

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Mueller, Stephen, "Exhibition Reviews: Sharon Lockhart, Blum & Poe," *Art in America*, February 2010

Sharon Lockhart: *Dirty Don's Delicious Dogs*, 2008, chromogenic print, 41 by 51 1/2 inches; at Blum & Poe.



Bath Iron Works, a military contractor in Maine that builds Navy destroyers. One group of large, glossy color prints (all works 2008) focuses on the quirky, worker-run vending stations in the shop-worn but organized Iron Works kitchen; a second group is of "portraits" that are in fact still lifes featuring lunch pails and their contents; a third series shows workers congregating at lunchtime. The photographs surrounded enclosed viewing spaces for a pair of films, which extend Lockhart's portrayal of factory life while furthering her exploration of the formal and conceptual relationships between the two mediums.

Lockhart's focus on places and things rather than people in her portrayal of the codes and culture of factory life evokes Walker Evans's Depression-era photographs of vacant domestic interiors, in which sharecroppers' stories were told through their possessions and surroundings. The tightly framed vending stations in "Lunch Break" are unoccupied; *Dirty Don's Delicious Dogs*, *Moody Mart* and *Pipecoverer's Cafe*, with their handmade signs, intricate pricing systems, justifications of mark-ups and Boston Red Sox posters, are documents that could serve workplace sociology. Such "portraits" as *Larry Conklin*, *Welder*—a grimy Coleman cooler decorated with "Retired Navy" and "Fighting Machinists" stickers, its contents (old Tupperware, a half pint of milk) displayed next to it—likewise suggest that the ways workers personalize their belongings can be as revealing as their faces.

In the 80-minute film *Lunch Break*, life at the factory slows to a crawl. A single tracking shot down an endless corridor of lockers and equipment is played at a fraction of real time. People mingle and eat, but a soundtrack of droning machines and clanging metal replaces the casual chatter of mealtime. We watch for minutes as a solitary woman takes a single bite of sandwich. Corroded metal, scuffed concrete and peeling paint are all made vividly present in the slow-motion, high-definition projection; with its languorous pace, *Lunch Break* seems to convert the time-based medium into a series of still images. A second film, the 40-minute-long *Exit*, comprises five stationary shots, each representing a day of the workweek and each featuring a stream of workers exiting the Bath Iron Works after their shifts, lunch pails in hand.

Both the films and the photographs focus on release from labor (lunch break and shift change), and both attempt to capture something of the experience of long, repetitive days at the factory by drawing out its operators' routines and isolation—and, equally, their fraternity. Lockhart offers neither glorification nor critique, but there is a sense of the anachronistic: one cannot help but note that the lunch pails and their union stickers represent a fading way of life.

—Kirsten Swenson

[A slightly different version of "Lunch Break" also appeared at Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York. It will travel to the Colby Museum of Art, Waterville, Me., in July.]

LOS ANGELES

SHARON LOCKHART

BLUM & POE

ON VIEW AT THE KEMPER ART MUSEUM,
ST. LOUIS, THROUGH APR. 19

"Lunch Break," an exhibition of photographs and films by Sharon Lockhart, portrays workers and working life at the