WILL ROGAN

A TWICE LIVED FRAGMENT OF TIME

OCTOBER 03 - NOVEMBER 27TH, 2013
The exhibition’s title is derived from Chris Marker’s epic ciné-roman, La Jetée (1962), a science fiction film constructed almost entirely of still photographs. Set in a post-apocalyptic France, scientists research time travel by conducting mind experiments on prisoners hoping to find a solution to their current crisis by sending emissaries through time. Only one man is capable of remembering the past; a vague recollection of himself as a child seeing a man die. Bewildered by the painful experiments, he is injected into the past where he begins to obsess over finding the answers to the memory that haunts him. As, after travelling back in time to that forgotten moment, he tragically discovers that the death he witnessed was actually his own. La Jetée’s narrative is a psychological time warp in that we are always faced with the persistence of the past while our imagination projects us into the future. Time travel is unfathomable because we only experience physical time, which is imminent and linear, but our memory of time is nonlinear and fragmented. In a similar vein, Jorge Luis Borges poetically observed that “the present does not exist, and since the past and the future do not exist either, time does not exist...time is a mere relation between intemporal things.” Since time is intangible, in order to foresee the future we must first understand the past. A Twice Lived Fragment of Time investigates the themes of temporal impermanence and mortality in the contemporary work of Will Rogan. His artistic practice is based largely around appropriated materials and capturing the everyday through photography, sculptures, and works on paper.

As in La Jetée, we too must search the past for ways to understand our future. Archives preserve history and serve the public as a resource for collective memory. In the series Mediums, Rogan’s process begins with collecting de-accessioned art catalogues taken from the San Francisco Art Institute Library. The images he chooses are of artists whose careers no longer exist. Cropped and mounted onto wood, the portraits become sculptural; their backsides are of artists whose careers no longer exist. Cropped and mounted onto wood, the portraits become sculptural; their backsides are of artists whose careers no longer exist. Rogan’s artistic practice is based largely around appropriated materials and capturing the everyday through photography, sculptures, and works on paper.

Archives, therefore, represent a temporal uncertainty. In resurfacing them, he.regenerates their significance.

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Photography, in and of itself, exposes the impermanence of space and time and the complexities of representing it. For instance, Douglas Huebler’s photo series Durations, attempts to capture time through the photographic process. Duration Piece #31, Boston (1974), is a photograph taken of a woman on December 31, 1973 at exactly an eighth of a second before midnight, while the exposure was completed an eighth of a second into the New Year of 1974. The woman not only travels through time, literally in the length of the exposure, but is forever suspended caught travelling in time between the two years. More interested in creating work about hypothetical statements than actual objects, Huebler famously stated, “The world is full of objects, more or less interesting; I do not wish to add any more. I prefer, simply, to state the existence of things in terms of time and/or place.” Huebler’s piece employs the temporality and spatiality of the everyday, depicting time travel as a tangible concept. Rogan’s photographic practice is similarly engaging. Viewing the Past As it Happens is a photograph of a 35-year-old book on the subject of time. The text illustrates how the historian has the unique ability to see the past as it happens. It states, “A galaxy is observed, not as it is now but as it was when its light began the journey to earth.” Starlight takes up to billions of years of reach to us. In the time it takes for the light to travel, a star could already be extinct. Viewing the Past As it Happens, emphasizes the reality of time while also capturing its fleeting nature.

In viewing the light of a nonexistent star from the past in the present, we too are like Huebler’s New Year woman, experiencing a split in time, caught between the old and the new. The night sky reflects our distance to the past and is a constant reminder of our mortality. The lights are only a remnant of that which no longer exists, much like Rogan’s memento mori sculptures. Comparable to time travel, memory is nonlinear. It is a time warp that fluctuates between past, present and future. In this sense, there is no time, there is only now. The simple act of gazing at the stars makes the experience of time travel a psychological reality, as with La Jetée’s time travelling man who is captivated by the memory of his past.

Notes
1. La Jetée, directed by Chris Marker (1962); New York, Criterion Collection, (2007), DVD.

Cover Image: Universe Art (detail), 2010. Silver Gelatin Print, Courtesy of the artist and Altman Siegel, San Francisco.

A special thank you to Jull Carson, Brian Allan, and to those who donated or lent their efforts in support of the exhibition.