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By

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INTRODUCTION

I had never given the camera much consideration until I had taken, and printed, my first photograph. The excitement of creating an image with a camera has remained with me since. There is nothing quite like the thrill of watching an image emerge, somehow magically, from the depths of a tray filled with chemical fluid, knowing that you have removed this piece of reality, and hopefully, transformed it. My interest in photography continues to grow along with a firm conviction that the camera as a creative medium, is a valid and stimulating tool for any artist who may choose to use it.

Walter Benjamin wrote, "photography opens up the physiognomic aspects of the world of images which reside in the smallest details, clear and yet hidden enough to have found shelter in daydreams."⁽¹⁾ It is this aspect of photography that interests me, together with the potential of the camera to invest and invent meaning, while also reflecting personal and unique ideas and sensibilities.

It is encouraging to see that photography as an art in Ireland, is receiving an increasingly warm response, despite the fact that such photography frequently receives much criticism. A large amount of this criticism has resulted from the misguided approach taken by many of the first photographers who believed fervently that photography had become a "new" art form.

From the 1850's through to the 1870's photographers relied on traditional sources in painting for their inspiration. Adaptations were made of landscapes, nudes and even allegories, and illustrative photographs imitating developments in painting, became increasingly common. Many of the subjects were elaborate still lifes, and "moody" landscapes modelled by the photographer on what they had grown accustomed to seeing in painting. Most of the work evolved from duplicating classical and romantic styles which were prevalent in much of the painting at the time. Painters, who for years had painstakingly been perfecting perspective and realistic detail, naturally reacted with fear and scorn as their livelihoods were threatened by the ease with which a camera could capture realistic detail.

"Art Photography" had got off to a disastrous start. People expressed their distaste for photography's intrusion into painting, and heated debates were held to discuss photography's role in art. An article published in Germany in the "Leipzig City Advisor" in 1842, condemned the new trend. It stated, "to fix fleeting reflections, is not only impossible as has been shown by thoroughgoing German research, but to wish to do so is blasphemy. Man is created in the image of God, and God's image cannot be held fast by a human machine. At the most the artist, enraptured by heavenly inspiration may, at the higher command of his genius, dare to reproduce those divine, human features, in an instant of highest dedication, without mechanical help." (2)

Many painters shared this "anti-technological" concept of art, and in 1862 the French painter Ingres initiated a petition that damned photography as, "a souless mechanical process, never resulting in works which are the intelligence and study of art." (3)

The fact that the camera is a machine, and that photographers turned to painting as a source for their subject matter, created much of the problems associated with photography "as art". However, progressive changes began to take place when an Anglo-American called Peter Henry Emmerson encouraged photographer's to reject the approach they had taken previously, towards art photography.

Emmerson believed that imitation paintings made bad photographs, and scorned the trend of "sentimentalising" reality with the fashionable use of costumed models, faked lighting, and other props. Emmerson wrote and published a book called "Naturalistic Photography", and in it he called for a photographic renaissance in which contrived devices would be replaced by honest and real sources. He advocated the belief that true photographic art lay in the ability of the camera to capture in a direct way, the essence of the real world. To illustrate his view he included in his book many of his own photographs taken in the Norfolk Broads, a rural and unspoiled area of England.



①

"TOWING THE REED"

PETER HENRY EMMERSON. 1885.

As a result, many photographers, began to re-examine their approach, and realised that photographs could acquire visual strength from their own sympathy for a subject, combined with personal and intellectual concerns. Although Emmerson succeeded in establishing photography as an art with its own unique needs and concerns, and painters learnt to accept the machine as an aid and ally, rather than a threat, criticism against photography as a new art form, continued. One area that attracted criticism in particular, was the nature of the photograph, when compared to painting.

In an essay written by the critic Richard Hennessey entitled "What's All This About Photography?" (Art Forum, May 1979), we can see an example of the type of criticism which was typical, and continues to be applied to photography. In relation to the surface of the photograph, Hennessey writes, "anyone who has ever examined a photograph knows how quickly one is faced with loss of focus and the merely nasty residue of photochemical processes." Whereas about the painted

surface (and with excessive romanticism) he says, "when upon examination, a painted cloud resolves itself into strokes, pigment, surface, and so on, we find ourselves pondering materials and activities of intrinsic beauty and interest. Consider the paintbrush. How many bristles or hairs does it have? Sometimes twenty or less, sometimes five hundred, a thousand more. When a brush loaded with pigment touches a surface, it can leave not just a single mark, but the marks of the bristles of which it is composed. The 'yes I desire this' of the stroke is supported by the choir of the bristles, 'yes I desire this'."(4)

Obviously the surface is of paramount importance to Hennessy in his assessment of art, as he chooses to ignore some of the more crucial aspects of "art photography" such as time, movement, subject matter, meaning and content. In the "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", published in 1935, Walter Benjamin points out the futility of anti-technological views, and describes the functional dislocation of works of art which occurred when, as he says, their mechanical reproduction "reversed them from their cult value as autonomous objects." This he believes is why photography suffered from what he describes as this "fetishistic, fundamentally anti-technological notion of art with which theorists of photography have tussled for almost a century without of course, achieving the slightest result. For they sought nothing beyond acquiring credentials for the photographer from the judgement seat which he had already overturned."(5)

The rejection of photography as art, has since been lessened. There are now so many photographers who feel deeply about the creative potential of their chosen medium, that harsh criticism becomes, in effect, superfluous. The photographer Paul Strand successfully justifies this by saying, "the existence of a medium after all is its absolute justification if, as so many seem to think, it needs one, and all the comparisons of potentialities is useless and irrelevant. Whether a watercolour is inferior to an oil, or whether a drawing, an etching of a photograph is not as important as either is inconsequent. To have to despise something in order to respect something is a sign of impotence. Let us rather accept joyously and with great gratitude everything through which the spirit of man seeks to an ever fuller and more intense self-realisation." (6)

Despite such an uneven history, photography has held an ongoing, active and permanent role in visual art. Numerous artists persist in finding the camera to be an exciting and satisfying medium through which they can express personal visions and concerns.

Art photography has long since found a warm acceptance throughout Europe, yet in Ireland, this process has been somewhat slower. This situation is now gradually changing, partly due to various factors such as increasing public awareness towards creative photography.

The establishment of a gallery that shows photography exclusively, has contributed to this development. The "Gallery of Photography" which opened in Dublin in 1978 with the aid of the Arts Council, exhibits the work of various renowned photographers such as Diane Arbus, while also bringing to our attention the work of many dedicated and interesting Irish photographers such as Tony Murray, Richard Haughton and Tom Grace. One major feat instigated by the gallery was the compiling of a comprehensive selection of work by Irish photographers which took the form of a touring exhibition called "Out of the Shadows" which successfully celebrated where Irish photography is at now, while also serving to encourage that development. Other outlets such as the Triskel Arts Centre in Cork, have also helped further awareness with frequent exhibitions by Irish photographers.

Why, despite an often unsympathetic climate, artists continue to choose the camera as a medium, and how they become involved with particular subject matter, are just some of the questions that interest me as an art student concerned with photography. My interest led me to select and interview three photographers who presently live and work, actively in Ireland. Having chosen and interviewed three specific photographers I have decided to look at two in particular, primarily because of the distinct ways in which they approach their medium, combined with the nature of their photographs and subject matter.

For example, Willie Doherty has a strong interest in the nature of photographic materials, and their potential for personal and emotional expression, whereas Patricia Langlois' approach towards photography is essentially intuitive and instinctive as she avoids preconceived ideas and analysis.

It was with these individual factors in mind that I approached each photographer with the following questionnaire. By looking at what I believe to be the most interesting aspects of these two interviews, I hope to establish how these artists continue to explore and believe in a medium, expressively, against the odds.

Questionnaire

1. Why have you chosen the camera as a relevant medium to work with?
2. At any stage have you been concerned with whether photography is art or not?
3. What differences do you see between so called "commercial photography" and "art photography"?
4. The author and critic Victor Burgin believes that the photograph is inextricably involved with the production of meaning, would you agree?
5. How do you decide on the subject matter and content of your photographs?
6. As a photographer, do you feel you have an active role in visual art?
7. Do you feel it may be necessary to combine photographs with text?
8. What would you say to the critics who condemn photography as a limited and mechanical medium?

Followed by interviews.

INTERVIEW WITH PATRICIA LANGLOIS DECEMBER 5. 7.00 PM.

L.F: Why have you chosen the camera as a relevant medium to work with?

P.L: In the question are you asking why, instead of painting etc?

L.F: Yes, why do you like the camera as a medium, what does it have for you personally as medium compared to say paint?

P.L: Well I used to paint, I found that technically I did not have the craft enough to control what I was trying to do, what I was trying to express. For some odd reason I find I can be more objective with the camera, with the finished image, than I can with painting. I look at a painting that I have done, and I still think it is better than it is, I can not be as objective as I need to be. With a photographic image I can be very hard on myself with it, I can see it easier, as somebody else might be seeing it, if that makes sense? Part of it is the fact that I have reached a proficiency I suppose, with all the skills involved, all the various different stages of skills and knowledge. That it makes it easier for me to express myself with a photographic image as opposed to painting. Part of it is just because I enjoy using a camera, it is I suppose partly (it took me a long time to understand it) my temperament. I tend to be gregarious, but I am not really. I tend to look and listen a lot, and a camera gives you some sort of objectivity. It puts a distance, painting is a much more physical immediate medium.

L.F: If you say you can be objective about it, and that is a good thing, does that mean you cannot be very subjective as well?

P.L: The thing is, is that it has the balance of both, which I think is often lacking in work. Some people are so concerned with the craft, they forget about the image, or what they are trying to express, and some people get so concerned with that, they forget about the craft. That is it, with photography I find I come closer to that balance of what I think is necessary for a good image. It is not that I do not feel that there are painters who can do it, it is just that with me personally. It is like Sidney Nolan, I think he does both. He has the formal concerns, and he has control of the craft, and a strong personal vision.

L.F: At any stage have you been concerned with whether photography is art or not?

P.L: No, I do not think so.

L.F: Never? When people say it does not qualify as art because it does not really involve real texture or things like that.

P.L: You could say that of any print medium

L.F: Well some of the critics have described photography as cold flat and boring.

P.L: It does not have to be cold flat and boring, I agree sometimes it is, but then I think that some painting and some sculpture can be that way. I have never personally gone through any questioning about whether it is art or not, I have always believed it was. But quite possibly that

might have been because I came along at the time when all those arguments had been pretty well hassled out in the States. I am finding arguments happening here against photography, that good lord, those were back in the beginning of the century. I am sure it is the same in France and Germany, those issues were resolved nearly a century ago in the States. That is part of my background, and I am surprised sometimes still to run into it. I mean people like Alfred Stieglitz went through that battle years ago. Sometimes somebody will say something and my back gets up, occasionally, but it is an art to me, and by defending it somehow I am negating the fact that it is an art. I do not feel I have to because it quite firmly in my mind is. If I get into a position where I am defending it, then it undermines it.

L.F: What differences do you see between commercial photography, and so called art photography?

P.L: Basically commercial photography for me anyway, is that somebody is trying to sell something, whether it is a product or an idea. And it is usually somebody else's idea, or product. In any art form I think it has to be a personal vision, and the formal concerns can be just the same, but I think what is lacking would be a personal vision. Even though part of yourself is going to always get in there. Slightly, but you are not in control of it. Like my frustration with languages, and picking up a book in France and realising that somewhere across the world at a certain time somebody else was doing images quite like mine. That person may never see my work, but I saw theirs and I know that they are very like me in some way, and there is a communication through a visual image. Rather than the need to form words.

