

“Okay, now, to the music this time—both groups do your dinosaur heads.” As part of “Chorus Lines,” his second solo appearance at Team, Italian artist Massimo Grimaldi transformed the room into a functional dance studio, partly cladding it in mirrors and allowing troupes to use it for rehearsals. On my visit, Holly Heidt’s company was in residence, six young women hashing out physical responses to outwardly impenetrable directions such as those above—and doing so without much concern for gawking passersby.

In Grimaldi’s formulation, the dancers were acting as “agents,” inflecting viewers’ experience not only of the site they occupied but also of the other works on display. Their energetic presence certainly made it difficult to focus on the remainder of the exhibition, which consisted of a set of digital slide shows presented on wall-mounted pairs of iPads; four small, round photographic light boxes; and a sleek, quasi-architectural sculpture. Not only did visitors risk colliding with bodies in motion, but the dancers had also distributed their snacks, coats, bags, and laptops around the room’s perimeter. While not difficult to avoid, these personal effects contributed to a sense of intrusion, a feeling that one’s presence was tolerated but inessential, or, at best, oddly secondary.



View of “Massimo Grimaldi,” 2013.

A distancing effect is apparent too in Grimaldi's iPad works. In each of the three featured examples, two tablets, mounted side by side, display juxtaposed looping sequences of a dozen or more images. One pair forces online-search results for "Kabul Bomb" and "Natalie Portman" into proximity; another abuts shots derived from the term "Baghdad Bomb" and the name "Rosario Dawson," respectively. A third takes a different tack, both parts displaying the artist's own snaps of a hospital in Somaliland. The first two works threaten a grinding lack of subtlety in their exploitation of extreme contrast—we anticipate a tedious commentary on the unjust coexistence of brutal conflict and Hollywood glitz—but their maker's rationale turns out to be closer to the exploration of form, the sequences' shifting phases prompting comparisons of composition, gesture, and visual syntax in general as much as of topical "subjects."

Juxtaposed with what seem to be exercises in dispassion, the images displayed on the third pair of devices felt jarringly optimistic, like a corrective of sorts, reassuring the viewer that what might be read as the artist's aestheticization of real-world horror was tempered by genuine empathy. Shots of staff and patients in brightly colored robes are seen with pictures of the building's cheerful exterior and the surrounding landscape. This apparent shift was, if anything, harder to take than the contrast between a smiling Portman posing on a red carpet and a bloody victim lying in a rubble-strewn street. Yet by investing these images with a hopeful brightness, Grimaldi succeeds in circumventing our instinct for what lends an image memorable force. The porthole-like light boxes, which contain ethereal landscapes, seem to exist in the same broad realm, but still felt like an afterthought here in their relative modesty and wallflower installation in the corner of the gallery most often obstructed by dancers. The red-and-white slab of aluminum and plastic that shares the show's title had—monumental scale and embedded spotlights notwithstanding—a similarly displaced air. Still, if Grimaldi's aim with "Chorus Lines" was simply to experiment with the forced intimacy of otherwise incompatible elements without concern for the coherence of the whole, he might be considered successful. "Again, on three: one, two . . ."

—*Michael Wilson*