

Objects of Melancholy

Morel Derfler / France Lebée-Nadav / Zohar Kawaharada

Curator: Ilanit Konopny

Looking through **Morel Derfler's** legacy, I found a wooden box, the kind made for storing treasures, the kind that is strong and sturdy on the outside, but soft and padded on the inside. Within there were photographic objects, lost for over a decade since the time they were first created. I recognized photographs that Morel clipped out of his famous series. The photographs were part of new and layered hybrids, placed in frames and on household objects. They appeared to be experiments for his amusement, recycling raw materials from his works. Characteristic of his work, his photographs play in an endless game of metamorphoses, never remaining in their initial direct form. They seem to be the product of a desire to disconnect from the past, from the origins from which they were derived.

Photographs are objects of melancholy. They are reminders of death. They are an invitation to look for ghosts. Photographs include the death of the photographed thing, whether it be human or object. Photographs are the remnants of history and are an expression of the vulnerability of life ever marching towards demise. "... They trade simultaneously on the prestige of art and the magic the real. They are clouds of fantasy and pellets of information."¹

The photographs of **France Lebée-Nadav** pulsate with the pain of time. A monkey of bright lily-white, the skeleton of fish flying through the air, a jellyfish billowing up into a cloud. She etches pictures of nature, infused with eternal life and preserved in a museum-like display. Lebée-Nadav, a collector of dying things, gathers the remains of leaves into her room. Like the foremost photographers, Thomas Wedgwood and Henry Fox Talbot, she writes in light the anatomy of the leaves. She glorifies the delicacy of their wounds and, in negative and positive, observes the beauty of their existence. In her photographs, the animate and inanimate are alike, objects of spirit, beings in the world. She transforms the two-dimensional into the three-dimensional, animating carefully folded paper. Lebée-Nadav immortalizes the momentary existence of fragments of light, the hypnotic presence of ghosts, and brushes over the cracks in walls connecting them.

Photography is a melancholic action. It captures the present moment and immediately turns it into the past. But this act of converting life into death also allows them to part from one another. With time, a photographed piece of reality, loses its connection to the real. After the act of shooting a photograph, following that very moment, the objects or humans fixed in the photograph instantly disperse and change. Each one continues towards their destiny into the future, leaving the photograph in an abstract past, open to new interpretations.

Zohar Kawaharada places herself in a darkroom. At a slowed pace, she spins full circle on an axis and, in a fragmented fashion, reveals gaps in the darkness. She moves, trapped in a panorama of pursuit. The interior space, photographed, is designated for military shooting practice in built areas. The exterior space, spilling into it, is used for hunting wild boars. For lack of control over that which is sketched in darkness, random encounters of reflections are engraved, as shadowy memories of actions that took place there. In a tribute to Nicéphore Niépce, one of the fathers of photography, Kawaharada entraps herself in darkness, taking the photographs while residing within the camera. She turns her work room into a camera obscura and looks out of its window. With admiration and hesitation, she touches the sacred image. The rooftops of Paris in the 19th century are replaced with the Abulafia rooftops of Tel Aviv today.

France Lebée-Nadav, Zohar Kawaharada and **Morel Derfler**, weave art of sadness and beauty. The melancholy pleasure that exudes from their works is accompanied by the eternal return to the past of photography. With camera obscura techniques, photograms and photogravure, they reveal a metaphysical clarity, the possibility of a living-dead existence. They create photographs that are seductive in their pain, expressions of everyday loss and mourning, intermingled with a deep yearning for the rhythms of life.

¹ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1973, p. 54