Do you know anything about Karl Jung? Do you know anything about his theory of the collective unconscious?

L.F: No.

P.L: I do believe that there are ways of tapping into sounds sort of metaphysical and mystical and whatever, but there are other levels of communication other than verbal. And visual images tend to call up those parts of people. Symbols, will do that, I mean, as an image, a symbol can be very much the same thing, it is like a line in a poem, you may mean something very specific, but a person is not wrong when they also see similar experiences. The one image you were looking at of mine, where you said it looked like maybe a bed, in fact it is clothes hanging on a line. But it had very much to do with a period of time when I was feeling very quiet, very inside myself, and caught up a lot with interior dialogues and visions. It, very much is like that, a hanging and waiting almost caught in my interiors. The bed thing, it is odd, I actually have taken a lot of shots of beds.

L.F: But that was not, and I saw that?

P.L: But that was not, and I could have said, no, it was not, but the fact that that particular image was not actually a bed, was not important. I have few proofs of a few images upstairs of beds, and shadows and light on beds.

L.F: Yes somebody can spark something off inside, it is a shared thing, not a verbal thing.

P.L: No it is not, and if you tie it down too close I think the mystery goes, or the mystery is closed off. When I do it for myself it is because I need to. I have to work, actually it is a physical need, it is an emotional need of mine. To keep myself centered, to keep in touch with who I am and where I am, but past that, once that is done, I present that for other people to look at. I am hoping that maybe it might make them look a little differently at life.

L.F: You cannot guarantee it, it is out of your hands, you cannot make them see what you saw?

P.L: You can stimulate it, or spark it off, or hope to reach somebody else, whatever words you want to put on it.

L.F: Psyche maybe?

P.L: Yes but I am really very cautious about using words like that, that is what basically it gets into, it does get into those areas. I do hope that maybe somebody may look a little differently at things.

L.F: Or even at you differently? That other people may see part of you in it as well?

P.L: Yes. Only just recently I think. It is a pretty scary place though. You are sharing, because you cannot separate your work from yourself. Not good work. I have trouble with what self indulgent means, but if you lose sight of all the formal concerns, or make it so personal that it is not universal, it should be that no matter what part of the country, what part of the world, people can respond to it.

L.F: The author critic and photographer Victor Bergin believes that the photograph is inextricably involved with the production of meaning. Would you agree?

P.L: I think that an image involved with work, whether it is sculpture, paint, painting whatever does have meaning I think if it is any good. I have problems with the question I am not exactly sure.

L.F: I think he means, for example, if you have a matchbox here on the table, that it is just a matchbox, it does not necessarily mean very much because it is just a matchbox on the table. You might not give it a lot of thought because it is sitting there ready to be used. I think what Bergin means is if you photograph it, you immediately give it a meaning and importance, all of its own. Suddenly you have 'a matchbox', in a photograph. Or that a photograph of a cup and a matchbox would immediately force you to see meanings and associations that you might not have considered before.

P.L: I see yes.

L.F: Would you agree then that the photograph in that sense is involved with the production of meaning?

P.L: Yes, I would not say 'any' photograph but I would agree, yes I think.

L.F: How do you decide on the subject matter and content of your photographs, and what are your main concerns?

P.L: Sometimes I am just drawn to things, and sometimes I do not know why. Like I have gone through different stages in my life of being interested, first I started out with probably strips of light, and then I realised there were shadows, and those concerns are always there I think. Different levels of reality maybe, I do not know. I often do not know 'why' I am taking photographs of things, but I know that if I am not really interested in it, it shows. If I am just doing it as an exercise and maybe I have got to use a camera, I find those images never work anyway.

L.F: When you feel no excitement?

P.L: It is like Morandi, with his paintings of boxes and bottles which he painted for years, because he was really interested in it, there was something coming through of him into it. Though most of the time I do not know 'why'? It seems like almost (with me anyway), if I 'know' why, something goes dead with it, it becomes too intellectualised. I am not saying all people work that way, I do not think they do.

L.F: So you rely more on your intuition. Are you interested in why it concerned you 'after' you have taken the photograph?

P.L: Afterwards? Yes. Because I think it does help me know a lot about a particular place I was in in my life. Yes afterwards, but not so much while I am taking it.

L.F: So you would see it afterwards as a self exploratory exercise?

P.L: You are much better with words than I am. Yes. No, that is true, because I have used a camera for about twenty years now. I still have all the decisions to make, but the camera is not really in between me and my work anymore. It is like part of me.

L.F: It is like another limb?

P.L: It is, I mean I can just use it. I know the films, and I know what they are going to do, what this camera will and will not do, what papers I am going to have to use afterwards, all of that. It is like Jean, he is fresh enough into it, that those ideas, or that part of him is still growing. You know, I pretty much have all that, so it has left me free, much freer than I have been with any other media.

L.F: Have you ever tried to impose a pre-conceived idea on a photograph, like have you ever tried to say "well I would like to do this, or say this, or mean this", and gone ahead to do it?

P.L: Oh I have, yes, but they do not work. It is like I came in here one day, (there are proofs which you have not seen), but I came in here one day, and it was a day usually I will take say maybe six, eight, ten, twenty, thirty rolls, maybe it takes me six months, a lot of the images just are not quite there, and then there will be one day, where quite possibly I could get almost an exhibition out of a roll of film. But it took all those other rolls of film, all those proofs, all those contacts. But it is like it takes it to get there, and there might be one day, where everywhere I look, it is going to be one of those images, and I know it usually. I have got

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to the point where I know it is one of those days, and there is 'nothing' on earth that is going to stop me taking images. Because I know it might take me six months to a year to get back there again. I mean it is silly things, I walked into the kitchen one day and there was washing up liquid sitting there, and those rubber gloves hanging there, and it was pulling me really hard, and it was not something I thought out of the corner of my head, that is interesting, I must get around to it one day. I walked in and picked up the camera and I did it, and I did not think about anything of it. But there was a shadow, and there was another hand over there, and the label on the bottle was three hands, and I consciously was not aware of it. People who I have shown it to since said, "oh well you could put that in a womans show" and it could be an image about womens blah, blah, blah, well I am not into it, it would not ever be a reason why I would be. But I could see how people could think that. What it is actually about is a year and a half of washing dishes at Trudi's, but I did not know that when I took it.

I had just reached the point when I had really had it, I would really have to do something else with my life than, working in a back kitchen. I needed it for a while, but I do not need it anymore. But I 'know' I would not have taken that image if I had not worked in Trudi's for a year and a half. Does that make any sense?

L.F: Oh yes, that means an awful lot to me. It reminds me of pregnant women, and the way some have been known to pick up a piece of coal. Like their bodies suddenly tell them they have to have such a piece of coal.



② "MANY HANDS MAKE LIGHT WORK". PATRICIA LANGLOIS.

P.L: Need, yes.

L.F: Something in you feels it, needs it yes.

P.L: Yes. It is actually a need I think, the balance has to be there, o.k
I have got it, now what size am I going to make it? What kind of paper
am I going to put it on? What is the mount? What is the frame?

L.F: Those are concerns after you have got the image?

P.L: Right. Once I have got it that far, and I know it is a working image,
then I have to say, o.k do I want that a bit lighter? Do I want that
darker? How much do I exactly take off it? You know all of those
formal concerns have to come into it as well. It could fall apart
at this moment, I may make a wrong decision 'anywhere' along the line.

L.F: So you do not see the photograph as being complete after it is taken?

P.L: No.

L.F: There is a lot more to it after that.

P.L: And I might blow it yet, somewhere along the line.

L.F: That seems to be where most of your deliberate concern for the
photograph comes in? After the intuitive side, where you actually
have a more conscious control of what is going on.

P.L: But even in the darkroom there is a fine balance between allowing yourself to free up and work intuitively, and keeping those concerns and crafts in control. If an accident starts to happen, and it is working and making more out of it than you had intended, you have got to free enough to go with it, and use it , channel it and not be so tight with the pre-conception, if that makes sense as well. I mean there are so many stages along the line.

L.F: I think it is very like painting. With myself at the moment, I might make a decision, and feel I do not want to change it, and then something tells me I just have to change it. You find another direction, and you have got to let yourself go. It is not easy but the possibilities are so good, it is a good thing to go with something like that.

P.L: It is yes. Well I think it is necessary.

L.F: As a photographer do you feel you have an active role in visual art?

P.L: I do yes. I have exhibited I think in most of the open shows, Limerick, Oireachtas, Living Art, Independents, shows that are open to photographers. I have yes. I mean anything that would take photography. I can understand a show saying, (and more so it is getting that way in Ireland) where it is drawing and sculpture, like say the S.A.D.E. But I do not understand the exclusion of photography.

L.F: Still it goes on?

P.L: Not as much, it is certainly not as much as it was when I first came here, seven years ago.

L.F: Well so you do feel you have an active role, because you do play an active role, and you have done?

P.L: I think so, yes. Teaching photography I think has been an active role in the visual arts. I mean it is not just my work that is important, it is photography as well. I know I have helped.

L.F: Before I ever had any interest in photography I remember you giving a class and I had no interest at all in it, you might as well have been talking about bananas, and I would never have heard of them, still one or two things you said I will never forget. I like that when something comes back to me when I need it. I remember, it was in Dunlaoire, and you were talking about portraits, (this is a long time ago) and you were saying that a portrait, (and this is before I had ever thought of anything like this), you were saying that a portrait of somebody in photography does not have to be a straight photograph of that person, and that symbols can be used. Which sounds very obvious now, but I remember you saying that which says something good about teaching.

P.L: Yes, I think it is an important way to influence, stimulate, just as important as putting my own work in. It is encouraging other photographers, whether they are students, staff or whatever, to do the same. In other words I cannot really do one without the other, because

I am a teacher as well. I personally do not want to get involved in a gallery, and all the inherent dangers.

L.F: You prefer to exhibit and avoid being a big cog in the process?

P.L: I do not, yes. I think there are too many dangers ending up doing that work, I am not saying I would give into it, but I do not want to chance it. The pressures to do 'that' kind of work because it sells, or do not do that kind of work again because it does not sell. I want to do the work for myself, and hopefully spark off something in other people, I do not want to do it for money. If something happens to sell, that is great.

L.F: Do you feel it may be necessary to combine photographs with text?

P.L: No. At this point I do not see any reasons to put photography with text, you are talking about a published book? Photoessays, that kind of thing?

L.F: You do use titles to enhance your photographs, but at any stage do you feel that you might have a leaning towards using text as an extension to your images. Or that you might find your work becoming limited in a way that you might find it necessary to add some form of text?

P.L: No I do not think so, at least with what I am trying to do with photography at the moment. The title, yes I am sure is giving an extension to my work.

L.F: You do not feel it will lead to a more elaborate extension?

P.L: Well maybe possibly a book at some point, but I do not think a photo essay, if that is what you are talking about where you have a written text and photographs to go with it?

L.F: Well anything really. You said you wrote poetry, say for example you had a line that conjured up something, maybe you could put an image with it? I mean have you ever thought about doing that, or is it that you would not like to do it? Or you have thought about it and you do not feel like doing it now, or you do not think you will ever feel like doing it?

P.L: I might try to put something together in a book, but it would not be a photo essay type of approach. I would not see it as being like that.

L.F: So you do not altogether rule out that photographs and text interest you?

