

*Rivington Arms*

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**For Immediate Release:**

Melia Marden and Michael Wang

*to the society*

March 5 – April 4, 2004

Melia Marden and Michael Wang imagine a sublime space of masculinity in *to the society*, a photographic installation that appeals to structures of elitism and nostalgia through an aesthetics of stillness. Invoking the anachronism of the collegiate gentlemen's club or secret society, they explore the impossible desire for a certain pedigreed manhood. It is this desire for return (the return to the instant, to the mythic era of an American aristocracy, to, even, boyhood) that propels the work.

Their re-stagings of freeze frame action photos (culled from the pages of contemporary sports magazines) memorialize the irretrievable originary instant. The athletic equipment, paraphernalia, in some cases teammates and opponents that contextualized the original images have been selectively omitted, isolating the figure's assumed pose. Positions held for several seconds (often supported by an unseen wall or chair) only approximate these fleeting moments of athleticism. While some poses become more awkward and strained, others, relaxed, acquire a languid, dreamy quality.

The assemblage of these images into large-scale ornamental collages in space has an immersion-effect on the viewer. The figures, subsumed by flowery form, evoke a pastoral stage setting, articulating a softer version of masculinity. The gallery-as-set (here with the actors themselves forming the scenery) effects Wang and Marden's dreamy vision while simultaneously foregrounding the "staged" quality of that fantasy.

Wang and Marden's insistence on the importance of nostalgia as a social force locates the sense of longing inherent in the work inside the very space of privilege they explore—a space where the power of privilege lies, precisely, in a self-propagating nostalgia.

