

The Highlights - N/A, or On the Dark Stores of Brian Ulrich

I am simply 'shopping' for pictures.

-Brian Ulrich to Jörg Colberg in YVI magazine



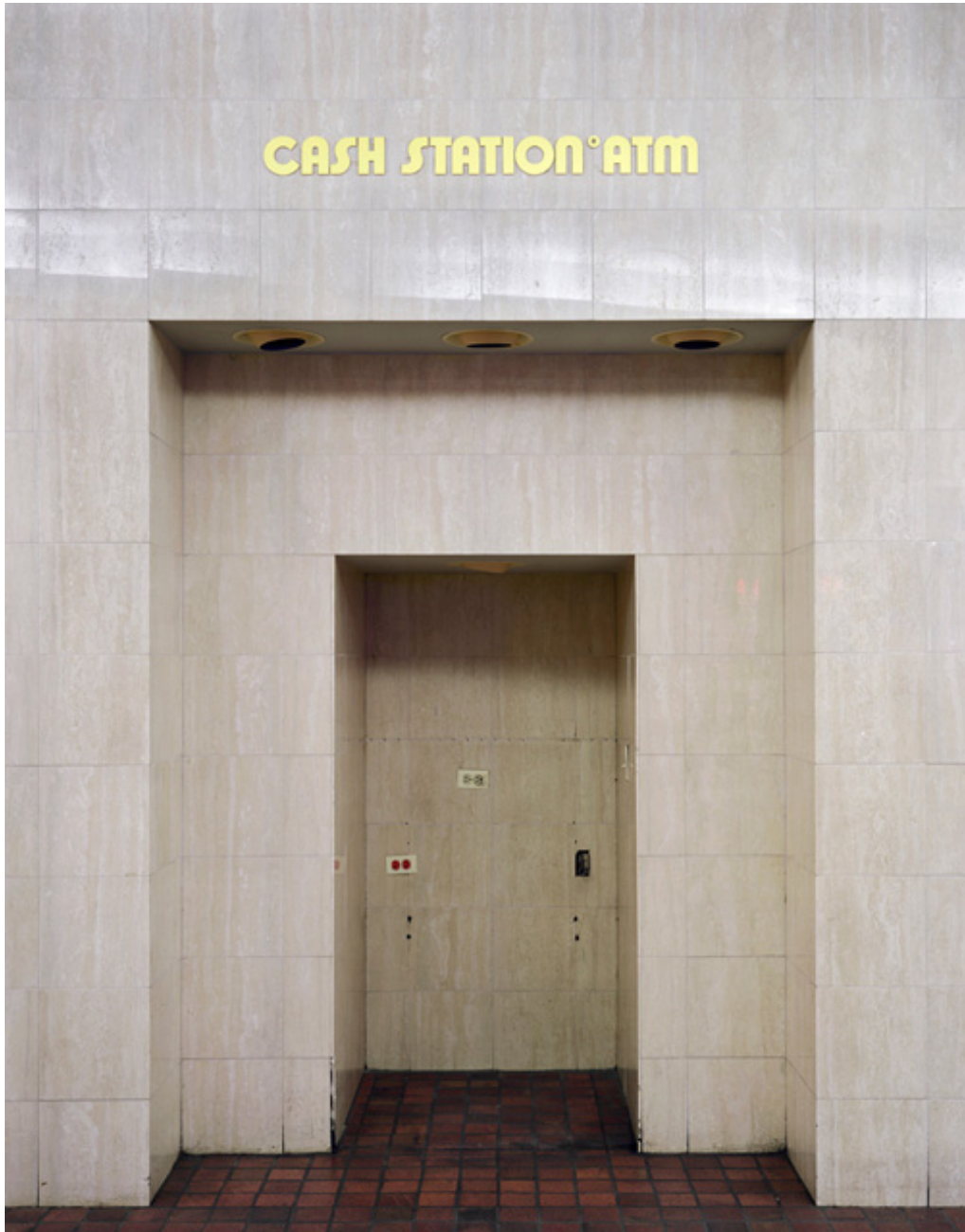
Brian Ulrich, *Saks Fifth Avenue*, 2009

ONE - I run my hand over the plate glass window. It's cold and flecked with wintry dust. I contemplate the dust. This snow has transmuted through three states of being - liquid, gas, solid - traveled unknowable miles through the heavens, and tested the divining powers of the local weatherman. Then snow meets our atmosphere. Choked exhaust fumes and bad cosmic jokes. To dissolve snow, we spread salt on streets and sidewalks.