P.L: Oh no, I do not it is just that I personally do not have a need to do it. It is not that I do not find it interesting, it is just that I personally do not have a need to do it, but I might. Sometimes I have a need to write, I suppose that is why the titles, my literary background, poetry whatever, it is touching into that.

L.F: It is just interesting to know that you do not rule it out totally, like for example some people might paint and may have no sympathy for

performing art. But you do not completely rule out the use of text with photographs as an interesting extension, you do have sympathy for it, and find it interesting, but you just do not do it right now?

P.L: Yes.

L.F: What would you say to the critics who condemn photography as a limited and mechanical medium?

P.L: I would tell them I disagree! It is no more limited and mechanical than other medias. Limited? Anything I suppose can be limited. Mechanical? It is quite ironic, because I do not actually like machines, I am anti electrical appliances and machinery, and it is strange I ended up in this area, I mean I used a hand sewing machine, I won't even use an electric sewing machine, and here I am with a camera, and an electric enlarger, but I do not feel that way about it so much. It is more about using light, I just do not think about the mechanics anymore. Once you have control of any craft, then you can extend yourself beyond it. Whether it is equipment for making prints, or you have a brush in your hand, or a saw for making a stretcher. All of those.

L.F: So you would feel that the camera is as limited as you make it?

P.L: Well I mean anything has its limitations, but that I think is a different issue.

L.F: Why have you chosen the camera as a relevant medium to work with?

W.D: When you say relevant, I immediately think in terms of socially relevant, is that what you mean?

L.F: Relevant as opposed to paint or print or even pencils, why is the camera relevant to you? Why have you chosen that?

W.D: Well, in some ways I have chosen a camera and I have not. A lot of the work I have made has been made without the use of a camera, I have chosen to work with photographic imagery, made with or without the camera. I suppose specifically photographic imagery, I have chosen that, or photographic media, and all its layers of understanding and then the theory that makes it up, its structure, its processes, the whole thing. I see it as being related. The starting point, my approach to using photography was that of a sculptor, rather than a photographer, so for me the structure of photography, its processes, materials were as much a part of it as the imagery I was working with.

L.F: Why the camera? Why not something else with other materials involved with it?

W.D: Well, before I made work with photography I had been using other materials, I have used paint, pencils, a variety of print making materials, and the usual assortment of materials that you tend to come across in your first year at art college. What specifically made me finally work with photographic imagery was the fact that as a medium it is accessible, by that I mean the language of photography is a language

that is in current daily use. Most people understand the language of photography, and they can understand advertisements, cinema and television, those mediums are connected in a way for example that painting is not, painting is a different language.

L.F: Are you saying that it would communicate to more people because of the type of medium it is?

W.D: Well, it seemed more relevant to me at the time that I made the choice, as my own particular background was not that of a painter. With my education, and everything else that had gone before me, I just felt closer to a kind of directness in some ways that photography is capable of producing, rather than paint. I would not totally agree with that now, but that was my starting point. In some ways I think that was naive. I went on to explore that through work, My initial question, was that photography and photographs must be truer than painting, it is related to the old notion that the photograph does not lie which is absolute nonsense, of course it does. A lot of the work that I have made from that has been about how photography in various ways can lie, trying to expose its nature, materials, and processes.

L.F: At any stage have you been concerned with whether photography is art or not?

W.D: It was not a problem to me, I mean I see it as being the same as bricks are, as mud is, as paint is, as canvas is. I mean it is a medium, or it is a material that exists and can be potentially used by an artist. I have seen photography that is not art, it is not

necessarily art, it depends on who uses it, the attitude of the potential user, the artist.

L.F: It never bothered you that initially it was not a very physical activity? As it is generally used, it is not often used in a very physical way?

W.D: Yes, well that was important to me as an artist that I should actually get my hands on it in a way that you cannot normally with photography. It is one of those mediums that makes the user very removed, it is mechanical and there is a certain kind of magic almost involved in it, there is a kind of aura involved in it, it is not like making a pot, or making a drawing where it is very direct, it is your hand, a pencil and a piece of paper. There are a lot more intermediary stages where you can lose more and more control of the image, so a lot of the work I have made is about trying to break that down and get closer to the material, the process.

L.F: So you have never questioned it being art or not?

W.D: The fact that I chose it as an artist, was enough. That made it art. If I choose paper, or if I choose paint, if I choose carpets, if I choose bricks, I mean they are art, and that was my stand towards it.

L.F: What differences do you see between so-called 'commercial photography' and 'art photography'?

W.D: The differences I see are, those I have just mentioned. The attitude of the artist, that is I think what defines a piece of art. Commercial photography like commercial anything else, is made for specific commercial reasons. It is made to sell something or to promote something in some way, it is made to make money essentially. Art I believe is related more to a person's emotions and spirit, and those essentially are not caught up with money. Art can be made into money, but I think the essence of it is beyond commercial concerns.

L.F: The author and critic Victor Burgin believes that the photograph is inextricably involved with the production of meaning, would you agree?

W.D: I would agree. I do not believe you can make an innocent photograph, a photograph that is devoid of meaning. The meanings and signs that a photograph contains work on a number of levels, lots of levels, from the very direct representational level of what information is actually represented in the photograph, very descriptive details, the location, whether it is a man, or a woman or an animal or a landscape. All those very immediate signs or meanings. A level beyond that would be whether it is being used metaphorically, symbolically or whatever. Then there is even a more subliminal level of meaning, beyond that. I do think photography, like any language that people use immediately becomes imbued with meaning. I do not believe it is separate and exists as a purely visual thing.

L.F: By its very nature it has meaning?

W.D: The person who took the photograph may not be aware of the meaning, but the actual image contains meaning for other people, for a potential audience it has meaning, it is the same way you approach anything, you approach it with your own particular views, your own prejudices or whatever, experience and association. You immediately start to read something in your own terms, they can be very personal things, and there is a level where every image means only certain things to every individual, but there is also a layer where everyone has a common understanding of its meaning, and there is almost a universal understanding of some images, not all images. There are images that are peculiar to particular civilisations, or cultures and countries.

L.F: Do you think if you had say just an apple on the table, that to photograph it would give it a totally different meaning?

W.D: If you show someone an apple, you are showing them an apple, but show a photograph of an apple, and you're showing them a still life and there is a history of still life photography. So by its mere existence the photograph of the apple has a place in the history of still life. It does have a meaning within that context, it is no longer an apple, it is a still life.

L.F: You think then that it would make somebody look at it differently by the very fact that it is in a photograph.

W.D: I believe it has meaning in the context of being a still life, it is still an apple, I mean the understanding of apple does not change, apples are still apples. The context for locating the apple in

this particular way, in a photograph, changes it.

L.F: How do you decide on the subject matter and content of your photographs? And what are your main concerns?

W.D: This is the big one is it? How do you decide? There is no one particular way. A lot of the work that I have made has been quite autobiographical or self referential, so I suppose I was the starting point, but within that there is not any definite method of coming up with content or subject matter, I relate that process to maybe keeping a diary of some sort, it is a very fluid process, I do not tie myself down to saying I have to make particular types of images, whatever happens to come up on that day will often be a starting point, I have often made work taking maybe a walk as a starting point, when I would go to particular places that have some meaning for me from maybe childhood or some other meaning, and then use the photographs that I might take on that walk or on that visit, then start a process of reworking them. I start trying to extract all the layers of meaning from those images, and trying to construct them in some way, initially I take a series of photographs, and then it becomes more like making a drawing or making a collage with them, in some ways. I do not have any strict ideas about what potential subject matter is.

L.F: So you begin with yourself, and then it is an intuitive thing you follow through?

W.D: Yes.

L.F: And your main concerns are initially about you, and from you?

W.D: That is true, but I think that is probably true of a lot of work anyway. More recently, or just recently I started work on a series of portraits which I am quite tentative about, at the moment. What I will actually make will be a photograph of another person's face, but I am more interested in the process that takes place before the photograph, which actually involves as much myself as the other person, a similar kind of starting point. I like to keep a thing very open ended.

L.F: So you would not approach something saying 'this is what I am going to do', like saying I want to do a, b and c and go and do it, it is all open to change?

W.D: Yes, in the past I have worked like that, as I say now I want to work with a more tangible thing, so that kind of level of immediate response is more controlled, or I put myself more in the position of having to deal with that, before I take the photograph rather than trying to deal with it afterwards.

L.F: Yes, instead of letting a finished thing suggest something, letting the thing beforehand suggest it?

W.D: Instead of having a series of photographs and then trying to construct a new image from them, to put the work into the initial stages so

that an image comes out of that work rather than making a series of images that you may reject, or you may reject some of them, and then using them in particular ways to make a new image.

L.F: More pre-conceived, would you call it that?

W.D: I would not say pre-conceived, it has to be very open, it is like reversing the process, 'before' taking the photograph, instead of 'after' taking the photograph, that has to be very open as well, I do not have any hard and fast rules about it. I also tend to incorporate formal concerns with the actual materials that I might be using, the camera, the angle and all these kind of things come into it.

L.F: What about shape and colour. Do they matter to you?

W.D: They do of course, yes. The work I am involved in at the moment is very confrontational, both in its presentation and its production, and I am going to set up a situation that will be deliberately confrontational, between myself and another person, and will again be presented to the viewer, in a confrontational way. So in that sense that form is related to the work, it is actually the crux of it.

L.F: As a photographer do you feel you have an active role in visual art?

W.D: As a person involved with that medium, I do. I think that it is as important, and as strong as more traditional mediums, like painting, or working with a variety of sculptural materials. I think photography

is as capable of making expressive and important art, as any other medium, the art is more about the artist than any particular medium, so photography like anything else is capable of being made into something good.

L.F: Would you see your active role in just using photography? Or would you see it going beyond that, for example being part of a process that encourages photography? Creates a greater acceptance?

W.D: I think that it is up to the artist how the work is presented to any kind of exhibition or gallery. You present it as important and relevant art. I think it will only become accepted, when, well in Ireland anyway, it has been seen to have made important and strong art. The problem does not exist elsewhere. For example in London and New York there is a long tradition of contemporary art being based around photography, in the last ten or fifteen years, with conceptual art, a lot of the basis of it was the fact that it was photography as a medium, or as a language it is very open to conceptualisation. Due to all its specific quirks, the fact that it is a very precise illusion, it does involve language in a particular way, that it can be used with text. All its quirks make it very open to conceptualisation, and a lot of very important art has been made through that medium. I think the problems Irish art has with photography are probably the same as it has with good painting, and good sculpture. I believe Irish art is very self contained, there is a particular thing which is called Irish art, it seems to end somewhere around Dublin, the rest of the world exists beyond that.

L.F: What do you mean 'self contained'?

W.D: The particular gallery system in Dublin is very self contained, there are a small number of artists in that system, it is very stifled, and stagnant at the moment.

L.F: Why do you think that is?

W.D: I think it is related to the size of Ireland, and its importance in an international art market, it does not really have a position in that. It has never had a major venue where major contemporary shows, will be shown. So instead of meeting what is happening internationally, and taken it abroad, it has always kept very much to itself, and shown its own artists. I mean the recent confusion about Rosc, highlights that. What should be a major international show has been turned into a fiasco by that problem of Irish artists believing that because the fact that they are Irish makes them relevant artists, makes them good artists. Where in fact in terms of the artists they are shown alongside, the quality of that work, I do not believe there would even be five artists in Ireland that should be included, never mind twenty or thirty.

L.F: You really think that there are not five at all?

W.D: I really do. The conception or the understanding in Ireland of what the issues of contemporary art are, are very different from what they are understood to be in Europe and America. The problems of Irish

art are the same as they were twenty years ago, and they will probably be the same in twenty years time. It is very incestuous.

