

REVIEW

Merideth Hillbrand, F Scale North

at Escolar, Santa Rosa, CA

SOCIETY

Daniel J Glendening. photos: Perry Doane



A pair of objects (*Clock*, 2025) rest on the floor, near to a wall. Each consists of two discs held some distance from one another by twelve rods roughly 40 inches long. The rods and discs form a cage; the rods intersect with the discs at equidistant points around the circles, like the points of a clock (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12). One is made of aluminum, the other is made of oiled cedar and red oak. The discs of the wood object are not flat, but contoured — they look like they could have been constructed out of pieces of the seat of a chair, though the contours are incongruous. These two objects lie on the floor like twelve-axled wheels, aligned with one another, disc to disc: material reflections.

Beyond are seven objects resembling lit candles (*Candelabrum* (weekly), 2025): metal discs set on the floor, each with a rod extending up from its center, topped with an illuminated red tapered night light bulb. Yellow lamp cords snake across the

floor, large plugs connecting them to extension cords. These objects are of varying heights. The light they emit is a faint orange-red glow.



Propped against the walls are five arrangements of mirrors: square, rectangular, some tinted darker than others, none larger than, say, 12 inches (*Untitled*, 2025). The mirrors rest in aluminum channels, a low lip to catch and hold the light. Fragmented, the reflection of my ankles splits across surfaces. A mirror reverses our image — we see ourselves not as others see us, but inverted and delayed in time and light as both bend and move between body, surface, and eye.

On the walls are three shallow boxes formed out of bent metal with a face and four sides, each etched with text in a trembling hand, arranged as a list: one enameled white (dusk; enters; mowed; lawns) (*Untitled* (dusk), 2025), one brass hued (above; light; blue; hue) (*Untitled* (light), 2025), one a metallic green tint (falls; on trees; planted; square) (*Untitled* (trees), 2025). Each is the size of a small paperback book, or a portable hard drive.

This exhibition, *F Scale North*, is also one of a pair: *F Scale South* opened at Gene's Dispensary in Los Angeles a week prior. The two are mirror images, or inversions: objects there include translucent plastic spheres containing ball bearings and fitted with night light bulbs. There is a chair; a table with a surface of two interlocking wood circles holding a stack of books (*We* by Charles A. Lindburgh, *How Things Work: The Universal Encyclopedia of Machines*; Welk McGeehan's *My America, Your America*), topped by a sculpted gargoyle. There is a striped bag emblazoned with the word "Famous" hanging from a doorknob, a postcard poking from the top with text that reads "Get your coat. We're on strike." On the walls are three engraved bent-metal boxes.



The exhibitions take their titles from the California F-scale, a 1947 "personality test on identifying and measuring traits associated with authoritarianism," as described in the exhibition materials. The "F" here stands for "fascist." The F-scale is a flawed artifact of its era — an era that echoes repeatedly, pulsing, in the present.

If it weren't for the curvature of the Earth, the many obstructions, and the scattering effects of atmosphere and dust, the light from those bulbs in Los Angeles would reach and perhaps align with that from the bulbs in Santa Rosa — this could be understood as an exhibition split or fractured across space and time.

The writer Boris Groys sometimes refers to philosopher Nikolay Federov's project of the "common cause," which called upon the state to make immortal all who had ever lived. If only future generations benefit from the progress of a socialist society, that society is built upon the exploitation of the past for the benefit of the future (inverting or reflecting capitalism's sacrifice of the future for the benefit of the present). As Groys summarizes in *The Immortal Bodies*, "the only truly just society is a society that extends care through time, in all directions: "Before it can be considered just, a society must be not only international (that is, reaching across space) but also inter-generational (reaching across time)."

"All future thinking requires a grounded material reality," Hillbrand writes in the exhibition materials. The future cannot be built without an understanding of the present: its forms, structures, and material. From here and now we connect points — points as in places, people, communities, conversations — across time and across space. We reach through the mirror and grasp that reflected other in order to bridge the gap of history.

