

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

LOS ANGELES

ROE ETHRIDGE

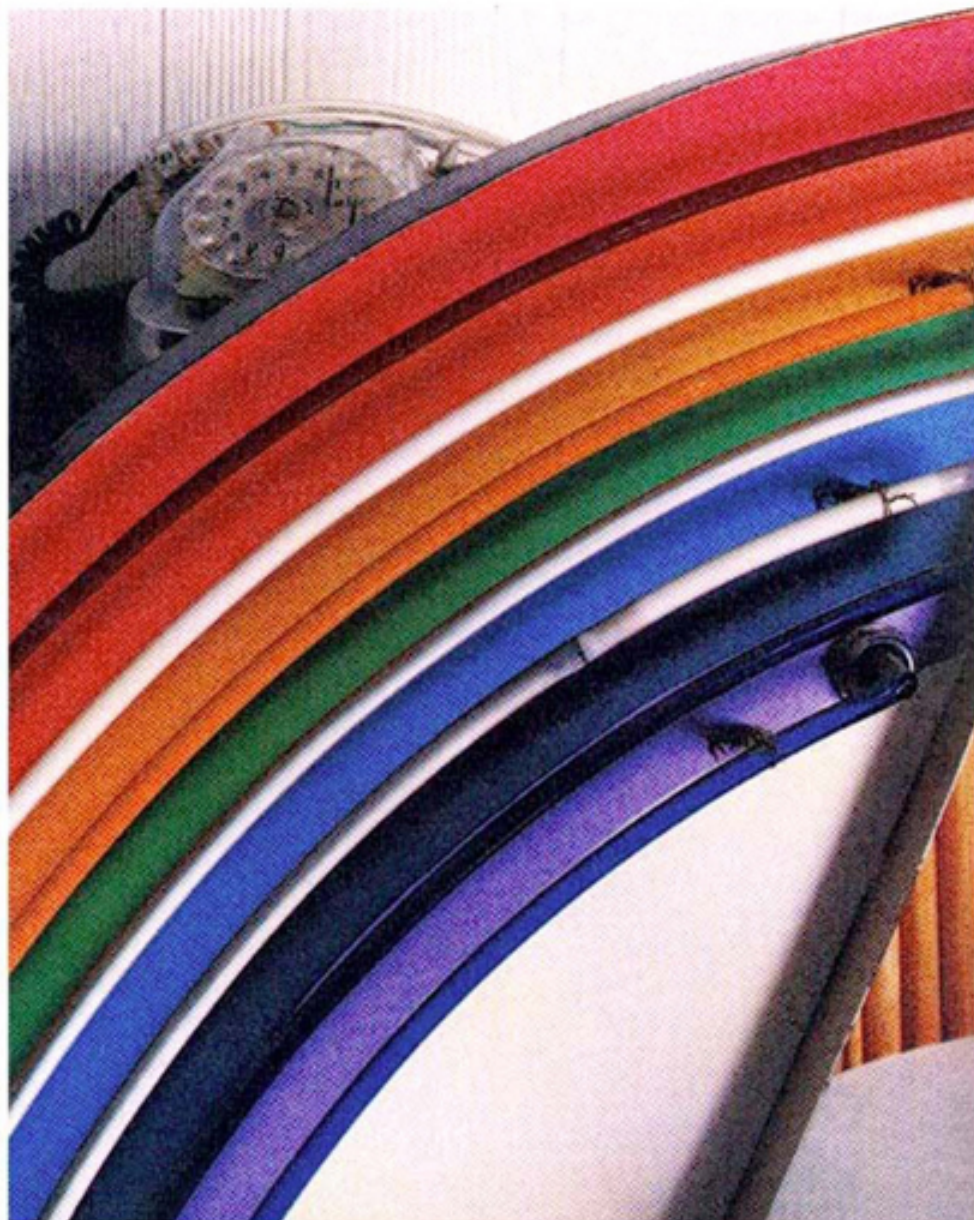
APPLE AND CIGARETTES

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

25 MAY - 7 JULY

Roe Ethridge has made it clear that he is very aware of just how critical a place the in-between can be. Even when he has used the medians of highways as his subject matter, as in the series *Neutral Territory* (1999), the conceptual and pictorial terrain of his photographs is anything but middle-of-the-road. His work has been unsurpassed amongst his peers in its ability to lay claim to (or, better yet, play with) the loaded territories that crop up between film and literature, as well as those between commercial and art photography.

In his best work, the picture itself comes across as if it were self-aware of the seductive, even dangerous, promise of its contextually-driven situation: for example, in this tight-as-ever exhibition (his first in Los Angeles, where several of the photographs were shot), even the plant-form protagonists of *Sage and Daisies* (2005) seem to have been infused with a kind of sharp self-consciousness by the blinding white light that turns them – the sage in particular – into eye-piercing switchblades. Quickly separating himself from the substantial prior achievements of Richard Prince and Christopher Williams, Ethridge's fully established point of view is as deceptively casual as the former, and as deceptively serious as the latter. Rather than getting caught in the deception by using it incessantly in the work (as Gursky and others have done), Ethridge allows it in any form (even when absent) to be a means to another end, resistant to definition but always open to pleasure.



Other successful aspects of Ethridge's prior solo exhibitions are developed here. First, there are the crucial ways in which every one of the 18 photographs on show differentiates itself from the others, almost as if each were a character in an intricate, magical realist novel. For example, *Los Angeles* (2006) seems to establish a specific (Silver Lake) setting for the rest of the show in a rather blank manner, yet it actually sets itself apart to initiate yet another intriguing story, once you realize that the two distinctive palm trees in the shot are stubbornly blocking the Hollywood sign and the Observatory. The definitive location of the show is further undermined by the presence of two photographs of mini-mall signs that are – almost perversely, in this context – not in LA: *Liberty Square, Liberty NY* and *Cove Corners, Wellfleet MA* (both 2005).