L.F: Are you relating that in the context of certain trends, ideological trends, where people see a certain type of painting having a certain meaning, and then it develops into another level beyond that, and do you think the Irish are apart from that, and they are not in that process?

W.D: They are not in that process. I think you cannot ignore it, if you are going to involve yourself in contemporary art, I think that is where the most exciting art is happening, it is not happening in Ireland, it is happening somewhere else.

L.F: Do you think that some people like Michael Farrell, who have become involved in trends in Europe, just began making carbon copies of other work, and that it can have a detrimental effect?

W.D: That is because he is a bad artist. I think that if he had been on top of it from the start, that would not have happened. This is a whole different thing really to what we have been talking about.

L.F: Well it is the visual arts, photography included, I was asking you if you would want to be part of expanding its acceptance in Ireland, and you obviously feel that it is not very fertile for that here.

W.D: I do not restrict myself to Ireland, I just want to make art that I believe, by all those standards that I think are worth trying to achieve, and if Ireland does not want that, then that is too bad, it does not worry me, I will work somewhere else.

L.F: But you do feel you have an active role to play?

W.D: Yes. At the moment teaching in the art college I think is quite an active role, that is quite direct. I mean showing work in gallerys is less direct than that. I have the opportunity to talk and discuss issues rather than merely show work.

L.F: You are in a position to affect things?

W.D: I do not really want to affect people, I do not want to influence people, or convert people to a particular way of thinking, but I want to make people more aware that these possibilities exist. I would like to see a wider understanding of the potential of photography as a language in Ireland at the moment that does exist. People still have a very restricted view of what it can do, and what it is about, and that is the artist and photographer I am talking about. They do not grasp the true potential of their medium, good art will only be made when the artist involved, fully understands the medium and its potential, and consciously accepts and rejects parts of that.

L.F: And learns how to use it like any craft?

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L.F: And learns how to use it like any craft?

W.D: Yes, use and abuse it, as he chooses. You cannot be in the dark about something, if you are in the dark about how something works you can never fully work with it.

L.F: Do you feel it may be necessary to combine photographs with text?

W.D: I have used text, at the time it seemed like an important thing to do, I have not done it in these past number of years. Because I became more concerned with working purely visually. At the time it was important, and it added a new dimension to the photographs. What it does is, it provides another layer of information, that the photograph does not. You can juxtapose a new set of associations, you can literally put the opposite beside something, you start a whole flow of associations moving between two things. In that respect it can be useful, I think it is a choice, it is a decision that the artist has to make. For some works I think text is vital, and I have seen works where it has worked really well. I can also appreciate the purist standpoint that the photograph must remain the photograph, and cannot be contaminated by anything else like words. That is a particular purist notion which relates more to a history of photography and a tradition, whereas the use of text is a more recent thing, which is more linked to conceptualism. People coming from that purist tradition find it a bit much, but then I think the other artists, the conceptualists do not have the same preciousness about the image, or maybe the same protection towards it. Everything is fair game, text can be or cannot be used, as the artist needs it, I think if a work needs text, it should have text, if it does not need text it should not have text.

I disagree with the premise that it can never have it, or should always have it. It should be flexible, so if a work will benefit from a text, a descriptive text, or a poetic text, or whatever, it should have it.

L.F: What would you say to the critics who condemn photography as a limited and mechanical medium?

W.D: Well it is limited, and it is mechanical, but that is what makes it exciting. Every medium is limited, I mean painting is limited, if you work with wood, wood is limited. That is the challenge I think of any medium, that you work and push the limits of the medium. While you are actually working with the medium you get frustrated because it is so limited, or whatever, I think that is its nature, it cannot be anything else. If you choose to work with photography then you understand what the limitations are, and you work within them and try and expand and understand them. You do not let it restrict your vision, the work you make still has to be as important, and as strong. It is a restricted medium, all mediums are. I mean you cannot make wood do what steel does, you cannot make photography do what paint does, some people try, but essentially they are different mediums, they have limitations, that is what makes them good. So much work has been made now within that limited field, to make it apparent that it is exciting and relevant.

Patricia Langlois

Born: California, USA

Group Exhibitions

Dunlaoire Art Festival, 1978

Dunlaoire School of Art & Design (DLSAD)

Student Staff Show, 1978

Independent Artists, 1979, 1980

Oireachtas, 1980

Irish Exhibition of Living Art, 1979, 1980, 1981

Limerick, Exhibition of Visual Arts, 1980, 1981, 1982

"Out Of The Shadows": Contemporary Irish Photography,

Arts Council Touring Show, Ireland, USA, 1981-1984

One Person Exhibition

Wexford Arts Centre, 1984

Television

The Landscape of Flats; Natural and Supernatural

Channel 4, Chico, California, USA

$\frac{1}{2}$ Hour Programme - Directed, Scripted, (Photography used as Stills)

Film

Mandala: Core of The Ring, 1976

16m Colour. 10 minutes

Directed, scripted, filmed, edited.

Featured in film series. California State University at Chico. (CSUC). Also interviewed with film. Channel 9

Television, Chico, California

Prizes: Arts Council Bursary, 1982

Publications: Irish Times, British Journal of Photography,

The Crane Bag

CHAPTER II

Patricia Langlois - "An Intuitive Approach"

Patricia Langlois studied photography at the California State University in Chico, and has been seriously involved with photography since 1960. In 1976 she came to Ireland and has now settled here. Patricia has been teaching and exhibiting photography ever since.

Patricia's approach to photography appears to owe little to any particular "school of thought" in photography, as it is essentially personal and intuitive. It could be said that her photographs are the result of her responding on a subconscious, automatic and "feeling" level. Because of this unpremeditated approach her photographs tend to have a peculiarly "private" quality about them, and many become unintentionally autobiographical. Her approach appears to relate to how she feels about the camera.

"Because I have used a camera for about twenty years now, I still have all the decisions to make, but the camera is not really in between me and my work anymore. It is like part of me." (7)

Although Patricia does not impose preconceived ideas on what she photographs, she is still aware of what her own personal criteria is, for an image that "works". This she believes involves an awareness of formal concerns such as scale, tone and the process of printing the photograph.

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Although much of Patricia's work may appear initially to be minimized or abstracted it is important to her that her images avoid being too personal, so that people may respond to them.

Often Patricia will use many rolls of film until suddenly she feels a form of "connection" and knows then that a whole exhibition might come out of that one roll of film. This she attributes to an instinctive need, and the photographs seem then to become a visual manifestation or statement, of that need. It is an instinctive way of working, an impulsive response to somewhere or something. She feels drawn to things, and seldom knows why. Patricia describes this process.

"I mean it is silly things, I walked into the kitchen one day and there was washing-up liquid sitting there, and those rubber gloves hanging there, and it was pulling me really hard, and it was not something I thought out of the corner of my head, 'that's interesting', I must get around to it one day." (8)

Later she realised that the resulting image was related to a stage in her life when she had completed a year and a half of washing dishes in a restaurant, a stage in her life that she realised, had come to an end.

Patricia is conscious of the ambiguous nature of her photographs in the sense that they are often interpreted by people, in different ways. She is also interested in

what she perceives as their "universal" characteristics, she believes that these characteristics enable her images to communicate beyond barriers such as language. She appreciates what she terms this "mystery", and believes that it may be disturbed or lost if it were to be subjected to excessive analysis. In relation to this universal appreciation of images she says;

"I do believe that there are ways of tapping into rounds sort of metaphysical and mystical, whatever, there are levels of communication other than verbal, and visual images tend to call up those parts of people." (9)

An interesting statement that Patricia makes is that photography is not so much about the use of a machine, but "it is more about using light". In all of Patricia's photographs it is apparent that shadows and light are predominant aspects of the image. The subject is frequently imbued with a sense of "wonder" as it is fused with the light and atmosphere in which it exists. The varying degrees of light in each image create an atmosphere that appears to be dense with sensory associations. These associations appear to me to evoke a world full of uncertainty, mystery and flux, combined with a hushed atmosphere that could be compared to dawn or dusk. It is in these qualities that we can observe a manifestation of Patricia's inner world, which results from her intuitive approach.

In one of the photographs entitled "Sock Walk" (12"x16"), there is a distinct sensation of a human presence which is suggested by the subject matter, a floor on which a pair of socks is strewn. The play of light on their commonplace banality brings suggestions of strangeness and mystery. It is evident that the socks themselves are not essentially the subject matter, but more the associative meanings evoked by them. Because it becomes apparent that these are in fact a child's pair of socks, their presence becomes increasingly intense and significant. There is an aura of quiet sadness about this image, a feeling that the child who once wore the socks, is now gone, leaving behind a sense of loss and emptiness. I suspect that it is an image that many parents might relate personally to, as it would be likely that a parent would stumble upon their child's belongings, haphazardly thrown on the floor, while alone in an empty room or house. There is a pleasing reiteration of elements in this photograph as the patterned lines on the socks, and their shape, echo the shape and tones created by the shadows and light.

Although Patricia chooses her subject matter randomly and intuitively, it appears that she identifies with situations that have a consistent blend of light and subject matter.

She comments; "I have gone through different stages in my life of being interested, first I started out with probably strips of light, and then I realised there were shadows, and those concerns are always there." (10)



③ "sock walk." PATRICIA LANGLOIS.

Subject matter that reappears in many of the photographs often involves hanging clothes and unmade beds. An example of this can be seen in a photograph entitled "Snagged by Shadows". The hanging clothes emerge from the dark, highlighted by accidental patterns of light which seem to "emotionalize" the hanging fabric, and define it. Again this image is heavy with atmosphere, the hanging clothes have an evocative presence which lends itself to subtle meaning, which suggests some significant and personal experience. There is an air of oppression in this image, a feeling of confinement, a womb-like quality that seems to be encompassed in the whole arrangement. Many of Patricia's still life "arrangements" seem to be invested with a spiritual presence, and this same peculiarity of mood can be seen as present in varying degrees in much of her work. The absence of people in the photographs seems to me to enhance their presence in the structures and subject matters.

The photographer Aaran Siskand believes that "the business of making a photograph may be said in simple terms to consist of three elements. The objective world, (whose permanent condition is change and disorder), the sheet of paper on which the picture will be realised, and the experience which brings them together. The object has entered the picture, in a sense; it has been photographed directly. But it is often unrecognisable, for it has been removed from its usual context, disassociated from its customary neighbours and forced into new relationships." (11)



(4.)

"SNAGGED BY SHADOWS"

PATRICIA LANGLOIS.

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This statement of Siskands could be equally applicable to Patricia's work as many of her images transcend the initial subject matter as they acquire a new context in which associative meaning then becomes a pre-requisite for "reading" each image.

Victor Burgin describes the way in which the photograph is inextricably involved with the nature of content, and the communication of meaning.

