

Los Angeles Times

Review Julien Bismuth tinkers with the DNA of his images at the Box

Sharon Mizota

October 16, 2015, 3:30 PM

Whether of gardens, dogs or vegetables strewn in the street, the photos in Julien Bismuth's exhibition at the Box are all subjected to the same manipulation.

Each image is paired with a text, and the text is digitally encoded into the image, altering the picture to varying degrees.

Bismuth's cousin, an engineer, wrote a program that replaces the ones and zeros of a digital photograph with the ones and zeros of a text file. Basically, Bismuth is messing with his images' DNA, creating mutations.

He provides an unaltered copy of each photo for comparison, and the differences range from minuscule shifts in color, to the striations of digital corruption, to flat-out dissolution. At the highest level of interference (or integration, as it were), the image becomes a field of gray, digital mush.

The work pushes us to consider the boundaries of human perception and the conventions by which we recognize and "read" things, whether images or text.

A photo of live dogs lounging around a sculptural dog is instructive. Different things often look alike; the differences that matter aren't always things you can see.

There's really not that much divergence between the altered and unaltered prints ... until there is. And then it is absolute: that gray mush. Operating at digital ground zero, Bismuth pushes the computer to places we can't follow.