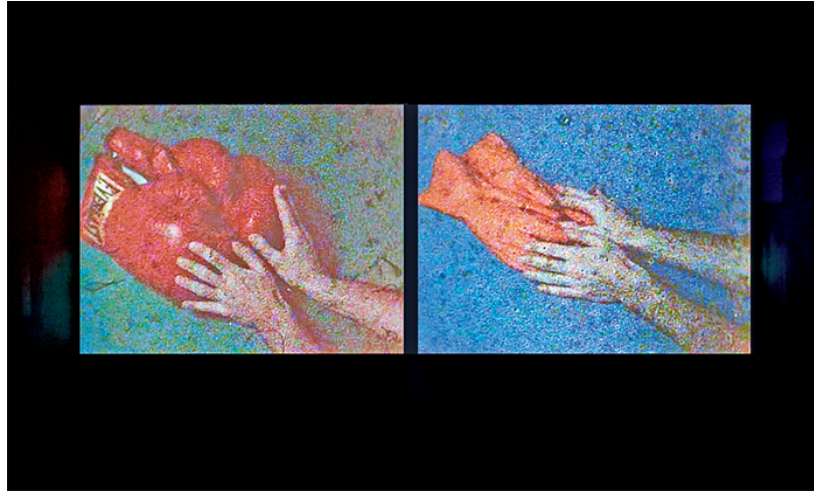


ARTFORUM

Morgan Fisher

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Morgan Fisher, *Red Boxing Gloves/Orange Kitchen Gloves*, 1980, two-channel video (Polavision cassettes transferred to DVD), color, silent, 3 minutes 20 seconds.

Much recent engagement with photochemical film tends to reflect a fetishistic investment in the uniqueness of its materiality. The work of Morgan Fisher is different: His interest is in the conjunction of this material support and the demands of industry. For Fisher, film is less artisanal than it is inextricable from the standards imposed by corporations in the field, such as Agfa-Gevaert. Of course, it is exactly this tie to industry that has cast the medium into obsolescence, a topos that looms large in Fisher's recent exhibition "Past Present, Present Past."

In the 1970s, Fisher worked in the Hollywood industry while maintaining a practice as an avant-garde filmmaker, thus inhabiting the peculiar nexus of two areas of film practice typically considered to be resolutely separate, if not antagonistic. *Production Footage*, 1971, puts these two kinds of filmmaking face-to-face to underline the close links between aesthetic conventions and modes of production. The first half of this 16-mm work consists of handheld color footage, a form of cinematography rarely seen in Fisher's films due to its alliance with subjectivity and expressivity, qualities the artist assiduously avoids. Fellow filmmaker Thom Andersen, a friend of Fisher's, stands on a dolly loading film into a mounted Mitchell camera, preparing to shoot. The second half delivers the reverse shot: a static black-and-white view from the Mitchell of Fisher unloading his lightweight Eclair and putting it away. The film closes in on itself with a reflexivity typical of its time—not to pursue pure materialism but rather in order to open onto questions of infrastructure.

In *Red Boxing Gloves/Orange Kitchen Gloves*, 1980, Fisher again uses the compositional device of the pendant pair, but organizes its couple spatially rather than sequentially. This two-channel piece is predicated on a strangely fascinating and amusing play of similarity and opposition. On the left, hands massage zaftig red boxing gloves against a green background; on the right, the same hands caress flaccid orange kitchen gloves against a blue background. The chromatic contrasts are echoed by a semiotic antithesis: violent masculinity on the left, domestic femininity on the right. But each glove is touched in ways that transform it into a graphic pun on a body part associated with the other gender: The boxing gloves appear as breasts and the fingers of the kitchen gloves as limp phalluses. The work thus invites shifting layers of perception in a manner at once deadpan and surrealist. Fisher's interest in industrial norms is never far away, however: The piece was originally shot on Polavision—a short-lived instant-movie format by Polaroid discontinued as a commercial failure around the time Fisher used it to provide an exceedingly grainy image whose tactility mirrors the work's subject matter. Joining the two moving-image works were twelve recent photographs of boxes of expired still film. Titles such as *Ilford Colour Film 'D' For Daylight 135 January 1957*, 2014, supply details of the formats and date the expirations to the period when a teenage Fisher was first learning the craft of photography. Whatever gesture to autobiography might be present in these titles is to be found nowhere in the visual style of the series. Each box is presented individually on a seamless gray background with flattened shadows, displaying a precise, depersonalized facticity that will be familiar to viewers of Fisher's films. Such neutral depiction serves to emphasize the vibrant color and striking graphics of the boxes, suggesting that the point of interest here is not just photography but offset lithographic printing, too. These pictures-of-pictures-not-taken recall an infrastructure now mostly gone, one to which Fisher is clearly greatly attached. Yet sentiment simply never enters the frame, suggesting another way of staring back at film as it slips away.

—Erika Balsom