

IAN BYERS-GAMBER



If They Can Do It, Why Can't We?

March 18 – April 5, 2019

When the original home of the Bob Baker Marionette Theater was sold to an apartment developer, its historic designation required architectural documentation prior to demolition. Given my ongoing work with the theater, they recommended me for the job.

Library of Congress standards for photographing buildings serve legibility and archival quality: black and white, wide angle documentation of empty structures. Making those reserved photos in an environment so colorful, chaotic, and alive, I felt compelled to document the magic unaccounted for by archival standards. I photographed puppeteers at work, whose animating magic makes performers of puppets. The animacy of those marionettes, meanwhile, I captured in more dramatic color portraits; the human care and labor that produce the marionettes imbues each with a spirit that I feel warrants a similarly humane photographic treatment.

A city planner lamented that one reason they couldn't block the development was that the magic was within the building, rather than in its walls. I argue that the magic permeates everything.

Ian Byers-Gamber

Last summer [Ian Byers-Gamber](#) was invited by the Bob Baker Marionette Theater to document primarily their theater, but also the puppets and puppet shows, as the building which they have inhabited for the last five decades will soon be demolished. The project that includes eleven architectural images and a few of the audiences and puppet shows will soon go into the photo collection of the Los Angeles Public Library and the LA Office of Historic Resources as a document of this landmark theater. In addition to the specifically documentary photographs that Byers-Gamber has made, there will be large black and white and color photographs that the artist staged with the puppets and their puppeteers.

Byers-Gamber is a Pomona alumnus who majored in Media Studies but shortly thereafter took up documenting art exhibitions, some of which include the Chan Gallery, Machine Project, Pomona Museum of Art, Chan Gallery, as well as other arts institutions across Los Angeles. Not so long ago, he audited a black and white photography class and has been producing bodies of silver gelatin prints ever since. Recently he has taken up printing color pigment prints. All this work has been done here at Pomona College and we wanted to honor the work and Byers-Gamber as he has been so much a part of our community since graduating.

In conversation with Byers-Gamber, he has said that he draws inspiration from the New Topographics movement, specifically the work of Lewis Baltz. But he also mentioned that he is inspired by the staged portrait photography of Deana Lawson. Both of these seemingly contrasting styles will be represented in the works shown here. They are documents of spaces and people inhabiting spaces that force the viewer to engage with the staged presence of the subjects represented in the photographs, whether those be puppets held in pose by their puppeteers or formal documents of the theater's interior and exterior spaces.

**Join us for a closing reception and performance by the Bob Baker Marionette Theater
Thursday, April 4th from 8-10pm co-sponsored by the Art Department and [Art After Hours](#)**

Tricia Avant

P.S. Special thanks to Pomona Museum of Art folks, Gary Murphy for framing and installing the works, and Justine Bae for collaborating via Art After Hours for the theater performance. Both Gary and Justine are comrades of Ian Byers-Gamber as he is a Pomona alumnus who had worked with them at the museum here at Pomona College for the last several years. And special thanks to Lisa Anne Auerbach who provided access to photo facilities and support for Byers-Gamber to complete this work here.



AUDREY, HAT-TIPPING SKUNK
Archival pigment print, 44"x55", 2019



CAIN, DRACULA
Archival pigment print, 44"x55", 2018



TAP DANCING FROG
Archival pigment print, 25"x31", 2019



BARNABY BEAN
Archival pigment print, 25"x31", 2019



BALLOON CLOWN
Archival pigment print, 25"x31", 2019



DEMITRIUS DEMISTAR III
Archival pigment print, 25"x31", 2019



THE WINDS
Archival pigment print, 25"x31", 2019



INDEX TO BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPHS AND BBMT NO. 1-11 (from left to right, top to bottom)
Twelve archival pigment prints, 16"x20", 2019