

Ise, Claudine. "Off the Digital Deep End With O'Neill," *The Los Angeles Times*, May 28, 1999.

Acclaimed experimental filmmaker Pat O'Neill is probably best known for his 1988 film "Water and Power," a quirkily ambitious look at the history of Southern California's water use. In a show titled "recent works, but not on film" at Gallery Luisotti, the L.A.-based filmmaker presents a new series of digitally manipulated Iris prints that prove to be as idiosyncratic as his movies, although not quite as fully engaging.

As a filmmaker, O'Neill does not rely on traditional narrative structures in which the plot progresses in a linear, shot-to-shot fashion. Instead, he utilizes what can be loosely described as a cut-and-paste approach to filmmaking. His latest film, "Trouble in the Image" (1996), is screened continuously in the gallery and in many ways provides viewers with a useful paradigm for approaching his visually dense Iris prints.

Each shot in the film contains manifold images taken from instructional films, Hollywood westerns and films noir, hand-drawn animation sequences and other found archival footage. Each element within this eclectic visual stew invites viewers to make potent connections between suggestively juxtaposed images. Audio tracks containing movie sound bites add yet another stratum of meaning to this complex orchestration of sight and sound.

O'Neill's foray into digital photography is ultimately more of a parallel activity to his filmmaking than a step in an entirely new direction. His photographs, like his films, are built layer by layer from scanned images culled from a variety of sources: urban landscape photographs, illustrations and diagrams from old *Popular Mechanics*-type magazines, O'Neill's own drawings and other appropriated images.

The best of O'Neill's chaotic and at times perplexing photo collages are those that elegantly restate familiar urban ills, as in "The Three Sisters" (1999), in which a car, stripped, abandoned and covered in graffiti, sits at the center of a barren mountainous landscape that has been seamlessly morphed into that of an anonymous Los Angeles neighborhood.

The less successful of O'Neill's prints, however, are so chock-a-block with imagery they seem merely self-indulgent and virtually illegible. But O'Neill's bricolage approach to filmmaking makes him uniquely suited to the emerging medium of digital photography, which itself remains very much in the experimental stages.