

THE PERSISTENCE OF IMAGES

PROVINCETOWN ARTS, 2005.

by Eileen Myles



Paul Horan Lee, Patch (Self-Portrait), B/W Photo from Notebook

Paul Lee's work excites me because of its disproportionate or maybe inverse relationship to scale. I saw a group of tiny photo collages of his at Schoolhouse a year or two ago-the exhibited pieces were composed of small bits of photographs, rearranged into versions that often included a pearl among its parts. My response to these first pieces was to want to hug the work yet it was so small and I felt larger and bulkier than usual. My body was troubling and felt oddly squeezed out of the contraption of his photo culture as if I myself were the pearl. Paul Lee is a poet. His work strikes me as one of relationships, and I think the material differences from piece to piece are secondary, which is why his work seems to me to be so-would it be modern and extraordinary? It's post technological, it's not of this world, though he's thinking intensely about it. What's in it? Like the ocean for instance, or cameras. What's in them, reassembling them. I delight in the cadences of Paul Lee's language. He's not a large man and is relatively young. I went to see his work in Brooklyn about a month ago. His building was near the subway stop called Atlantic/Pacific and I was a little taken aback at the suggestion of a meeting of those two seas that probably do meet somewhere on the globe, but not in their enormity. They probably meet when they finally get small or insubstantial, about to go away. But the words themselves are huge like both oceans are in their huge force. And in their names, Atlantic and Pacific always feel permanent-only carry a sense of the oceans at their peak, their bigness, no other point. I climbed up the steps to his building and I had about an hour, having just gotten lost and packing my day as I do into ridiculously small intervals so any wandering creates an incredible squeeze somewhere else, but Paul's work squeezed back and the hour I spent in it felt huge. By and large he sums his work up as video and sculpture.

Yet his work trails in and out of various media: on the wall of his studio were a procession of raised collages-pale photographs of ocean on cardboard almost like an arial view of a skateboard loop half built-as if you threw the project into the hands of Frank Gehry or someone and these were their working models and they pinned them vertically on the wall-these seas stick out. It's like furniture. Paul says he's trying to construct a flat world in order to open it. I wondered if he would also consider that he is stealing worlds to create new ones. I ask him the obvious if he likes Joseph Cornell because where Cornell used a golf ball or a ping pong ball, Paul persistently uses a tiny pearl. But my comparison is plodding because the pearl is less a thing and more a bit of a doorway in this world, a lens. The pearl is placed

in the eye of one if his other repeating elements, men, specially a young French boy lifted from a fashion magazine who appears continually in Paul's videos and in the wall collages and in the books he also makes and the young man's eye is a pearl-which is where I began to fall most grandly down the rabbit hole of possibilities in his work-are the pearls always cameras? Are we being watched or saved or something? I mentioned that he also makes books-thickly overlaid books of dots and cameras, of large black lenses that move wildly around the pages, as you turn them, then the video he showed me next seemed a reenactment or a reinterpretation of the book, with "bootlegged" sound of a 16-millimeter projector running throughout maybe attempting to make the video feel as retro as the book though for me the book had an actually more "advanced feel than the video. It gave that same kind of grunty body feeling I initially described some kind of sexual metaphysical unnnh. The book's unnnh is one of created excess, photos and cameras begin to pile up cascade in a slow animation, not all Muybridge but instead being the private experience of a film that you can stop and start-a dream that beckons very differently from the "take only hostages" viewing experience of film.

There's a nostalgia here for the sea, film, photography, and handsome men. All his work seems a meditation on what seeing brings us and what it doesn't. His own relationship to this wryly conducted experiment is an indelibly perverse one. He's walking through an assembled history of ideas about seeing and capturing pictures from it as a dandy might. Perhaps in the way a pirate is a dandy. With tattoos and the parrot and the satanic wink. Paul's whole project is about looking back at the dream of representing the world as if we had by now gone far beyond, and we have. And the sea is a constant symbol for all that as well. Perhaps we're out there going around and around it. Smack in the center of his room is a blue cardboard box painted light blue. In it are remnants, curling pieces of paper that each was covered with photographs of the sea (again). Where did you get those, I asked. Oh off the web, he smiled. This was his answer to where most of this stuff came from. So you go "in there" to get pictures of out here. You print them out again and again. First you make them 3-D, like raising the sea again. And then you throw your scraps into a box and paint it blue. As if the question were can you take the color out of the sea, and then hold it in blue. Returning the color somehow.

One other piece was a curlicue pattern of burned matches growing into gorgeous filigree. On a little rectangle, like a painting, but not. Again, a collage, I guess. And finally he showed me a couple of heavy cameras made of out clay. Like puppets. Heavy as shit, and painted brown. And then all stuck with bright white feathers, fluffy and pretty. Sell me that one, okay? He did. It sits on my teevee. It's called Native, which my friends all thing is wrong; they're probably right. I love it. It's the heaviest camera in the world and I think it can fly. He calls it Native cause it's home everywhere. I didn't ask, it's just what I think. Clay cameras are actually very old. Muybridge but instead being the private experience of a film that you can stop and start-a dream that beckons very differently from the "take only hostages" viewing experience of film. There's a nostalgia here for the sea, film, photography, and handsome men. All his work seems a meditation on what seeing brings us and what it doesn't. His own relationship to this wryly conducted experiment is an indelibly perverse one. He's walking through an assembled history of ideas about seeing and capturing pictures from it as a dandy might. Perhaps in the way a pirate is a dandy. With tattoos and the parrot and the satanic wink. Paul's whole project is about looking back at the dream of representing the world as if we had by now gone far beyond, and we have. And the sea is a constant symbol for all that as well. Perhaps we're out there going around and around it. Smack in the center of his room is a blue cardboard box painted light blue. In it are remnants, curling pieces of paper that each was covered with photographs of the sea (again). Where did you

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Paul Lee's Piracy

BY EILEEN MYLES



PAUL HORAN LEE, *PATCH* (SELF-PORTRAIT), B/W PHOTO FROM NOTEBOOK

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EILEEN MYLES, cover subject of Provincetown Arts in 2000, is a poet and novelist who writes frequently about visual art.