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Ken Gonzales-Day

CUE Art Foundation
511 West 25th Street
Through Oct 14

In the process of researching a book called "Lynching in the West: 1850-1935," the Los Angeles artist Ken Gonzales-Day assembled an archive and made a discovery: in the more than 350 California lynchings he found records for, most of the victims were Latinos. His photographic show at CUE Art Foundation is an interpretive response to that.

Some of the photographs are his own, taken of still-standing trees where lynchings took place. Most of the other pictures are reproductions of historical images, found in newspapers and on souvenir postcards, of actual lynchings. In each of these pictures, though, the artist has erased the body of the victim, leaving everything else intact. The tree or telegraph post used for the hanging is there; so is the crowd of witnesses and executioners, posing for the camera or staring up at what is now empty space.

As the artist Kerry James Marshall demonstrated in paintings using lynching photographs and a comparable mode of selective erasure, the effect is very different from looking at the horrific unaltered pictures, where the victims continue to be exposed and shamed as objects of casual spectatorship, exactly as their killers intended. Mr. Gonzales-Day's work throws the emphasis on the spectators themselves and makes hard lines between then and now, them and us, difficult to draw.

HOLLAND COTTER