

ARTFORUM

Em Rooney

BODEGA

167 Rivington Street, Lower Level East
January 10–February 14

The press release for Em Rooney's exhibition at this gallery is written in first person and ends with a list: "Future words for forest: apple, brazil, empire, expro, Exxon, gate, gates, grass, fire, loneliness, love, sand, seed, sunrise, rattlesnake, rock." Almost alphabetical, the list is imperfect, personal—much like the artist's photographs. Rooney, no Luddite, nonetheless worries about the ephemeral textures and qualities of material—and memories—that are imperiled by transitions to digital storage and circulation.

Rooney's hand-colored silver gelatin prints depict views of loft apartments and squats, some woods in Maine, and a melancholy zoo. They are images from a personal archive that dates back to her high-school years. Their pastel-tinged, black-and-white aesthetic imparts a de facto nostalgia, but these are not exactly resurrected snapshots. Subtle traces of manipulation abound. One can detect double-exposures, bits of collage, and a wry intermingling of digital and analog processes, especially in *The End of Oil* (all works 2015), an image that is crowned with a Preview edit toolbar, marking its trajectory from film to digital archive to print. The "hand colored silver gelatin print in artist's frame" description for this piece is deceptively twee and simple.

"Artist's frame"—what a nebulous triangulation of medium, material, and display device that term is. Rooney says her frames contain "thatch, ash, fruit and stone," but we can't see them. However, three larger wall-mounted panels, shaped like frames or mats with empty centers, make good on the insinuation, as their exterior portions are studded with three-dimensional objects. In *Outer frame for Elliot (The Sawdust Ring)*, a fake orange and three spooning ceramic figures are suspended in the hand-dyed canvas and leather surface. As its title suggests, this work is "for" a framed photograph called *Elliot*. What of the redundancy? For one thing, the "extra" frame proffers a strange opportunity to stash things away—a playful paean to imperiled marginalia.



Em Rooney, *Elliot*, 2015, hand-colored silver gelatin print in artist's frame, 11 x 13".

— Andrew Kachel