"In the very moment of their being perceived, objects are placed within an intelligible system of relationships, (no reality can be innocent before the camera). They take their position, that is to say, within an ideology. By ideology we mean, in its broadest sense, a complex of propositions about the natural and social world which would be generally accepted in a given society as describing the actual indeed necessary, nature of the world and its events." (12)

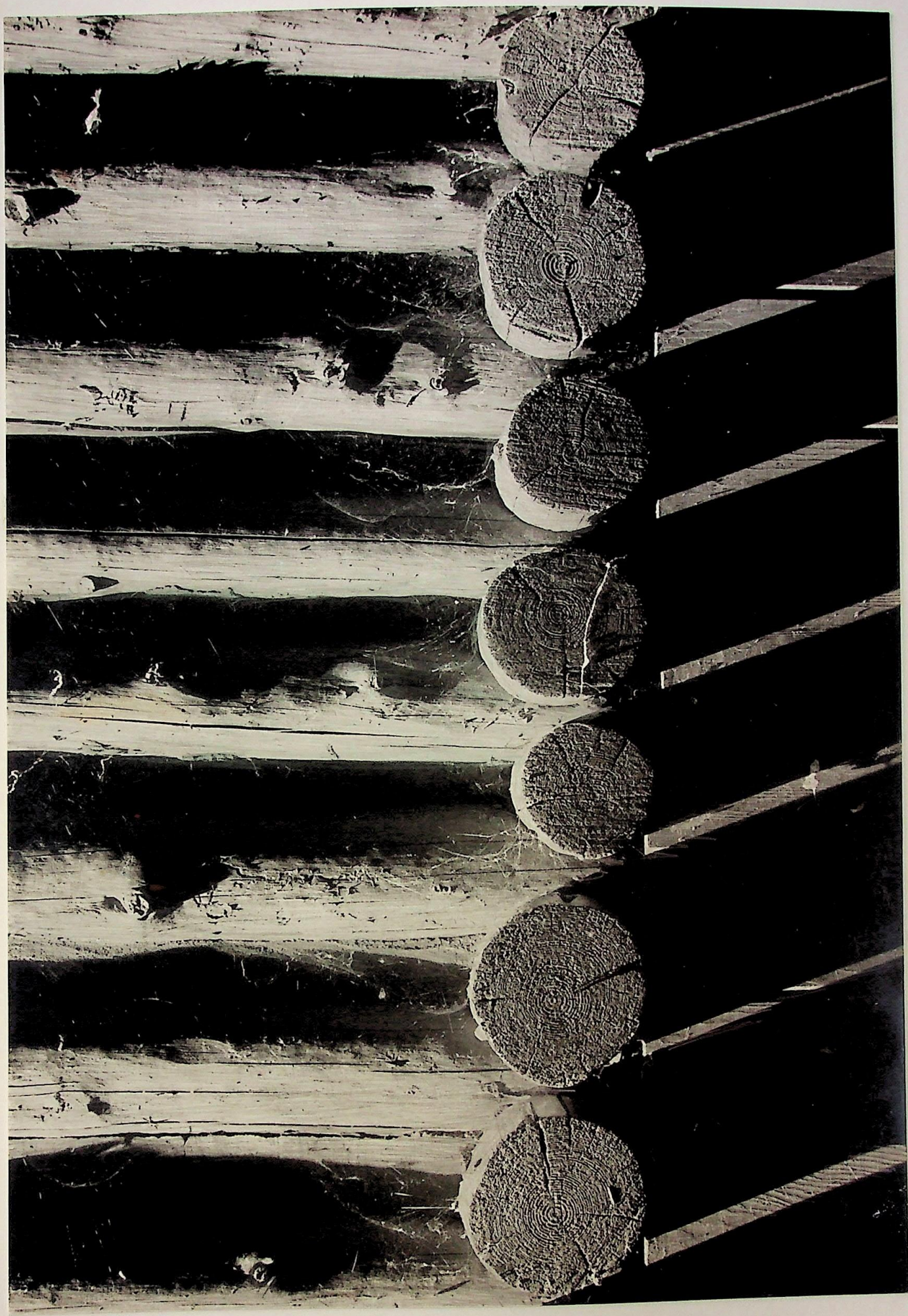
By intuitively responding to certain objects and situations, Patricia's emotions and feelings become an integral part of her photographs. While discussing one of her photographs, she explains this phenomena.

"The one image you were looking at of mine, where you said it looked like maybe a bed, in fact it is clothes hanging on a line. But it had very much to do with a period of time when I was feeling very quiet, very inside myself, and caught up a lot with interior dialogues and visions. It, very much is like that, a hanging and waiting almost caught in my interiors. The bed thing, it is odd, I actually have taken a lot of shots of beds." (13)

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It is this aspect of Patricia's work that I find particularly interesting. It becomes obvious that she has a strong personal involvement with the medium which translates itself through work that becomes exceptionally direct, and yet paradoxically understated and subtle by nature. Perhaps this is because she is sure of her need to express herself through the medium.

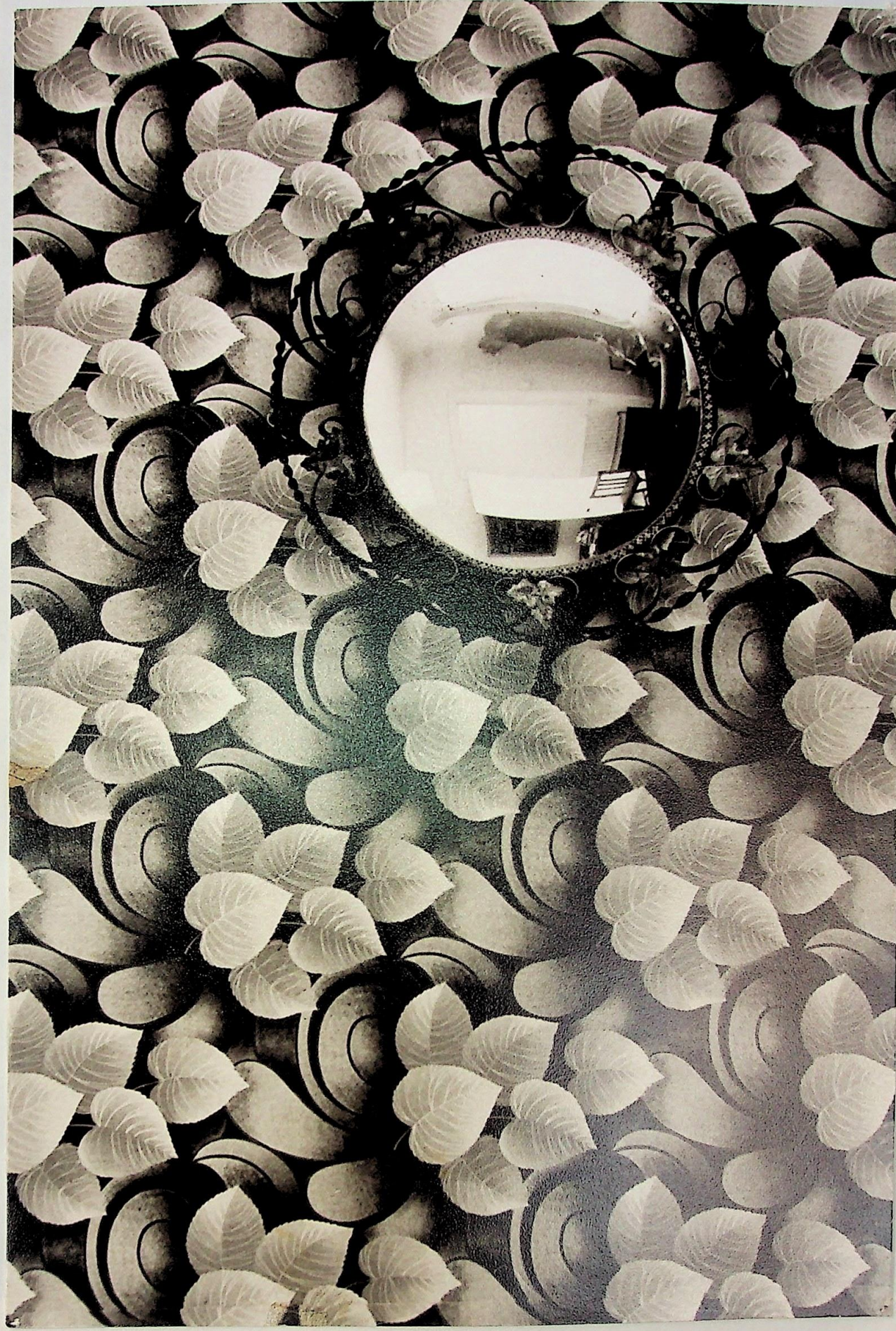
"I have to work, actually it is a physical need, it is an emotional need of mine. To keep myself centered, to keep in touch with who I am and where I am, but past that, once that is done, I present that for other people to look at. I am hoping that maybe it might make them look a little differently at life." (14)



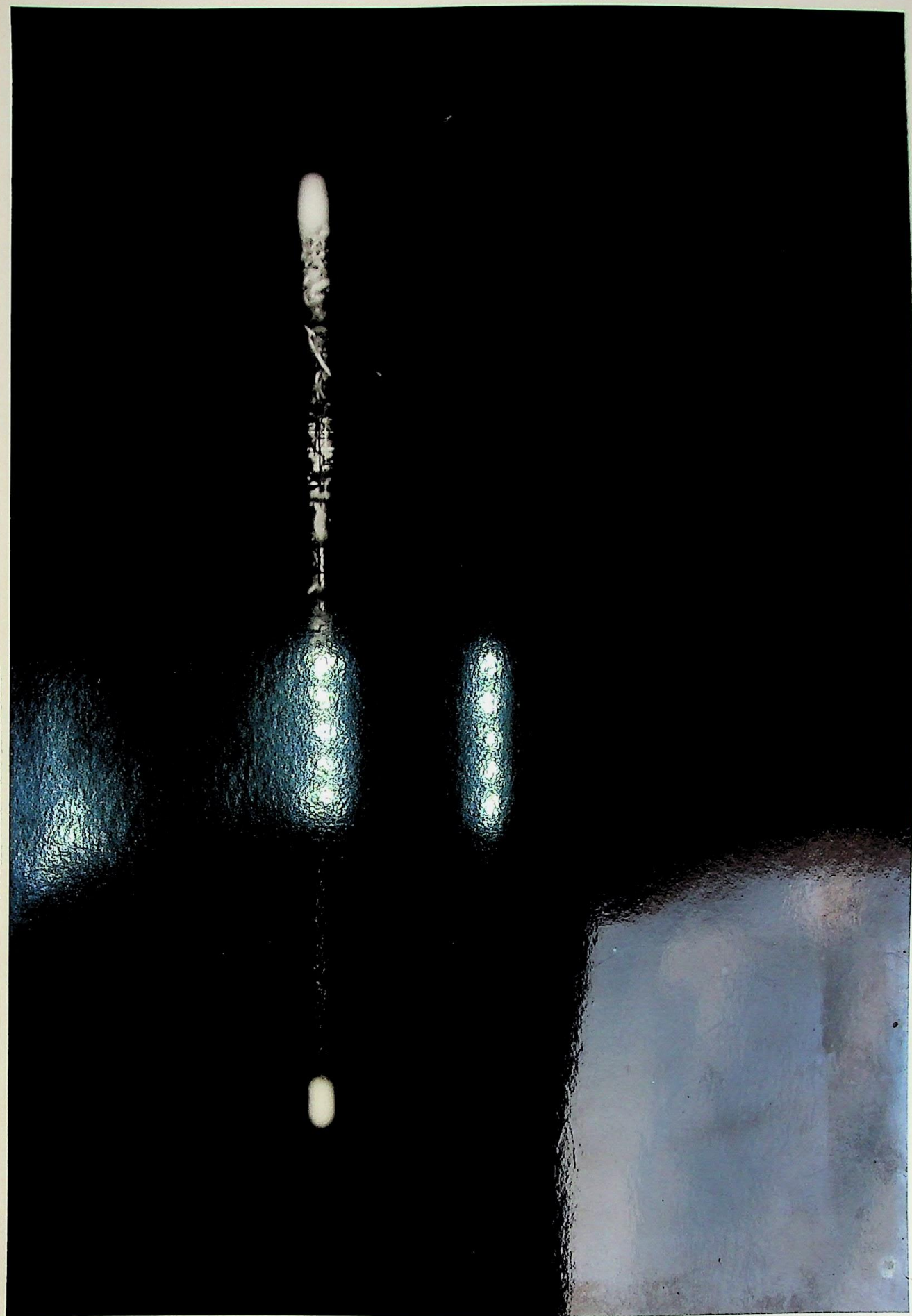
⑤ "LOG RYTHEMS" PATRICIA LANGLOIS.