Salt made the Phoenicians rich, bankrolled Roman wars, and substituted as soldier's pay during the War of 1812. Salt served as the fulcrum on which a skinny Indian man turned a cause into a movement and himself into Gandhi.

We throw it on the ground. In the United States, road salt is a billion dollar industry. Salt drops the freezing point of snow, creating dirty pools of winter muck. When snow meets salt, we are left with neither, just residue, like the residue under my window-pressed palm. Heaven-sent is now simply a piece of shit, stuck to the cold window of a dimmed and dead

Hollywood Video.



Brian Ulrich, *Chicago Place Mall*, 2009

TWO - When I was a child I was obsessed with baseball cards, small squares of cardboard bearing photographs of and information about people I did not know. I didn't even like baseball all that much. Still I would run down to the card shop with money earned from odd jobs to hand the store's creepy proprietor crumpled dollar bills in exchange for packets of these small squares of cardboard. The moment would quicken my heart rate, a pulse would

thunder in my throat. The brief but dangerous flirtation with heroin as a young adult should have come as a surprise to no one.



Brian Ulrich, *Cinema I-IV*, 2008

THREE - The incandescent light bulb changed the world. Its mechanism was simple if

elegant, a metal filament wire heated until glowing. Reproducing it was easy. Thomas Edison did not invent the light bulb - a technology extant for decades by the time he filed for the relevant patents - he merely designed one workably efficient and devised a comprehensive system to make lighting it economically viable.

The fluorescent lamp, on the other hand, does not qualify as a revolution. The Geissler tube, a mid-nineteenth century novelty of colored lights, caused phosphors to fluoresce to entertain crowds in dimly lit rooms. Many inventors, Edison included, dabbled in fluorescent lighting, but the process proved too delicate and too difficult to reproduce until after the incandescent bulb lit the developed world. In the 1930s, scientists at General Electric finally uncovered an efficient method to excite mercury vapor to produce ultraviolet light to, in turn, set a phosphor aglow.

An incandescent bulb burns hot to produce its light. To us, nourished by the sun and warmed by campfire, the hot light appears natural. A fluorescent lamp's operation is complex, the light it emits cold. Fluorescent lamps cost more than incandescent bulbs. Their efficiency renders them, in the long accounting, a bargain. Such savings allow companies to string up fluorescent lamps in long rows and run them endlessly until they flicker and burn out. The cost of fluorescent lighting is not hidden in some unlit recess of our economy, it is exacted everywhere.



Brian Ulrich, *Circuitry City*, 2008

FOUR - "I'm looking for a Taylor Swift album."

"What?" She raises an eyebrow.

"A Taylor Swift album, I'm not sure which one. The one with that song on it, you know?"

"Sir, this is a Marshalls." She narrows her eyes.

"There's the self-titled debut, *Fearless*, and *Speak Now*. I think it's *Fearless* but I'm not sure."

"If you want to buy a shirt I can help you but I don't know shit about Taylor Swift." She crosses her arms.

"But this was once a Circuit City. I want to pay \$18 for a CD. Do they still make CDs?"

"Sir. This. Is. A. Marshalls. We sell clothes. We sell shoes and belts. We sell blankets and spatulas. We sell clothes so fast we don't even bother to clean up the racks." She motions her hand to the atmosphere around us.

"But I don't see anything."



Brian Ulrich, Frank's Nursery, 2008

FIVE - At Lowe's in the Gowanus neighborhood of Brooklyn, I once saw in person the actor who played Marlo Stanfield on *The Wire*. I love *The Wire*. I share with people all the time my belief that *The Wire* is the best fiction of any kind created during the Aughts. As opinions go, my stance on *The Wire* is a very important one to me.

After smiling stupidly at Marlo Stanfield, I wandered around Lowe's for two hours looking for a mirror. I didn't find the mirror I needed or any other. I left, defeated and numb, my arms free as I shuffled through a near desolate parking lot that emptied into an asphalt confluence bridging the Gowanus Canal.