



ALEX DELFANNE/FRIEDRICH PETZEL GALLERY

The British artist John Stezaker's portraits merge photographs of two people into one.

John Stezaker

The Bridge

*Friedrich Petzel Gallery
535 West 22nd Street, Chelsea
Through Saturday*

Conventional surrealistic collages juxtapose wildly diverse images. By contrast, those of the British artist John Stezaker conjoin slices of similar images to uncanny effect. The ones he's become known for in New York in the past couple of years marry parts of two old, black-and-white movie actor portraits. The parts line up more or less approximately along straight, diagonal edges; often they are of opposite sex.

The means are simple but the effect is darkly comical and mentally violent. The mind tends to unify the two halves into one figure, yet the differences between the two sides makes that figure seem monstrously disfigured. There's a sense of a schizoid persona; the disintegrated portrait implies a kind of psychosis.

In a sense, Mr. Stezaker's work is an extended meditation on photographic imagery and its effect on consciousness. (He began as a conceptualist in the early 1970s.) A part of the mind responds to photographic images as though they were real; Mr. Stezaker's conjunction collides with our trust in the seamless-ness of reality. This happens despite how obvious it is that we are looking at mere photographs, and antique ones at that.

A number of collages in the exhibition join different landscapes and views of castles from old tourist photo books of Prague. These are less aggressive than the portraits. As the title of the series, "The Bridge," suggests, the artwork bridges the gap between divergent states of consciousness, and the effect is dreamily poetic.

KEN JOHNSON