

DOWNTOWN

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Photographer Jimi Billingsley is not an artist who plays it safe. Whether it is shimmying through locked gates with 25 lbs. of camera equipment, encountering shady characters while exploring the cavernous remains of abandoned power plants, or convincing authorities that catch him in the act as to why he should not be arrested, Billingsley firmly believes that if you want the picture, you have to take some sort of chance. In his fourth solo exhibition *We're Not Talking about Pretend* currently on view at Pablo's Birthday gallery, moments of chance are what Billingsley has captured best.



Hudson street (Through a glass darkly), New York, 2010, 18" x 21", Digital C-Print

In the summer of 2010, Billingsley packed his '99 Taurus Station wagon with a Horseman 4" x 5" view camera, lights, a tripod, and a few necessities and embarked on a three month and 11,000 mile road trip across the United States. As Billingsley explains, "I had been photographing New York for 10 years. The vernacular of New York City was going to give me one kind of photograph, and from the idea I had, I wanted a broader pallet to paint from." The idea Billingsley refers to deals primarily with "happenstance". Billingsley's photographs capture the physicality and reflection of America's urban blight as seen through the pane of a window. In pieces such as *Hudson street (Through a glass darkly), New York*, elements including etched doodles in whitewash and water-damaged cardboard come into view with the ephemeral reflection of skyline and cityscape while seamlessly bleeding into an interior view of an empty room. The power of such a complex moment is compounded by the realization that nothing in Billingsley's images have been edited or altered. The photographs capture an honest but transient moment, dependent upon the serendipitous combination of light, location and luck.

Billingsley's system for finding his subjects also occurs somewhat by accident. His process consists of simply driving and looking. Along his cross-country journey, other works such as *Power Station 1, New Orleans* came to be after discovering a decaying factory outside of the city. Although decay seems to be a prominent element in *Power Station 1, New Orleans*, as in many of Billingsley's photographs, capturing situations of decay is not his primary focus. Rather Billingsley tries to find circumstances that suit the relationship between observing flatness and perspectival space simultaneously. For Billingsley, the choice of composition in his photographs engages his personal interest in formal elements. As Billingsley clarifies, "I'm interested in the way the layers come into conversation with one another to create a kind of tension, or what I call an 'activated plane'. The compositions seem to break down into complexities, but not so much that you don't want to look at them." Aesthetic intention aside, it's impossible not to marvel at Billingsley's immediacy in capturing moments of abstraction in urban landscape that equally take on a narrative style through their rich layers of content. However, for the viewer, Billingsley's images dually function as a reminder of the visual gems that coexist around us daily, often without our recognition. In essence, Billingsley reminds us to stop and look at the phenomena that we have been missing.



Power Station 1, New Orleans, 2010, 24" x 30", Digital C-Print

Jimi Billingsley, *We're Not Talking about Pretend* is on view from January 20th through February 27th, 2011 at Pablo's Birthday, 526 Canal Street, New York, New York 10013, 212.462.2411, www.pablosbirthday.com. The opening reception is hosted by Downtown Magazine and will take place on Thursday, January 20th from 6-9pm.

- Stacy Seiler