

This Is Not a Pipe

By Michael Leaverton Wednesday, July 6, 2011

When French realist painter Paul Delaroche saw a photograph in 1839, he reportedly proclaimed, “From today, painting is dead.” He wasn’t much for proclamations. Painting, of course, easily swerved around realism, and photography was right on its heels, with groups like the Surrealists photobombing all manner of stuff into the frame that didn’t belong there. Today, photography proves itself the most unreliable medium by the magazine page — what you see is simply an approximation of what you get. Take David DiMichele: From a few feet back, the photos in “Pseudodocumentation” seem to feature mind-blowing museum installations, with cavernous galleries filled with ceiling-piercing light rods, 30-foot shards of glass, mountains of salt and asphalt, and other bleachers-clearing spectacles. Get close, however, and things appear subtly off; he is manipulating us, of course, but not how you think. The photographs are real. The subject matter is not. Or rather, it’s not real in the SFMOMA sense: DiMichele is actually photographing tiny models of giant museum shows, which he built himself in his magical (we’re pretty sure) studio. Photography is how most people interact with monumental museum installations, anyway — do we really need the museums? Well played, photographer. “Pseudodocumentation” appears perfectly with “Fabricated Realities,” a group show featuring vintage, realism-skewering photographs from the 1920s avant-garde on.