⑥ "RIBBONS OF LIGHT" PATRICIA LANGLOIS.



⑦ "INVERSION": PATRICIA LANGLOIS.



⑧ "PRIVATE VIEW". PATRICIA LANGLOIS.

Willie Doherty

Born: Derry, 1959

Foundation Studies, Ulster Polytechnic 1977-78

B.A. Honours Degree in Fine Art, College of Art And Design, Belfast 1978-81

Artist in residence at the Orchard Gallery, Derry,
September-December 1982

Previous Exhibitions

May 1980 - Installation, Orchard Gallery, Derry

April 1981 - "Work Made Live", NCAD, Dublin

August 1981 - Carrolls Prize Winner, Irish Exhibition of Living Art, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin

January 1982 - "Live Performance", Crescent Centre, Belfast

February 1982 - Exhibition of Collages, Orchard Gallery, Derry

November 1982 - "Siren" An Installation, Art and Research Exchange, Belfast

December 1982 - Exhibition of Photoworks, King St. Gallery, Bristol

January 1983 - "New Artists New Works", Orchard Gallery, Derry

February 1983 - "New Artists New Works", Project Arts Centre, Dublin

May 1983 - Performance Art Space, Cork

August 1983 - Guinness Peat Aviation Awards, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin

October 1983 - Six Slide Sequences, The Last Picture Show, Art and Research Exchange, Belfast

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Publications

"Artwork" Published by the Orchard Gallery, Derry

"8 Weeks 8 Works, A Season of Installations" Published
by Art and Research Exchange, Belfast

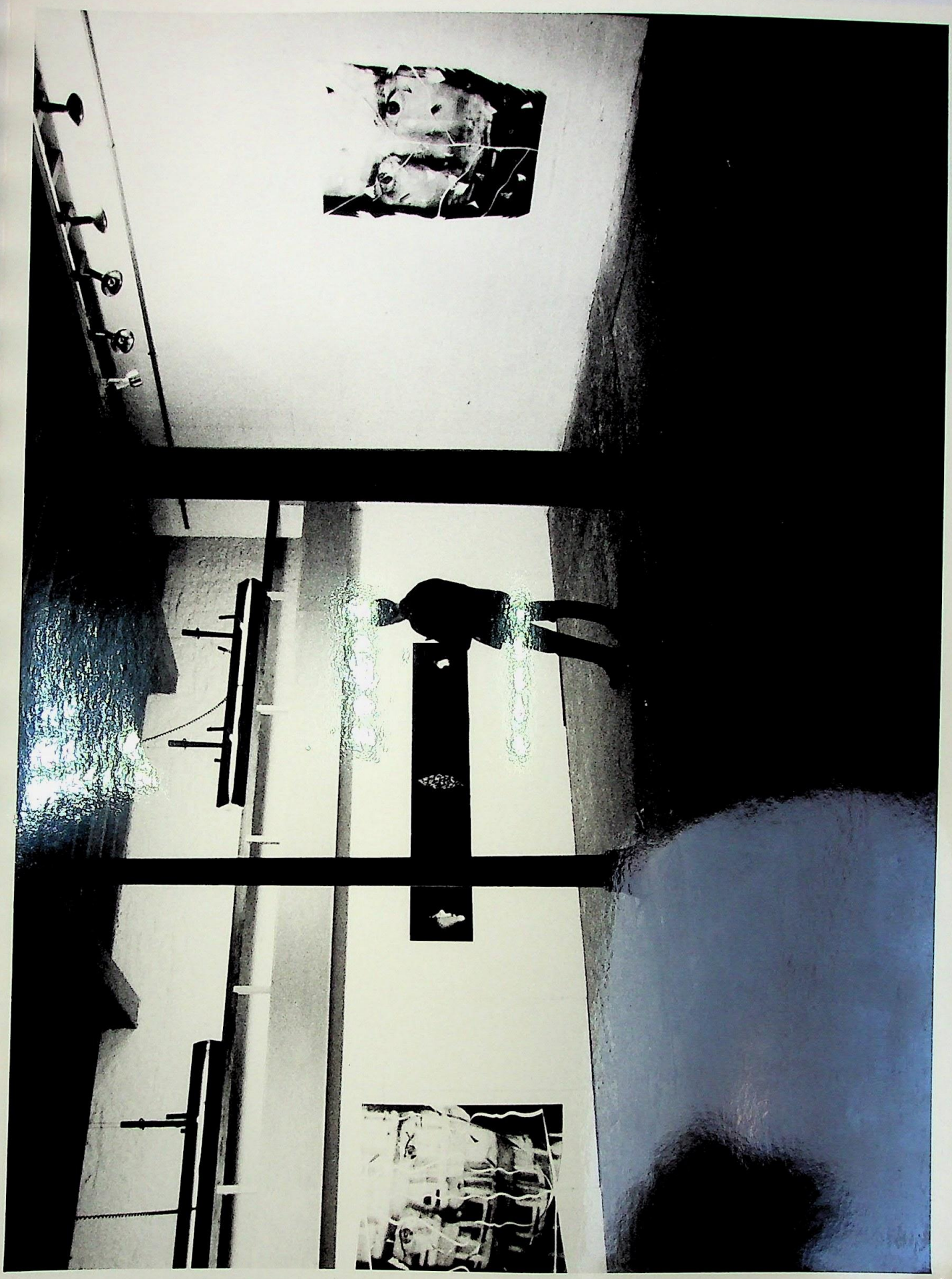
"New Artists New Works" published by the Orchard Gallery,
Derry

CHAPTER IIIWillie Doherty - "Exploring Boundaries"

Willie Doherty was born in Derry in 1959, and is now living and working in Dublin as part-time photography lecturer, in Dublin's National College of Art and Design.

Willie Doherty's work relates more to the tradition of sculpture than it does to that of "fine art" photography, yet he combines this tradition with the potential of processes or effects which are particular to photography on three specific levels collectively. The fact that photography is accessible in the sense that it can be "read" and understood universally, is obviously an important factor, while also the nature of the medium, the way it can be applied and explored, and the various processes that can be exploited and controlled. Finally Willie is especially concerned with the progressive stages that lead to a finished work, and the various meanings that can be conveyed and formulated through subject matter and process.

Because Willie's approach to photography is essentially that of a sculptor, "structure", is an essential preoccupation in the presentation of his imagery. This is particularly evident in his installations where he deliberately "uses" a given space and constructs his work according to the nature of the space and the meaning behind the imagery. This process often involves the combining of photographic



9. "INSTALLATION VIEW" WILLIE DOHERTY. 1982.



⑩ "MASIC" WILLIE DOHERTY. 1982.

materials with elements constructed from various materials, light and space. These works or "assemblages" fuse the difference between the idea, concept, and the mode in a medium that he is aware of promising such possibilities.

Some of the parts that make up the composite "whole" of what could be termed Willie's photographic artworks, consist of photograms which are images made without the use of a camera. The technique (which goes back to the very beginning of photography, Talbots "talbo-types" were obtained by placing objects onto light sensitive paper)(15), has been developed by various artists such as Man Ray with his "rayographs", and Moholy-Nagy with his "photograms". Man Ray viewed photography as an extension of all his work in several different media, painting, film, sculpture and "tried to rescue photography from the mechanics, even the camera". (16)

By placing objects on chemically treated paper, he was able to expose the area around them under strong light, creating silhouette forms, or what he termed "rayographs".

Moholy-Nagy invented a similar process while also experimenting with double exposures and photo-montage.

Willie's principle use of the photogram involves a way of looking at objects by placing them directly onto the picture which produces recognisable outlines and shapes of identifiable objects. Photograms are only one aspect of



Moholy-Nagy 31

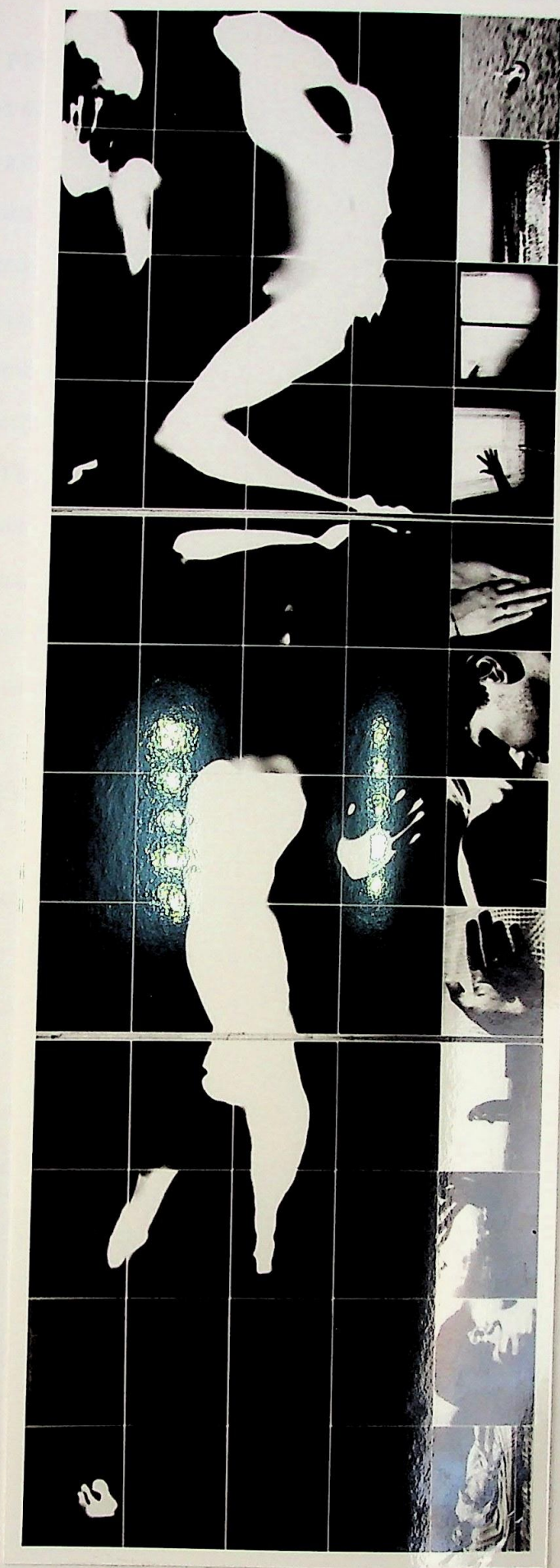
⑪ MOHOLY NAGY. PHOTOGRAPH. 1931.

Willie's involvement with the pliability and the processes of photography. He also uses chemically-treated paper to "solarize" his chosen imagery, and in some works original images are cut and pasted and re-worked in the form of a collage. Other distinguishing ways in which he uses the medium include the combining of "straight" black and white photographs, with photograms or with text.

