

## **Birch Libralato**

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## **JAMES NIZAM**

Curious Perspectives

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*Curious Perspectives*, James Nizam's third solo exhibition at Birch Libralato, opens with a title aptly borrowed from French mathematician Jean François Nicéron's 1638 treatise on the practical applications of perspective. As in *La Perspective Curieuse*, Nizam's work demonstrates an affinity for natural magic: an alchemy of position and perspective, light and shadow, and of temporality, sequence, and technique. Just as Nicéron held that optics are as much concerned with illusion as they are with the distinct properties of light, Nizam's work occupies a complex physical and temporal space where perspective is both, a precise science and a natural magic. It is exactly here, in Nizam's own view, that the unique position of the lens in time and space may capture our curiosity. "Curious", then, does not regard the optical trick but, instead, evokes imaginary perspectives; immaterial and material coalesce in a series of photographic works – each carrying a quality of the impossible.

In Nizam's *Cube (Deconstruction)*, we are introduced to the constituent parts of a cube in isometric projection—captured, in stages, at the intimate scale of process. Sequential photographs show the step-by-step exposures that produce Nizam's *Thought Form* series. An array of mirrors carries sunlight, in steps, through an artificial haze; after three or four steps, the beam becomes faint and requires the mirrors' repositioning in advance of a subsequent exposure. Here, Nizam asks the viewer to work in reverse, alluding to the complexity of his process: a study of the light's trajectory, calculation of the angle of incidence, and the complex plotting of the graphed forms to be drawn in light. The total sum of these steps becomes evident in *Thought Form (Fan)*. The figure, in isometric projection, fans between states: the two-dimensional or flattened network of lines or the extruded triangle cascading in three dimensions.

*Skylight* borrows the so named architectural element, in situ, against the backdrop of the built context's skeleton. The hexagonal window—itsself, an anamorphic form—is flattened by the camera from a single point of origin to become a cube in isometric projection. *Pyramid* captures the lit form in site-specific context, as a pyramid of light activates the architecture of the galleria at Toronto's Brookfield Place. This form—the shape of the visual plane—speaks, moreover, to the mechanics of the camera as it ushers light and geometry through perspective to inform our construction of space.

In *Shard of Light*, the camera's position determines the location of a cut—literally, a notched out segment of a soon-to-be demolished house—allowing a sliver of daylight to penetrate the exterior. The ray filters in, at an exact time, drawing a line of light in the camera's view. In a departure from the usual interior context of his work, Nizam took the fragment (salvaged from the aforementioned cut-away) on a pilgrimage to the Death Valley desert. *Sun Dial* captures, in digital composite, the sun's path and ensuing hourly intervals of shadow—inverting the shard of light to shadow. These works demonstrate an *immaterial* materiality composed of the complex relationship of site context, lens position, and light as it changes with the passing of time (or with each exposure.)

Two works present a collage from architectural elements: interior, exterior, and corner. Where the interior bounds meet at the corner's edge, cuts through to the exterior create a form suspended in play. In *Four Circles*, ellipses perforate the right-angled walls—cut to appear as perfect circles in the camera's view. Outside the lens' view, the circles are, again, elliptical. The process of the space itself becomes the object of perception, a *Gestalt* impression of built space, negative space, and the context beyond. *Two Triangles*, using the same technique, balances triangular figures against the exposed interior surface.

In a sense, each of these works holds contemplative space: a kind of material non-duality—a conversation between the material and immaterial. Through the praxis of Nizam's lens, and careful consideration of temporal and physical position, these impossible figures may appear. Where the passage of time or a change of orientation would cause the image to dissolve, Nizam's lens, with acute positionality in time and space, is the technology through which the final *percept*—the *Curious Perspective*—is possible, holding together an impossible balance of space, time, light, and form.