

Lynda Gammon

Artist talk at V.A.C. Saturday September 28th, 2019

JOURNAL ENTRIES

1. Curiosity

There is on the one hand the flat illusionistic space of photography and on the other the volumetric physical space of sculpture. I have an ongoing interest regarding the experience of looking at an object photographed versus the experience of objects in actual space ... differences between how one comes to understand a thing we share space with, the physical experience of an object – versus a mediated encounter with something depicted in a photograph.

2. Studio Pictures: 1983- 1989

Fisgard, 3rd floor. The walls consisted of narrow vertical pine boards most of which had been covered with newspaper. The space had been a rooming house for migrant Chinese workers, a shrine room, a school. With many gallons of paint, I made all of this white and proceeded to build work on the studio wall. However, the paint did not actually cover nor did it neutralize. The previous history seeped through and intermingled with the art I was making. Unsettling. Confused and yet curious, in an attempt to understand, I photographed the small assemblage works on the wall. On reflection, in these Polaroids, I saw the architectural space, the wall texture, the light fixtures, the baseboards as well as the sculptural assemblages that I had built. In the photographs they existed concurrently. Unlike documentation of individual art works there was no hierarchy, everything was of equal significance. I made a series of about 130 Polaroids.

3. Interval

I return to roam around the cavernous labyrinth of interconnected rooms. Spaces momentarily come into view only to fade into darkness and obscurity. Progressive and regressive wandering, the Polaroid camera clicks, negatives drop image by image into the container of water, and black strings of emulsion drift away to reveal the dark, blurry, murky, homey, moldering zone, that 'architecture' tries to repress. In the darkroom, a re-articulation of this inhabited space. Deep cuts into the dense compost of fiber photographs, groundless depth, stratified space and time, now pliable. Folding, taping and gluing, I seek out traces of continuity between images. Contingent bonds. Gleaming shards of white foam core intercalated. A peristaltic process; pearly, velvety, glossy images added and removed, the thick messy memory between intervals and disparities is affirmed and a sense of place emerges.

4. Chogyam Trungpa

A Buddhist meditation master and preeminent teacher of Tibetan Buddhism and holder of the Kagyu and Nyingma lineages says;

"Any perception can connect us to reality properly and fully. What we see doesn't have to be pretty, particularly; we can appreciate anything that exists. There is some principle of

magic in everything, some living quality. Something living, something real, is taking place in everything.”

5. Objects

Objects become photographs, enlarged to match the scale of the referent. They are mounted on thick pieces of foam core and roughly cut to match their depicted shape. These black-surfaced, flat-ish mounted photographs then try to become objects again. They are a different kind of object now, they try to pull away from their referents.

6. Practice

Mary Jane Jacob, curator, writer, and educator who has held posts as Chief Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles and at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago writes;

“Practice is about trying, developing, cultivating, improving. Practice connotes repetition: to practice, to perfect. To launch into and carry out a process without a stated outcome is to allow the process of inquiry to unfold, to trust the right way will arise, to wait, persevering through a blank open space. This deep awareness of the process of art – of self in process- is key to the creation/ the artist’s mind –in –making is not just the result of studied knowledge (getting the fact straight) or skills acquired; it is always determined by the actual process of making and the depth of awareness one brings to bear during the process. This awareness is what moves beyond the known for the self, for the viewer, and potentially for the society or culture at large”.

7. Taking Pictures

I meander around the studio taking pictures, pictures of tools, sketch books, materials and so forth. Later, I go to the darkroom at the university, then to the dry mounting room and the equipment sign-out room. Later that week I am shopping at Industrial Plastics and I photograph a stack of foam core; then at Lens and Shutter I photograph packages of fiber-based paper. Everywhere I encounter tools, objects and materials that I use to make my work. As I click the camera’s shutter the objects reflect their light onto 4” X 5” sheets of film. I move freely through the world of the digital and the mass produced, consuming, borrowing, recycling and combining.

8. It All Comes Down to What You Do With Your Mind

Buddhism explores how the mind works. How thought forms, emotions and feelings arise and dissolve. In meditation I practiced the subtlety and delicacy of watching this process. Firstly, Buddhist teaching stresses the important of ‘practice’ the practice of meditation and this requires time to learn, and takes discipline and patience, continually starting over and over again. Secondly one is directed to the dharma; reading, listening to your teachers and learning to embody the knowledge through contemplation. And thirdly one becomes a part of the sangha and understands the significance and importance of the community. Theory and practice and seems so similar to art practice.

9. The Gap

Despite our strategies to bridge the visual 'gap' between the photograph and the thing being photographed, that distance stubbornly remains.

