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Los Angeles Critics' Pick

Allen Ruppersberg

MARGO LEAVIN GALLERY
812 North Robertson Boulevard
February 11–March 11



This tightly focused show of photoworks from 1970–73 highlights Allen Ruppersberg's interest in the magic of mythmaking. Channeling Houdini, the artist escaped the studio to the streets of Los Angeles where he explored the glitter of Hollywood fantasy amidst the grime of Hollywood Boulevard. The resulting works intersect performance and photography, art and life, seeing and believing. *The Fairy Godmother*, 1973, and *Summer Days*, 1971, suspend pedestrian encounters in moments of awkward and anticlimactic wonder. In *To Tell the Truth*, 1973, typewritten lists of objects form the framework for a mystery. In the corresponding photos, items appear before the masked artist (a recurring disguise), but not the objects introduced by the text. What begins as a suspenseful game of make-believe ends with the artist putting a gun to his head (a recurring resolution). "A Murder," reads the text. Each work consists of a narrative unfolding over a series of photographs, and the parallel stories ask the observer to navigate the incongruous paths between what is stated and what is shown. Ruppersberg revels in those sleights of hand that leave us wondering what we missed between the scenes, cleverly captioning the most silent, inexpressible moments "self-explanatory."

—Kristina Kite