures of movie-theater screens; in the series "Screen Lives" Pillsbury produced compelling images that seem lit from within the mise-en-scène by the ghostly glow of television screens, computer monitors and other significant light sources. His titles include location, date, duration of the exposure and occasionally the source of illumination and featured subject. The 13-by-19-inch *Nathan Noland, Grand Hyatt Tokyo, CNN Japan, Monday, February 7th, 2005, 5:09-5:23 am* owed much of its haunting quality to a studied composition, a nude male subject standing before a small round basin in a bathroom

illuminated only by the light of a small television and its variously reflected screen and light. Viewed from the side, front and back in a complex arrangement of mirrors, Pillsbury's subject seemed evanescent, rendered transparent by his movements during this 14-minute exposure. The figure seated before a laptop screen on a picnic table in *Full Moon Rising Over Beaver Bay, Monday, May 23rd, 2005, 9:52-10:46 pm* seems to all but disappear, the face barely legible and the moon a diagonal streak of light caught in its rise above a far horizon.

The skeletal remains in the 30-by-40-inch *Dinosaur Coming to Life, Museum of Natural History, NYC, 2004* from Pillsbury's "Museum" series seem more substantial and enduring than the blurred forms of the children gathered around. The introductory lines of Theodore Roosevelt's "Youth," an exhortation to manly boys, carved in the blocks of a vast stone wall to the beast's right, went unnoticed by all but the photographer. Inexplicably attractive to the untutored eye, Pillsbury's sci-fi image in the "Zero Hour" series, the 30-by-40-inch *Zero Hour, Mojave Desert, Sunday, November 20th, 2005, 7 pm* pictured fans as they flocked to the secretive desert launch of a much-sought-after digital action computer game. A monumental silvery banner inscribed XBOX 360 hovered above the entrance

to the site, lit from within by the host's strategic lighting and fixed by Pillsbury's ability to harness it to illuminate the darkness.

—Edward Leffingwell



Matthew Pillsbury: *Full Moon Rising Over Beaver Bay, Monday, May 23rd, 2005, 9:52-10:46 pm*, pigment ink print, 13 by 19 inches; at Bonni Benrubi.