

Art

Perpetual Summer



Art

Josh Tonsfeldt



Simon Preston Gallery, through
Apr 10 (see Lower East Side)

Like much recent art, Josh Tonsfeldt's work is low-key and decentered in both subject matter and presentation. Its distinctiveness lies in Tonsfeldt's feel for images, objects and gestures, his talent for combining them (with only rare lapses into preciousness), and his almost writerly interest in narrative and description. This last quality is particularly evident in Tonsfeldt's current exhibition, which uses sculpture, photography and video to incorporate the viewpoints of the artist, his brother and a Facebook friend named Andrew.

This obliquely autobiographical constellation of works includes a thin slab of plaster—to which the artist has stuck a tattered, spray-painted spider web—flanked by a water-damaged photograph of his father on one side and a scavenged wooden pallet on the other. Projected on a wall in a back room are the brother's cell-phone movies of daily life on a Missouri oil field, featuring hard-hatted men and lurid sunsets. Photographic images reduced to near silhouettes and obscured by juddering horizontal lines of ink are derived from Andrew's snapshots of himself, posed in front of various monuments during a semester abroad.

The idea of a container, or frame, is a recurring motif. A ring of tire rubber hung on the wall supports and encircles an arrangement of fresh fruit. A video of oil gushing into the interior of a storage tank, shot by lowering a camera through a hatch at the top, is meant to draw a parallel to the function of the gallery itself as similar surroundings for art—a comparison underscored by a hatch to the roof of Preston's space that's been left open to the elements. Even as they are based in the particularities of individual experience, the pieces here contain or frame a larger story about Americans and Americanness in the 21st century. Therein lies much of the show's resonance.—*Anne Doran*