Although much of Willie's work appears to have a controlled external appearance, his approach to his work, although analytical, is essentially an open and fluid one. Whatever he feels or is suggested to him at any given time might become a starting point, and that in turn may suggest a particular direction through which he then explores appropriate ways of applying both the idea, and the medium. It is at this stage that he appears to become involved on an increasingly conscious level, and in the process of constructing his work in a way that corresponds to any "meanings" that might have evolved throughout this procedure. In relation to this process he says,

"I have often made work, taking maybe a walk as a starting point, when I would go to particular places that have some meaning for me from maybe childhood or some other meaning and then use the photographs that I might take on that walk or on that visit, then start a process of reworking them. I start trying to extract all the layers of meaning from those images, and trying to construct them in some way." (17)

Willie's imagery and subject matter is fundamentally auto-biographical. Although he denies having any strict ideas about what "potential" subject matter is, definite themes re-occur which frequently involve self-portraits which include references to a woman's face, figure, or presence. An example of this can be seen in one of his works, (Untitled, 10'6"x 3'5") in which various images have been arranged in a grid formation. The lower section of the grid consists of whole images which contain evocative fragments which in turn suggest various associations. This is combined with a larger area in which photograms are used to depict a "free floating" human figure. The separate and complete images elicit sensuous associations of angst, love, freedom, constriction and human touch. In this work there is evidence of a personal relationship which appears to have embodied an incongruous mixture of intimacy and pleasure, with restrictive and emotional pain. There is a feeling of sad inevitability about this piece. It could be an honest statement about the nature of an ongoing personal relationship between two people, yet there is also a strong sensory quality that suggests a fatalistic bond, that is, or was, doomed to failure. The movement implied by the central figure could be a metaphor for a certain "disquieted" wrestling, while its placing appears to reiterate the associations suggested by the images below, as it also determines a sense of absorption and ease, with a rigid tension and enclosure.

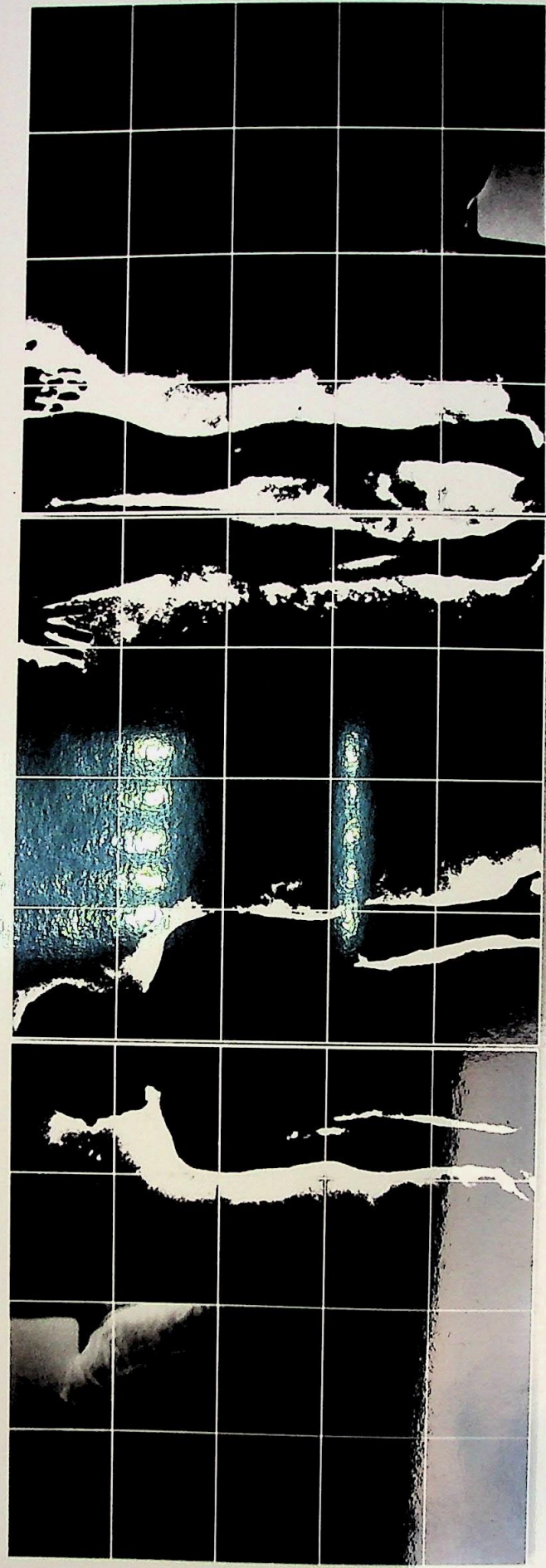
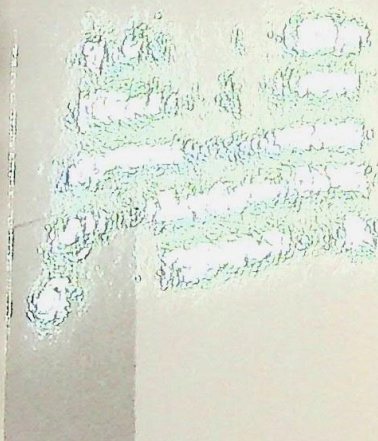


⑫ "UNTITLED." WILLIE DOHERTY. 1981.

This piece could also be interpreted in an entirely different way. Because it is natural to "read" from left to right, the images in the lower section of the work could be seen to have an evolving story to tell, with a beginning, and an end. The first images evoke associations of anguish, the central images suggest touch and contact, and the succeeding images allude to associations of confinement and finally, freedom. If this were the case the whole meaning of the work would alter. It could be that it is actually about a relationship that has "rescued" somebody emotionally, somebody who was lost and unhappy, and who, through a relationship, has found a sense of security and freedom. In this context the floating figure could be seen to be suspended in an aura of contentment.

Willie's use of photography illustrates its flexibility in presenting us with meaning, while also his involvement in an area in which he is particularly interested in, and aware of. His perception of the levels of meaning that can be read into photographic imagery, is interesting and concise.

He explains; "you immediately start to read something in your own terms, they can be very personal things, and there is a level where every image means only certain things to every individual, but there is also a layer where everyone has a common understanding of its meaning, and there is almost a universal understanding of some images, not all images. There are images that are peculiar to particular civilizations or cultures and countries." (18)



⑬ "SPIRIT" WILLIE DOHERTY. 1981.



(14) "RESTLESS SLEEP" WILLIE DOHERTY. 1981.

In much of Willie's work there is an obvious concern for subject matter that can be structured to convey the multiplicity of his personal emotions, ideas, and experiences. In this sense his work is ultimately emotional, and personal. It becomes evident on closer examination, that these "private" images exist to inform us as facts, yet also to move us emotionally.

A similar theme emerges in another work entitled "Guilt" (10'6" x 3'5"). Again there is a contrast of "straight" photographs and "photograms", in the format of a grid. Numerous, separate photographs are pieced together to present an overall image in which we can observe certain associations and connotations. Two repeated faces gaze forcefully at the viewer, one of a woman, whose eyes appear strikingly demanding and fearful, and one of a man, (situated above) which expresses a sense of tension and guilt (hence the title?). The whole composition is brought together by a series of photograms depicting the top half of a female figure, and the bottom half of a man's figure, enveloped with a garland. Both expressions are contrasted with the same persons face in repose, and expressionless. It would seem to me that these associations exist as metaphors, once again, for a relationship that fluctuates throughout difficulty, unease and involvement.



(15) "GUILT" WILLIE DOHERTY. 1981.

It becomes apparent when looking at Willie's use of photography, and in the presentation of his subject matter, that he is not content merely to reproduce some "straight-forward" version of reality, but a subtle collaboration of processes and signs which blend emphatically, yet ambiguously.

The energy and imagination that he expresses through photography is an inspiring example for any young artist today who might still be in doubt about the medium's creative potential. For Willie there is no doubt, only possibilities. Photography is a medium he believes in, and defends with conviction.

"I think photography is as capable of making expressive and important art, as any other medium, the art is more about the artist than any particular medium, so photography like anything else, is capable of being made into something good." (19)

CHAPTER IVSUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Both Patricia Langlois and Willie Doherty agree that because of the processes inherent in photography, it is not essentially an "immediate" medium, unlike painting, an activity in which the painter is involved in a more physical and direct way. This characteristic of photography is something that each photographer finds attractive, and relevant.

Patricia enjoys the "distance" that she believes is involved in the use of photography, and finds that it is important in helping her to be objective and clear about her work. This she believes enables her to combine the craft involved with what she wants to express in a more balanced way.

Willie believes that the photographer is more "removed" essentially because photography is a mechanical medium. This he perceives as a challenge that can lead to a varied choice of processes which can be used and investigated, more exactly.

Initially it would appear that Patricia is less interested than Willie in the way with which photography can be applied. Yet it becomes apparent that Patricia does in fact attribute much importance to the use and control of

the skills involved, and believes that working with the medium successfully involves the balancing of two separate considerations, the intuitive response, with formal and practical concerns.

In comparison to this, Willie's use of the medium is more thorough, and although he believes it is important to have an "open" attitude towards his photography, he is more actively and intellectually concerned with the content of his images, and in how they will be presented and interpreted.

The difference in these two approaches can be seen quite clearly in the way each photographer presents their work. Patricia's scale is small and her photographs are meant to be seen as single and "whole" images. In contrast to this, Willie's work is presented to us as a large-scale collaboration of various and complex photographic processes. Because of the scale of Patricia's work, her photographs tend to be wholly personal and private, yet Willie's work also embodies these properties through his choice of subject matter, and its associative meanings.

Neither photographer has any doubt about whether photography can be art or not. Both agree that art is related to a person's inner feelings and emotions and to the inclination of expressing them visually. They believe

that photography made in that context is, without question, art, especially as it is not made to sell a product or for any other specific, commercial reason. Clearly in this sense, Patricia and Willie are "art" photographers, as in each case their work stems from their need to express personal insights and feelings in the form of images.

The photographer Henri Cartier Bresson describes how he perceives photography in this context.

"To me photography is the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as of a precise organisation of forms which give that event its proper expression. I believe that through the act of living, the discovery of the world around us which can mould us, but which can also be affected by us. A balance must be established between these two worlds - The one inside us and the one outside us. As a result of a constant reciprocal process, both these worlds come to form a single one. And it is this world we must communicate." (20)

Clearly the belief that inner thoughts, ideas, and experiences can be expressed through photography is the primary reason why artists continue to work with the camera as a "relevant" medium. What is important to photographers is not whether photography is art or not, (although they firmly believe it to be), but the way with which photography can be used to accomplish this expressive "crystallisation".

Regardless of criticism, artists will continue to be excited by the nature of photography, and their ability to discover in it, a vehicle for exciting and relevant art. Willie Doherty concludes;

"People still have a very restricted view of what it can do, and what it is about, and that is the artist and photographer I am talking about. They do not grasp the true potential of their medium, good art will only be made when the artist involved, fully understands the medium and its potential, and consciously accepts and rejects parts of that." (21)

INTERVIEW WITH GEAN LAMBERT NOVEMBER 29, 3.00 PM

L.F: Why have you chosen the camera as a relevant medium to work with?

G.L: It is another way of making images, I started out by using it as a means for collecting information, as I got more involved with it I saw that it has potential as an end in itself, that a quality of a print on that very level can look very beautiful, that you can control the tonal range in a photograph, especially with the zone system that I use, where you pre visualise the image and it is predictable what will turn out, the absolute control of the image which Ansel Adams developed, and Minor White, people like that, their research is invaluable. I'm not interested in photo journalism, straight photography, Stieglitz and that kind of tradition is one that I can identify with, so it evolved, I see photography as an end in itself not as a means to an end.

