

Vilma Gold, London

Stephen Dwoskin

21 November - 19 December

Private view Friday 20 Nov 6:30 - 8:30pm

Having moved to London from the USA in 1964 Dwoskin is known for the key role he played in British Avant Garde cinema, especially in regard to film theorist of the 70s. But despite his photographic practice constituting an important and lifelong part of his work it has so far been largely overlooked. Indeed having begun as a painter and graphic designer after studying with Willem de Kooning and Josef Albers at Parsons School of Art and Design in New York, it was not until later in his life that he started to explore moving images.

Dwoskin's photographs play a dual role within his practice. On one level they constitute key sites foregrounding his major artistic themes and concerns. But on another they also form extremely concentrated distillations that have their own autonomous expressive function as visual images in themselves. Having suffered Polio as a child Dwoskin was wheelchair bound and has inferred that his own immobility meant that the human body, in all states of pleasure and pain, became his central subject. Through visual motifs but also through his deployment of the unusual angles that his disability forced him to literally look out from, his photographs bring into consciousness his own physicality as it relates to the model he looks on so that they become deeply autobiographical documents. His films are known for the stylistic modernism that brings these elements into play and here we see these elements at work directly: the bodies of models are 'spliced' or superimposed with other body parts as they are studied intensely. As such their bodies are made to 'speak' so that they very much look back at the camera that gazes on them thus creating a dialogue that is at once sexual, intense, painfully aware of physicality and highly intimate. Dwoskin brings the model / looker relation into sharp relief but without the conceit that his consciousness of this historically fraught dynamic might somehow alleviate him from his own implication as beholder of male gaze. Instead he constructs a 'dynamic of glances' (- Laura Mulvey) that makes for highly subjective, speculative, emotional and complex scenarios that weave desire, time, intimacy and corporeality into more formal concerns.

Looking at the construction of these photographs, it is interesting to note that Dwoskin was fascinated by how memory functions visually and it is in his photographic works in particular that he was able to explore it because of their status as singular image. He was influenced by Alfred Jarr who developed the notion of "imaginary solutions", or the science of Pataphysics. Dwoskin treats memories almost actively. For him memories are objects searched for, retrieved, embellished and reconstructed in the present. He has said:

"Memories are passed through unknown dimensions and are no longer something of the past. Rather, they become redefined equivalents in the present. In this way, memories are restructured like dreams, or, in a more concrete way, like collages. Remembered pleasures can become pain, or painful occurrences can become pleasurable." (Dwoskin, Stephen, 1993, HAHA! La Solution Imaginaire published by The Smith, p.x introduction)

For Dwoskin, the process of Pataphysics becomes the process of imaginary solutions, i.e, the process of making artworks. Where gaps occur in memory these 'solutions' symbolically attribute the properties of objects, usually described by their actuality, through their distinctive and particular characteristics. Looking at the splicing and superimposition at work in his photographs, what they show is a man delving into his memories and reconstructing them in the present to make a sort of impossible and singular fusion "collaging events of the past with the discoveries of the present" (ibid., p.XI).

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“Dwoskin’s cinematic style is formalist, but at the same time it is illuminated by feeling that goes beyond form. The camera’s zoom collapses the spaces between itself and other people and between itself and places. Under the inexorable and erotic gaze of the camera, women’s faces lose their surface presence, the mask of normality, or the cosmetic mask. Out of this intense preoccupation with the human face, the surface presence of the screen image also seems to disintegrate, losing focus and outline. The camera seems to be reaching behind both surfaces – the screen and the woman – as though for something hidden ‘behind’ a mirror and beyond the sexual. There is the sense that places materialise in Dwoskin’s cinema when people, particularly women, are no longer present. These times of isolation are also times of immobility and the camera wanders around a room or, more often, stares out of a window, using the lens – to alter the perspective, the configuration, the focus, the frame – to create moments of pure film. But the formalism is grounded in physical and emotional sensation.”

-*Laura Mulvey*

“Why woman—I’m always asked—I think I merely filmed the ‘dialogue’ with that which I ‘desired’ to have a dialogue with. All the films of this period have high degree (greater or lesser) of sexual implications. It was not to make a voyeuristic relationship with the ‘model’ but to create an ‘actual’ relationship of participation (this is important)—it was to be involved—and triggered the way the camera participates and the way that the ‘model’ acknowledges the presence of the camera (and the person using the camera). This acknowledgement is the key shift from voyeur (the English sense of voyeur) to participant.”

- *Stephen Dwoskin*

List of works

	Untitled, 1990 archival pigment print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag, framed 100 x 79.59 cm 39 3/8 x 31 3/8 ins Edition of 5 + 2 AP	Untitled, 1990 archival pigment print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag, framed 65 x 47.2 cm 25 5/8 x 18 5/8 ins Edition of 5 + 2 AP
clockwise from door		
Girl, 1971 Black & White 16mm film 22 mins	Untitled, 1990 archival pigment print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag, framed 65 x 36.99 cm 25 5/8 x 14 1/2 ins Edition of 5 + 2 AP	Untitled archival pigment print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag, framed 65 x 51.37 cm 25 5/8 x 20 1/4 ins Edition of 5 + 2 AP
Take me, 1969 Black & White 16mm film 28mins	Untitled, 1990 archival pigment print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag, framed 65 x 40.59 cm 25 5/8 x 16 ins Edition of 5 + 2 AP	Untitled, 1990 archival pigment print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag, framed 65 x 52.37 cm 25 5/8 x 20 5/8 ins Edition of 5 + 2 AP
Untitled, 1990 archival pigment print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag, framed 100 x 65.27 cm 39 3/8 x 25 3/4 ins Edition of 5 + 2 AP		

