

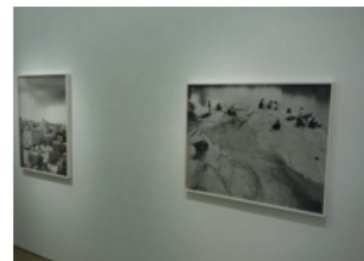
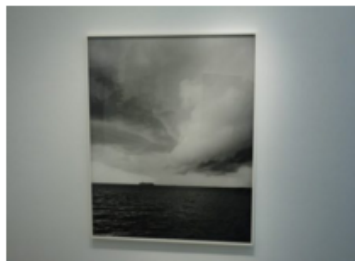
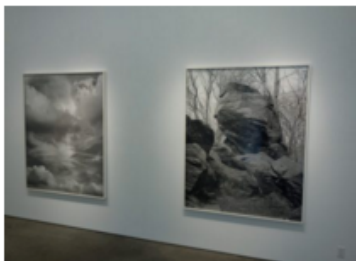
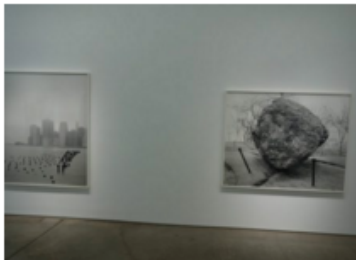
# COLLECTOR DAILY



## Mitch Epstein, Rocks and Clouds @Yancey Richardson

By [Loring Knoblauch](#) / In [Galleries](#) / September 13, 2016

**JTF (just the facts):** A total of 12 large scale black and white photographs, framed in white and unmatted, and hung against white walls in the main gallery space and the smaller side room. All of the works are gelatin silver prints, made in 2014 and 2015. The prints are shown in two sizes: 68×54 (or reverse), in editions of 6, and 40×30 (or reverse), also in editions of 6. (Installation shots below.)



**Comments/Context:** For the better part of the past five years, Mitch Epstein has been thinking carefully about the city of New York. He is, of course, by no means the first photographer to turn his attention to this sprawling metropolis, and for many, such a task has meant engaging with the never-ending action on the streets, reveling in the density of its built infrastructure and architecture, or getting close to its diverse cross section of people. It's conceptually straightforward to see the city as a living, breathing entity, ever changing and growing, and to try to capture some of that energetic spirit in a series of photographs, and countless accomplished photographers have followed these very paths with notable success.

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But for Epstein, the siren song of New York-style human hustle didn't seduce him. Instead, he has taken a decidedly longer and more patient view, choosing to investigate the subtle relationships between nature and the city. He began by tracking down some of the city's oldest and most majestic trees – finding them in parks, arboretums, and packed into street corners – and making grand large scale specimen portraits that reminded us of their enduring stature. The best of the images in this series, *New York Arbor* (exhibited in 2012, reviewed here), showed us nature coexisting with the all-consuming dash of human progress, the aged trees often seeming to watch the surrounding frenzy with a slowed sense of passing time.

Epstein's newest series, *Rocks and Clouds*, continues this line of thinking, looking at how nature and the city interact with an even more deliberate focus on time scale. Using a rhythmic pairing of the eternal and the fleeting, his pictures move back and forth, with the city bookended by the two extremities.

Epstein's rocks exude craggy permanence, their confidently bulky forms seeming to effortlessly challenge the primacy of the human world. When casual visitors and iron stakes intrude on their territory, the rocks look almost comically stoic among these annoyances, the fence posts impossibly flimsy when compared with the force held in the balancing rocks; a rocky jetty extending into the sea looks equally indifferent to the frothy waves that pound and smash its surfaces. Framed with the same reverence employed by 19th century monument photographers, Epstein's rocks are remarkably sculptural and tactile, each rough texture and jagged crack available for our close inspection, their noble age unquestioned.

His clouds operate on a much larger scale, with mists and smudges that linger over entire portions of the city and more menacing maelstroms and swirling storms that threaten to obliterate usually large objects like shipping tankers or the Empire State Building. When he crops out land and water leaving only sky, Epstein's images bear little resemblance to Alfred Stieglitz' intimately precious equivalents. His clouds are more awesome, with a bit of 19th century Romanticism paired with 21st century meteorological impressiveness. These photographs tower over us, with a depth and nuanced thickness that feels richly powerful not slight. When the clouds darken and the energy coalesces, our jaunty metropolis just can't compete with that kind of mightiness – the weather is indeed

# YANCEY RICHARDSON

temporary, but Epstein has captured its momentary theatrical presence, full of sculptural layers and potential force.

While Epstein's trees often felt like overlooked and underappreciated elders in our midst, these new pictures speak to our insignificance with more authority. His Rocks and Clouds point to more timeless cycles, and remind us that our carefully constructed urban wonderland lies perched between their two relentlessly uncompromising wills. Of the two, the cloud pictures are stronger, built with more compositional interest and deliberate experiments with scale, but against the backdrop of his earlier career, only a few rise to the memorable heights of his Family Business and American Power projects – these new views of New York are less emotionally charged. Where they do succeed however is in quietly reframing our notions of the big city, forcing us to remember the unquestioned primacy of the land and sky.

Collector's POV: The prints in this show are priced at \$28000 (68×54) and \$15000 (40×30). Epstein's work has become more available in the secondary markets in past few years, but the volume of prints for sale is still relatively small, with prices ranging between \$2000 and \$63000.