

On Wonder

On the notion of wonder, Caroline Walker Bynam noted that
“We cannot wonder at that which we fully understand!”¹

Shoufay Derz’ *Linking back* lays claim to a similar response, a prompting of wonderment. We find ourself in a dark field of barely sensed apprehension where darkness obscures and ‘*something*’ emerges from the shadows. In the uncertainty of what will be revealed, we are led to speculate and ponder what that *something* might be. The image resonates an ache of desire, the promise of fulfilment, and offers an experience of wonderment that places us outside of linguistic modes of processing.

Analytical process should not direct our affective response, but rather, flow from it, from wonderment as the point of engagement. In *Linking back* we sense a presence, which draws us towards the ineffable, the numinous, which, in our developing comprehension, lies somewhere close, yet beyond our reach. We are reminded, perhaps, of the notion that

“touts vies des choses qui nest pas etranger est fausse”,

all things which are not strange to us, are false

* *citation needed*

That which is strange, or other, than the audience, triggers wonder, prompting an investigation, or desire to discover and know.

¹ Caroline Bynam Walker

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³ Rosemary hawker “Painting over Photography: Questions of Medium in Gerhardt Richter’s Overpaintings. AAANZ Journal

Linking Back seeks to bridge that unknown space between the unreachable location of the numinous, and that of the private and intimately devotional. An artwork communicates perhaps the most ineffable truths when it challenges the recognisable: wonderment occurs in that space.

"My hope was to allude to a sense of 'before', perhaps to a place beyond what is concealed by appearances,"

Derz's work is informed by the Sufi poet Rumi and the notion of being in the world and connected to it, but also being separate from it.

"Sleep/Walk", situates the audience in a landscape shifting and blurring on the edges of our vision: here we are within a dream state. In this remote, dualistic location of journey and return we are stranded, drawn to consider, in the nature of a quest, what truth may be revealed to us? This place, half known on the edges of our consciousness, barely apprehended yet intuitively recognised, is perhaps a site of pilgrimage, of revelation.

Whereas complicity with commercial digital process confers authority upon the convincingness of *Linking Back*, the shift and blur in *Sleep/Walk* instead creates a veil, prompting an interrogation of authorship, of the hand that holds the camera. This landscape, in its shift and blur, appears to be beyond the apprehension of the apparatus of the lens itself, beyond logical capture, and therefore something beyond our own apprehension also. Blurring "disrupts the logic of this picture and any logical response based on recognition or resemblance"². Here the valley is a resemblance, combining both the figural element of a place

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with its dissemblance, and this sense of disturbance and strangeness promotes a desire to both decode and sense the landscape.

This disruption enables the far more potent form of signification based on not what is shown, but rather, what is felt.”³ The soft blur places it outside the realm of the utter convincingness of the highly technical digital image: in its intermediately this picture deftly hovers somewhere between watercolour and photograph.

This slippage conveys a sense of disappearance, a message of warning, that perhaps these are archaic images somehow sent to us via strange and unusual means, the subdued tones imbued with the authority of documentary images of a prior age. A historicity perhaps, lies within these works, something that threatens to disappear, remaining only as a trace within us.

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³ Rosemary Hawker “Painting over Photography: Questions of Medium in Gerhard Richter’s Overpaintings. AAANZ Journal December 2007