

GALLERIES

Trains of thought in arresting video artworks



RAFIUS FANE GALLERY

Maggie Stark makes use of praxinoscopes in her work.

By Cate McQuaid

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Time rules train stations, but they have a feeling of bottling a moment — commuters perennially entering and exiting in a blur that does not change. In her show at Rafius Fane Gallery, video artist Maggie Stark uses imagery of trains, trolleys, and stations to weigh the contradictions of time.

Layers of history shimmer in her black-and-white projection “Cedar Grove (Mattapan Trolley),” depicting the MBTA’s Mattapan-Ashmont high-speed line, an adjunct to the Red Line that employs historic streetcars dating back to the 1940s.

Two images of the same trolley emerge symmetrically from the center of the video. It’s like watching a kaleidoscope, suggesting that time mirrors as much as it proceeds, and patterns of life reconfigure within it. In another scene, ghostly streetcars pass through Cedar Grove Cemetery, as if the past still lives, and phantom trolleys service the dead.

Stark returns us to the present in her “Station Stop (S-Bahn Ring)” series, shot from a train line that makes a one-hour circuit of Berlin. In her short loops on vertical monitors, trains reverse direction, or people appear in mirror images like the one in “Cedar Grove (Mattapan Trolley).” It’s as if capturing time with her camera, Stark can stop it, dissect it, and reveal its tricks.

Which brings us to her third body of work, three praxinoscopes — animation machines invented in the 19th century.

Like a zoetrope, a praxinoscope is a cylinder with images placed along its inner wall that come to life as the cylinder spins. But a zoetrope has viewing slits, and a praxinoscope is open; imagery reflects in a mirror surrounding the central hub. Stark’s pieces are dodecahedrons, and in one, cutouts of a clock face tick the hours away.

Images of people and trains move as the viewer spins these works, and stop when the viewer halts the motion. Perhaps that is Stark’s point: We can’t really stop time, but if we pay attention, we can pause it, if only for a moment, and step into an eternity.

MAGGIE STARK: STATION STOPS

At Rafius Fane Gallery, 460 Harrison Ave, through June 16. 508-843-2184, www.rafiusfanegallery.com

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