

Photographic Skin

Susan Fereday investigates the object and process of the photograph. Through the display of nostalgic, found, analogue photographs, the artist emphasizes the photograph as object; and interrogates the physicality of the image. The residue of the photographic subjects as human characters communicates their personality and transfers their presence to the viewer.

The language of analogue photography abounds with sensation. It refers to the bodily and the alchemical. Gelatin, emulsion, silver, salt. These substances transform the plane of the paper into the space of the image. The photographic negative is submitted to bursts of light inside the dark chamber of the camera. Emulsion like a layer of skin holds and protects an image. Composed of gelatin sourced from animal hide, bone and offal; it is unique for its ability to hold light sensitive chemicals, to expand with water and to protect the silver nitrate and sensitive salts that construct the image.

The processes engaged in the area of the darkroom are often visceral activities; these undertakings transform physical materials to bring forth the marvel that is the photographic object. Under the red glow of the safe light the body dances between the enlarger and the chemical baths; the tempo is orchestrated by the clock's second hand. Time is critical to the process and duration can perhaps be positioned as the protagonist of analogue photography.

The interior space of the camera's body is a physical space; a space that can leave a mystical impression on film or paper. Inside the body of the camera, rays of light; the energy of the sun, becomes indexed as an image. This 'aura' of a pre-developed image embedded in light and its refraction; often of a human subject; is subsequently focused onto the surface of a light sensitive material, then 'fixed' and made physically permanent by chemical treatment undertaken by the developing artist. This is a visceral investigation, a process that uses material from the body of an animal; gelatines and emulsions; and involves the senses of the human body; vision and touch; to process. Therefore the photographic process is confirmed as a haptic and visceral exercise.

Both human skin and photographic emulsions share similar vulnerabilities and sensitivities. The 'skin'-like surfaces of the photographs presented in this exhibition draw an analogy to the human body. The photograph in *After Life (torn up girl)* seems to be lacerated; or scarred like the human epidermis could be, and an attempt has been made to place or stitch it back together; to 'heal' the photograph.

The *Ghost Story* series presents the viewer with coincidental trails of light, and clouds of mist that have appeared on found black and white photographs that the artist has chosen to present to the viewer. These manifestations of light on the surfaces of the photographs obstruct the human subjects thereon. Traces of light are indexical of the sun's rays and could be envisioned as an analogy of film to human skin; when thought of as 'sunburn'. The trace of light writes itself into the surface of the medium as an index. Accidental over-exposure has occurred to the surface of the film. Likewise the surface of the human epidermis could be subjected to overexposure by the sun. Tanning, or perhaps even burning occur both to the skin of the human body and the surface of the photographic film or light sensitive paper.

This series of work also makes the connection between the human subjects of the photographic images and the ghostly aura that is the light of the sun materialized on the image. Perhaps these manifestations of light could be read as ghostly emanations that have a relationship to their human subjects.

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