

Erin O'Keefe

Things As They Are Nr. 79,
from the series
Things as They Are, 2017
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In *Things as They Are*, Erin O'Keefe (b. 1962, USA) employs reflecting light and overlapping colours to create architectural illusions that challenge traditional perceptions of space. Below, O'Keefe sets out her approach to photography and to the act of looking critically.

Q: Before you became a photographer you were an architect. How has that background influenced what you're making today?

A: My background in architecture is the very reason I'm making this work. The mechanics of colour and light in space, and how we read space in images are my primary concerns. Addressing these ideas as an architect allowed me to approach building an image differently.

Q: While your work is presented in the form of images, these images would not necessarily be regarded as photographs in the most traditional

sense. What do you think your use of photography contributes to your artistic vision, and why does it remain your preferred medium?

A: The fact that they are photographs – as opposed to paintings or sculptures – is the point. I am not interested in making paintings or sculptures, and although the work resonates strongly with these media, the questions my work asks are rooted in the way the camera twists and flattens space. I don't feel that we are at the point where a photograph has to look a certain way, or at least I hope not! This work is also strongly related to the history of photography. The likes of Florence Henri, Jan Groover and Barbara Kasten all dealt with similar ideas in their work.

Q: In your images, colour, object, reflection and shadow all seem to have equal importance. What is the significance of this approach?

A: I'm interested in how we can measure

and give value to objects, shadows and reflections in the "real" world, but as soon as these elements come together in an image, that hierarchy and understanding gets lost. That presents a magical opportunity to me: our certainty vanishes, and in the best case, that absence invites us to look and think more critically.

Q: With your most recent work, *Things as They Are*, you intend to force viewers to question their perception of the spaces you've created. Could you elaborate on that?

A: I want the act of looking to be active and critical, so I try to ensure that the viewer is left to try and work something out in the image. When things don't add up in the customary way, the viewer is left with a feeling of uncertainty. For me, this unknown creates space for speculation, which makes it a much more exciting place to be.