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Critics' Picks: Gareth Long "Section Man" at Kate Werble

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Gareth Long, *Untitled (Zooney)*, 2010, lenticular print mounted on Dibond, 72 x 45".

A summer 2007 *New Yorker* cover captures it: Atop a double-decker tourist bus, a gaggle of plump passengers snap photos of Radio City Music Hall. Seated at a distance, a teenager instead peers into a slim white book bearing a few diagonal stripes on its upper-left corner. The spare cover design and the girl's sullen expression confirm instantly that she's reading the work of the late J. D. Salinger.

Gareth Long's first New York solo exhibition explores that curiously easy identification—overtly in regard to the book's cover design and more fundamentally, I'll argue, when it comes to that adolescent's withdrawn disposition. How can diagonal bands of color on a white background signify so strongly as Salinger? Long probes and distorts the book-cover motif in a series of five lenticular prints. From their usual milieu as Cracker Jack novelties, the artist ratchets lenticulars upward in scale—each is six feet tall—and sophistication, interlacing as many as thirty frames. Whereas his earlier work tweaked the conventions of video by compressing a narrative sequence into a single static object, the Salinger series situates lenticulars in dialogue with abstract painting. The parallel bands of *Untitled (Buddy)*, 2008, suggest a flickering succession of chevron compositions by (also recently departed) Kenneth Noland; the buoyant color fields of *Untitled (Zooney)*, 2010, resemble a Mark Rothko canvas reengineered by James Cameron. The analogy is not an idle one—3-D glasses and lenticulars share the same hokey, permanently outmoded capacity to simulate depth. As Hollywood increasingly enlists the former in the service of spectacle, Long inscribes the latter in a lineage of modernist painting.

Which brings me back to that adolescent on the bus: If modernist painting is associated with the formation of a centered, autonomous subject, *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) marks a pivotally awkward phase in that same process of self-realization. The shifting, kinesthetic encounter with Long's lenticulars doesn't recapitulate this process, but renews it. A centered subject gives way to a mobile and restless one, engaged in the more complicated and rewardingly uncertain activity of finding one's place in the world.