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Review: Christopher Russell looks through prisms

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Christopher Russell's "Aftermath (#15)" (2013), pigment print scratched with a razor.

Making the best of a bad situation – refreshing lemonade from sour lemons – is a time-honored practice. **Christopher Russell** performs it once again in a frosty yet lovely show of 27 recent manipulated photographs, plus one large-format handmade book.

The photographic pieces at Mark Moore Gallery begin with the blurs caused when a camera's lens refracts light and creates a prismatic flash across the image. Aiming his camera skyward, Russell photographs into the network of tree branches overhead. The light flash shatters nature's sheltering canopy with visual overtones of apocalypse.

Next he folds, spindles and otherwise mutilates the pictures, then spray-paints blasts of white and scratches into the photographic surface (and sometimes the framing glass) with a blade. Sailing ships sink, wolves pace, jungle cats attack and flocks of birds scatter. Floral patterns proliferate like animated Victorian wallpaper. Nostalgia for the past bubbles with hints of determined regeneration in the future.

The handmade book, which features one page with the ominous heading "dead art star," is a meditation on the seemingly contradictory effort of making art within a collapsing environment – social, cultural and natural. Titled "GRFALWKV," it bristles with the confounding energy of a resolute Jabberwock: 'Twas bryllyg, and ye slythy toves / Did gyre and gymblye in ye wabe.

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