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Review '70s social commentary still resonates in Fred Lonidier artworks



Detail of "Representations of Self-Representations," 1973, by Fred Lonidier. (Jeff McLane)

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An underappreciated contemporary of Martha Rosler and Alan Sekula, Fred Lonidier shares their passion for social commentary. His exhibition of photographic works from the 1970s at Michael Benevento takes us back to a moment when the documentary impulse in art was still a startling thing.

Comprising 46 photographs and voluminous texts printed in black on white panels, Lonidier's best-known piece, "The Health and Safety Game" from 1976, is an overwhelming record of workplace injuries. Stark photographs of severed limbs and scars are accompanied by first-person testimonies and descriptions of corporate strategies to maximize profits and minimize accountability. Lonidier's critique of callous corporate America is exhaustive and demanding. These days, it also feels largely impotent, too dense and dry to spark Twitter-pated consciences.

Less sweeping, more ambivalent works fare better. "Girl Watcher Lens" from 1972 was inspired by a telephoto lens of the same name. Lonidier took photos of young women, graying out all but tightly cropped details of busts, legs, butts and hair. This patchwork of eroticized parts both critiques and reinforces women's objectification. In "Representations of Self-Representations" he gathered his students' self-portraits into a similar document of self-fashioning.

Works like these are more resonant because they are more open-ended. "The Health and Safety Game," on the other hand, is specifically designed to elicit outrage. It's a more probing, disturbing critique — if you have the fortitude to get through it all. Today it would probably be a film on YouTube.

Michael Benevento, 7578/7556 Sunset Blvd., Los Angeles, (323) 874-6400, through July 12. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.beneventolosangeles.com