

Austin Irving: "Not An Exit" at Wilding Cran Gallery

By Molly Enholm

art ltd. Magazine v. 9 no. 4 - July/August 2015



The title of Austin Irving's recent exhibition at Wilding Cran Gallery, "Not An Exit," might lead viewers to anticipate the opposite— that the LA-transplant photographed scenes that create the illusion of said exit, before confounding our expectations. This, however, is decidedly not the case. Instead, the vantage point offered by Irving's empty hallways seem to lead the viewer ever inward, toward the heart of an urban labyrinth. The photographer relates her inclination towards the somewhat claustrophobic subject with her upbringing in the concrete jungle otherwise known as New York, though the subjects of her work, save one, hail from locations far beyond the familiar Manhattan skyline.

Each of the large-scale digital prints (ranging from five to six feet tall, and shot with a traditional 4x5 view camera) are carefully constructed from specific vantage points that result in unsettling distortions on the viewer's perspective and ability to enter into the scene. The floors seem to rise awkwardly, and in some cases aggressively, pushing the viewer back while creating a vague sense of unease. This leads to the next conundrum, for these interior scenes are

simultaneously familiar and remote. Although they seem to be archetypes, a public restroom, '70s office building, or sterile hospital hallway, they lack any concrete clues or signage to indicate where these twisting passageways actually exist. Irving seems to take delight in creating something not quite attainable, and our presumptions of place quickly change to a visceral, anxious dread: where are we, and exactly how do we get out?

In Irving's previous series, she photographed entry/exit points, pathways and souvenirs shops located within the familiar tourist-cave experience, which might be read as highlighting the commodification of nature through prepackaged and pre-routed experiences. These images portray popular destinations such as Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico, Howe Caverns in New York, and Dau Go Cave in Vietnam— although without Irving's titles, the novice may be hard pressed to differentiate between them. Relating the two bodies of work, the interventions into the natural formations bear a striking resemblance to the angular architectural pathways of the current series. Along with the delicious vertigo of Irving's dizzying corridors is the somewhat dismaying realization of the universality of these architectural formations

Image: *St. Patrick's Cathedral School #1, New York, NY 2013*

Austin Irving Type-C lightjet print 48" x 64" Photo: courtesy Wilding Cran Gallery

Los Angeles Times

Review Austin Irving photographs spaces with no exit

By Leah Ollman

The nine color photographs in Austin Irving's absorbing show at Wilding Cran read as existential propositions as much as visual documents. Each is shot looking through a doorway or into a hallway, but none of the spaces promise passage. They all recede into what seem like dead ends, suffocating cul-de-sacs of glaring banality.

One site photographed in Eagle Rock (all are titled by location and some by function as well) shows a door absurdly set in a wedge-tight corner. Kafka must have served as architectural consultant; the situation reeks of futility. A Texaco rest stop in Ehrenberg, Az., could pass as an interrogation facility or perhaps an abattoir. Its gray-tiled walls seem designed to be hosed clean of evidence.

Throughout, the L.A.-based Irving focuses on surfaces insistently generic, bureaucratically bland and bleak, absent all niceties of fine detail or ornamentation. The spaces, characterized by industrial carpet and fluorescent lighting, are not attractive; her canny perspectives make them feel downright desperate.

She ups the visceral impact of the images by printing them large (most are 4-by-5 or 6 feet), with a matte surface. Mounted on thin aluminum-composite panels and unframed, their spaces feel nearly continuous with our own. We experience them bodily, not just visually, as if stage sets dense with metaphorical implication.

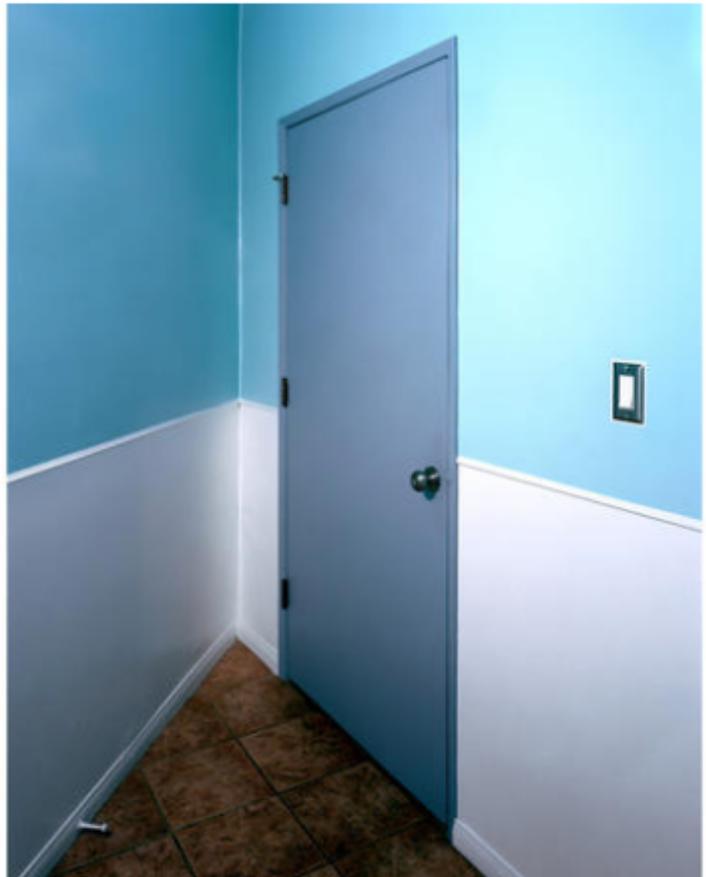


Photo: "Eagle Rock, Los Angeles County, CA" by Austin Irving at Wilding Cran. (Austin Irving / Wilding Cran Gallery)