

art ltd.

Nicholas Frank: “Post-Self” at Western Exhibitions

by james yood
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Everyone's tired of hearing about “selfies,” the early front-runner in 21st century narcissism (though they even make me sympathetic to politicians, who daily are subjected to a close clinch with a series of idiots holding a cellphone at arms length). Nicholas Frank takes us back to a long-forgotten simpler and sylvan time—you know, a decade ago—when having your picture taken in front of some thing or place required the participation of another human being who would hold the camera or cellphone and do the deed. Frank gets around, and on trips this last decade to Great Britain, Russia, and China he engaged in the surreptitious act of taking pictures of people taking pictures of people. They look like a bit like a one-person firing squad, someone stands perfectly still in front of something, and the other stands or squats 10 or 15 feet away, also perfectly still, takes aim and shoots. Frank's project here is a wry slice of the human comedy, looking at a practically universal situation as a simultaneously intriguing and pathetic act, proving that old adage that wherever you go, there you are.

Frank is a witty and intelligent artist whose work falls between the ruminative and the quirkily revelatory. He enlivens this project by framing the inkjet prints of photographs in individual largish frames that are—I looked it up—isosceles trapezoids, meaning that two of the four unequal sides (here, always the left and right) are parallel while the other two are not. While the images are always plumb horizontal they don't appear so at first, seeming askew or foreshortened by their capriciously asymmetrical framing. This project had me humming “Picture Book” by the Kinks (go ahead, YouTube it) for weeks afterward. A second project by Frank, *Greatest Skips* (2015), had him amass all of those that were on his LP record collection and create another LP that for some 30 minutes (both sides) played his skips one at a time over and over. Hearing dozens of 3-4 second skips individually repeated 30 or 40 times in a row turns each one into a kind of chant, fragments of music sometimes vestigially recognizable. It's a bit of a retro Cage match, a refusal to overlook the accidents that seem like imperfections but actually invite a fresh rethinking of the medium. Nicely done!