10. 562 Fisgard

In 2009 my friend and colleague Trudi Lynn Smith rented a studio space at 562 Fisgard. I visited. It was then that I re-encountered the studio I myself had inhabited twenty-five years earlier. My gaze turned to the long wall on which I had worked; layers of white paint, the mahogany plywood that I had nailed over the wall of narrow vertical pine boards. Realizing that through its layers this wall traced lives over 100 years, Trudi and I decided to use it as a subject of investigation. The history of this particular space is largely undocumented in writing or in photographic archives. However, when people visited the studio stories would abound regarding its unwritten history as a rooming house, a shrine room, artists' studios etc. etc. We decided to think through this history with a very close photographic investigation of this wall. For this we decided to build a large format (16" X 20") analogue view camera (9' long, 6' high and 2 ½' wide). The idea being that this would be a way to photographically document this wall in the most detail possible. Drawing on photography's relationship to indexicality, its truth value, its drive towards the documentary and archival, the camera's lens was focused on the wall so as to expose a 16" X 20" section at exactly 1:1 scale. We then proceeded with a process of taking an exposure (25 minutes), then peeling back a layer of the wall, then another exposure and so forth, documenting the layers. This resulted in 3 series of 16" X 20" negatives and contact prints. Although documented at exceptionally high resolution the peeling process and photographs actually revealed little of the buried history. Although rather attractive collage-like abstractions, the history we sought remained for the most part tenaciously unavailable.

11. 25 Minutes

My Shambhala meditation teacher visited the studio and said "why don't you meditate on the studio wall?" In 2016, I embarked on a series of studio wall meditations, While the large camera was focused on the studio wall taking its 25 minute exposure, I too would focus my gaze on the same section of the wall for the same period of time. I documented these 'sittings' with 25 minute time exposures using my 4" X 5" analogue camera. While meditating, thoughts would emerge and disappear, thoughts of the shrine room, thoughts of the inhabitants, thoughts of my time spent in the studio and more thoughts, but my gaze remained focussed on the wall.

12. Morandi

I consider Morandi in his bedroom, painting images of bottles in Bologna while fascists take hold of Italy and think about the relevance and significance of my 'practice' both as an artist and as a meditator.

13. Four Postures

Four postures for meditation; sitting, standing, walking and lying down. My teacher says when you are sitting know that you are sitting, when you are standing know that you are

standing, when you are walking know that you are walking and when you are lying down know that you are lying down. I sat in the studio for 4 minutes, walked in the studio for 4 minutes, stood on the ladder in the studio for 4 minutes, and lay on the floor of the studio for 4 minutes.

14. Time

Everything changes at every instant. I was interested in the relationship of the time taken to meditate and the time taken to expose a photograph. I favour large format cameras... an 8 X10 and a 4 X5, film, the darkroom.... I am interested in the physical properties of the analogue... the darkroom gives me the chance to experience the materiality of the photograph and the paper. Digital cameras capture images in a tiny fraction of a second. In contrast, when using analogue processes, as light falls on photographic film, metallic salts are exposed in a continuous process. This exposure can be lengthy, thereby registering objects and events that may or may not be visible to the eye in the final negative. Regardless of their 'invisibility' this continuous stream of evanescent images in front of the camera's lens is recorded. An energy and potentiality towards 'form' is imbued in the analogue negative. The Buddhist way of explaining the void is to see it as an accumulation of things existing in a continuous cycle of formation and disappearance.

15. Luce Irigaray

I think of Luce Irigaray's comment that in a patriarchal world "making has been a matter of constructing and erecting" to which she proposes "cultivating" as the feminist alternative. When I look to the dictionary meaning of 'cultivating' it says "to try to acquire or develop (a quality, sentiment or skill).

16. Offerings

I work with a small group of meditators who create weekly flower arrangements for the shrines and alcove. An ancient meditative practice, Ikebana is as much about the doing of flowers as what gets done to them. Seen as a way of harmonizing humanity and the natural world, life and death, the process involves the slow and deliberate construction of arrangements based on ancient core principles and rules of form.

I seek beauty in the weekly arrangements for the shrine room and reflectiveness in an activity that seems counter to the aggressive nature of our current mode of activity in many ways. I explore notions of transience and decay that are a constant reminder of the fundamental impermanence of all things.

17. Walking Meditation

While walking my gaze is directed towards the shapes of branches. I later cut them hastening their death. Once cut and removed from their habitat, these branches are brought indoors and 'arranged'. A week later they are removed to the compost.

18. Laurie Anderson

"Is this a kind of Buddhist aesthetic? I can easily imagine the opposite: that real awareness and an ability to be in the moment would allow us to be completely non-

judgmental, aesthetic-free. I can imagine a way of seeing in which even our preferences are no longer important. I can imagine being so astounded by the world that there is no time to reject any of it at all.”

19. Moment

There is a moment just before the actual arranging takes place. The plant materials have been collected and the container has been selected. I breathe in and I breath out.

20. Rikka

True straight branch, supporting branch, receiving branch, hiding branch, anterior branch, flowing branch and waiting branch.