

The approach

Lisa Oppenheim

Heaven Blazing into the Head

22nd March – 21st April 2013

The Approach is pleased to announce the opening of a new exhibition by Lisa Oppenheim.

For her first solo show at the gallery, *Heaven Blazing into the Head*, Oppenheim presents a grouping of three ongoing series of work, each addressing her engagement with the relationship between photographic process and content. Oppenheim researches images and techniques from the recent and more distant past and translates them by consciously performing processes that emulate both the content of the original image and the way it came into existence.

Leisure Work is a series of four photograms, in which folds of antique lace multiply in successive prints. It derives its title from the classification of lace making in an early twentieth century Belgian census. As a part of her studio work, folding the lace is a step in a performance and occupation for Oppenheim while also a gesture to the history of photography and William Henry Fox Talbot's early experiments with lace calotypes.

Two sets of tiled photographs from the *Smoke* series exist as different iterations from the same negative. The source image, found in the U.S. Library of Congress, is described as 'a possibly erupting volcano'. Oppenheim selectively crops the image so that only smoke is depicted. Instead of using the light of an enlarger, the light of a flame is used to expose the negative and also to solarize it. Fire exists outside the frame of the photograph, cropped out of sight, reemerging as an ignited match in the darkroom in which the image is made.

In *Calendars* the tiling format becomes a temporal system. Using the same technique as in her *Smoke* series, Oppenheim has produced four large-scale tiled photographic works created from an aerial photograph from the collection of the Imperial War Museum. For every year of war and armed conflict that has involved the UK since its formation in 1707, Oppenheim has exposed a fraction of a single negative of a smoking bombsite. These images are then reassembled as multi tiled panels. In the instance of a peaceful year, she processes a blank piece of photographic paper with metallic toner to produce a gold effect. In the four pieces exhibited, 193 of the UK's 307 years of existence as a sovereign state are represented. The works act as a calendar of sorts, a quantitative timeline that compresses the UK's existence into a pictorial binary of war and peace.

Writer and independent curator, Chris Sharp has produced a text to accompany the exhibition (below).

Lisa Oppenheim (b. 1975, New York) lives and works in New York City and Berlin. Recent solo exhibitions include: Grazer Kunstverein., Graz (forthcoming, 2014); FRAC Champagne-ardenne, Reims (forthcoming, 2014); Everyone's Camera, Kunstverein Göttingen, Germany (2013); Equivalents, Harris Lieberman, New York, (2012); Vapours and Veils, Galerie Martin Klosterfelde, Berlin, (2012); Heliograms (1876/2011), Art Statements, Art Basel 42 presented by Juliette Jongma (2011); Group exhibitions include: New Photography, MoMA, New York, (forthcoming, Sept 2013); A Different Kind of Order, ICP Triennial, New York (forthcoming- May 2013); Artists' Film Club: Lisa Oppenheim- Double, ICA, London (2012); Flags for Venice, curated by Giani Jetzer and the Swiss Institute, Venice, IT, 2011; The Ginger Island Project, Performa 11, NYC (2011); Found In Translation, Guggenheim Museum, NY (2011), and Haunted: Contemporary Photography/Video/Performance, The Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, (2010). She is a graduate of the Whitney Museum's Independent Study Program and the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam.

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Heaven Blazing into the Head

Perhaps, when all is said and done, it is just a matter of form. Or being "in good form." Of showing up, of being there, and, if not playing your part, then bearing witness as faithfully as possible (faith being relative to time and place). This morning walking in the park of the Belvedere in Vienna, I thought, inevitably (unoriginally?), of Alain Resnais and Robbe-Grillet's "Last Year in Marienbad." I thought of the reduction of social interaction to ritual, to mere form, of dutifully playing one's part- the content of the piece being, in the end, quite negligible, while what counts, what really counts is the geometry of bodies, the grace and economy of gesture, the stopping and turning to stare with everyone else when the glass falls and breaks.

It could sound like a copout masked behind metaphysical meditation, but such a mode of being in the world is less inflexible than it might at first sound, lending itself to a certain latitude of interpretation. But that is perhaps more a question of style than form.

W.B. Yeats writes of it in Lapis Lazuli. A poem about the specter of World War Two in Britain (which is where the line- *Heaven Blazing into the Head*- comes from. Not entirely sure what it means, I am totally fascinated by this line, its succinct and exemplary violence. Ostensibly about death, there is nevertheless the connotation of transmission. Of 'heaven' transmitting a (final?) message. That which in turns puts into play the notion of afflatus, divine inspiration, which could lead if not elsewhere entirely,

then to an inspired notion of death), it espouses a Shakespearian commitment to action, to role-playing, while embracing a fatalism whose redemptive quality has less to do with resignation than cognition.

Here is the part in which heaven appears:

*All men have aimed at, found and lost;
Black out; Heaven blazing into the head:
Tragedy wrought to its uttermost.
Though Hamlet rambles and Lear rages,
And all the drop-scenes drop at once
Upon a hundred thousand stages,
It cannot grow by an inch or an ounce.*

All of which seems to pose a problem whose solution can only be found in the articulation of the problem itself– even if that solution, which seeks (which must seek) to be definitive, can only be provisional, no matter how beautifully articulated.

- Chris Sharp, 2013