L.F: So you think that there is plenty of potential with the camera, and that you can explore a lot with it?

G.L: Oh yes, personally I am interested in black and white photography, I'm not too interested in using colour, not at the moment anyway.

L.F: At any stage have you been concerned with whether photography is Art or not?

G.L: No, I just accept that the bias in this country against photography is so great, that it just doesn't worry me. Some of the reviews I had over my last show were glowing, and others there was just incomprehension,

where the critics, or the art reviewer rather, was confused. His bias towards photography was evident.

L.F: Towards photography?

G.L: Yes, personally I don't feel it needs justification, to an extent I can see why it is so biased, if you pick up a magazine and it is choc-a-bloc with photographs, they have all one thing in common, they are all pushing something, it could be anything from shoes to perfume to a tin of beans, usually they abuse painting. Very often the photographs are derived from the compositions of painters. So I suppose people have learnt that the camera can lie, lies more than it tells the truth, and it renders people insensitive if people are bombarded with photographs.

I was looking at a book on photo journalism, and on the front was an image of Lee Harvey Oswald, clutching his stomach after being shot by Jack Ruby; photography can do that, it can bring violence, make appearance of violence, but on the other hand it can as I say be abused, a situation like that can be rigged, set up, and people have learned to mistrust it. "Well it is only a photograph'."

L.F: When do you see it as art, and definitely not photojournalism? What is it when it is art?

G.L: This is another problem that I also have with painting, if you take the work I have done on the hospital series for example, for me the motivating force behind it was very often fear. Like the women of

Greenham Common, their actions are motivated by fear. Fear is a powerful means of doing something, of doing something creative. It can also have the opposite effect, it can render you impotent, but the motivation with any of the images I make can be fear, not art. I am suspect of that word.

L.F: The term?

G.L: I think if you set out to make a statement as clear as you possibly can, as precise as possible, that would be an aim, if it is art at the end of the day, all well and good, either way it doesn't worry me. Making images is not got to do making an object which is hung in a gallery, nicely framed and then is sold, the last painting I sold I got a good price for it, but that in a way is irrelevant, the painting is very nasty in one way, in fact it did not try to flatter anyone, it tried to pin down very real feelings that I hold as being important, that is my motivation.

L.F: What would you call it then if you would not call it art?

G.L: It is a visual statement, all of the means that are necessary to making a statement, the scale, composition line rhythm, form movement, control of space, all of these things are applicable to photography, to etching, screen printing. It is just the medium that is different.

L.F: So you are not worried with whether it is art or not, just that you can make a statement with a camera?

G.L: That is right. To give an example, in the 19th century when Japanese porcelain was being imported into Europe, the packing were Japanese prints, now in the West, and in Japan these were never regarded as being art. They were a means of making images that could be printed off in their thousands, and made available to people. But when (especially the post impressionists) began to study these things, the packing was suddenly elevated to art, and Japanese prints nowadays go for enormous sums. I suppose what I am trying to say is that very often the people who decide what is art or what is not are gallery owners and a kind of art mafia who dictate taste, fashions. Sometimes your work might be acceptable, as my work is at the moment, but I take that with a grain of salt because it can just as easily go out of fashion. I think the Japanese print idea, how they won respectability can illustrate how fickle that whole system is. We have learned a great deal from Japanese prints. If you look at some of Van Gogh's work for example, the way he used the idea of the flat plain, he used Japanese forms, and the conventions of controlling space were thrown out the window. Here was a new way of representing space, and controlling space, using flat plains and flat shapes. Suddenly Japanese prints became art.

L.F: You mean some people making art what they want to make art?

G.L: Yes.

L.F: What differences do you see between commercial photography, and so called art photography? Do you feel your photography could be seen as commercial or is it definitely not in the realm of commercial photography?

G.L: Well if you take a commercial studio, the photographer might specialise in a particular area, like still life for example. The still life could consist of a packet of cornflakes, or it could consist of anything, and his brief is to help sell the product, it is about profit. In my work, what I am selling are ideas, not products. There is no profit motive intent in my work, so there is no comparison.

L.F: So you see it as self expression?

G.L: It is, yes. You see what the ad men do is, before they go to a photographer they have the story board worked out, and they tell the photographer what he is going to do, usually the end result might only bear a vague resemblance to the initial idea. But the motivation for doing it is about profit. We see the results of their work on any bus journey on the headings in the newspapers, magazines, and on television, and they are all pushing something. But with what I am doing that is just irrelevant really.

L.F: What you do is for yourself basically, and not to sell anything?

G.L: No. I think with Emile Zola, who was also a very talented amateur photographer, one thing he said was that 'you only know something really well, after you have photographed it'. Because the actual business of photographing something forces you to look, and to analyse something. Especially if you want your print to be articulate, you have got to know the various luminences of the surfaces that you are photographing. So you have got to look. Even looking at the print can reveal new aspects. This is something I learnt when I was photographing wallpaper, and light falling on white wallpaper, in and

around the car parks, the walls that were exposed and that were once interiors, are now externalised. I had to keep doing the thing over and over again until I clarified exactly what it was I was trying to do, and in that way refine the image down until it was as precise as I could possibly make it. You see it is the difference between a snapshot and something that has been worked out.

L.F: So doing something intuitively is not the way you want to work, you prefer to premeditate what you are doing, and work out why you are doing it?

G.L: Yes. There are other people who do very good work, and they use the opposite approach, they use the accident, and they use the intuitive approach, great work has been produced this way. But for me it is not the right way.

L.F: The author and critic Victor Bergin believes that the photograph is inextricably involved with the production of meaning, would you agree?

G.L: Yes. I am just trying to understand exactly what he means by that?

L.F: Well, one example he gives is if you photograph an object, and if you place another object beside that, it immediately maintains a relevance. That one thing can have a relevance then, that it did not have before, also by photographing something it immediately gives it meaning. A photograph of something emphasises its meaning.

G.L: Yes, I think that again, with the business of the object, that at the end of the day is just the vehicle. An example is Paul Cezanne who painted apples, but to say that Cezanne's paintings are about apples is interpreting it in a very shallow way. The apples were a means to an end, the object is just a vehicle.

L.F: So you think you could photograph something without necessarily giving meaning to what you are photographing? It could be about other things?

G.L: It could. It can be used as a sign, as a symbol. With the development of photography, and with the electron cameras that can photograph minute detail, I was watching a programme the other night on television about insects. But what it showed was to take the physical appearance of something, just on its face value, can be very very deceiving. But if you get close, really close, you can begin to find out, or it can give you a hint at what makes the thing work, the object work. This is something with commercial photography, they are usually only interested in surfaces. They are not interested in telling us anything 'about' the objects, they are photographing. Especially in terms of say fashion photography, which is about fantasies, and about what people would like to be, and what they aspire to be, but they have very little to do with the real world, or about the people who are wearing the clothes, they are incidental. They are as relevant as any other prop. But if you are inquisitive enough, and want to get beyond the surface appearances, whether you are a painter or a photographer or an etcher, you select your medium and the work starts, once you know your medium, what its limitations and its strengths are, you then use them.

L.F: How do you decide on the subject matter and the content of your photographs, and what are your main concerns?

G.L: Just before I answer that, when the tape recorder was off you passed a comment about hating the sound of your own voice on the tape recorder. Now I identify with that. I feel exactly the same. In photography, the number of people who are pleased with images of themselves is very rare. You often when you hand around snapshots, hear people say "that is not like me'." , they are right, perhaps it is not, there are so many different factors involved. As a photographer you must be capable of understanding or analysing 'why' that is the case, and then control becomes a medium, and light is central to the medium, it is about light. The professional will be able to make a likeness. It is not something you can take for granted, if you point a camera at someone and take a photograph, that does not automatically mean it is going to be about them. Work has to be put into it, you have got to have an angle. Anyway that is off the subject a bit.

L.F: I know what you mean, again how do you decide on your subject matter and content in photographs, and what concerns you the most?

G.L: Well, we will just take one series I did on a car park, it started out initially out of anger as to what was happening in the city. Where the new cathedrals and palaces to power and wealth were going up, and money, our new gods, at the expense of people. People were being driven out to the suburbs, and the city was being preserved for these cathedrals, and palaces. I started out with that in mind but the

result was again, photojournalism, it did not communicate what it felt like, what it looked like was solved, but what it felt like was not. So I decided to concentrate on one particular car park, and the walls that surround it were once interiors, they were bedrooms and they were kitchens. And the marks of human activity were still present. I decided to use largely white surfaces, white wallpaper peeling off white walls, and the kind of marks people made, and personally I found it very moving, and also very beautiful, so the whole thing was reversed, it was no longer ugly and awful, it had its own rather peculiar beauty. So there was an evidence of the presence of people who had been removed, and I think that got to what it felt like.

L.F: Do you think by making it beautiful that it did not mean much anymore, it is just beautiful, like a full stop?

G.L: No I think it is the same way if you study nature for example, with urban people when we go into a butcher or a supermarket and buy a piece of meat nicely wrapped, we are protected from the process that put that there, like the animal was grown, and was killed and we just see the package, and we are divorced from that total reality. More and more helpless in an urban or city environment, things are done for us, and we believe we are in control of the situation. What I am trying to get at now is how one dimensional urban life is becoming. Going into town the other day on the bus, it was raining, lunch hour, and people were coming out of the offices very ill equipped for the weather, the shoes they were wearing, o.k. they may be high fashion, but they were designed to be worn in air conditioned offices.

L.F: Fluorescent environments?

G.L: Yes, exactly. Symbolically when people become so divorced from nature, and the cycles of that, they become in many ways helpless, dependant on the enormous consumption of fossil fuels and there is this blind folly, that something like fossil fuels will go on and on forever, they will not in actual fact. What will all these people in the cities do. You will have generations of helpless people. So approaching the problems that way, rather than whining about a city being destroyed, is what interests me. Again the object is used to try and say something about our particular condition, and of course the overriding fear that we all live under now. Particularly with the siting of ^Ccruise and ^Ppershing missiles, not very far from here. Only 70 miles from here Windscale is pumping radioactive waste into the sea. We cannot escape from it anymore, these threats challenge our very existence. The threat is so enormous we sometimes would prefer not to see it. It is something I believe the artist must involve himself in, whether he is a poet, or a painter or a photographer. This has to be his subject matter, we cannot ignore it. If we want to continue to produce nice decorative pieces, to be consumed by people with lots of money, go ahead and do that and make a few bob, but on the other hand if we have any kind of responsibility, these are the areas that we have to explore, and talk about in our work, how we feel about it, starting there. Robert Lowell's poetry is written as if there is a nuclear warhead aimed at us personally, and until we all accept that, only then can we try and do something about it.

L.F: Do you feel taking photographs of the way you see it is enough, do you think it is an adequate response?

G.L: I don't know if it is enough or not, and I don't know how effective it will be, but I think we have all got to face that challenge. If we allow ourselves to be intimidated and do nothing, we do have problems. I am not just talking about producing propaganda. I think it has gone way beyond that stage. I suppose what I really am saying, is that artists are not stuck for material to work on.

L.F: So you would say that your subject matter and your content is bound up with how you feel about the way things are?

G.L: Exactly, yes, what is actually happening in the world. Yes.

L.F: And that is what concerns you at the moment?

G.L: That is correct yes.

L.F: As a photographer do you feel you have an active role in visual art, I suppose you have more or less answered that in the last question?

G.L: I have yes.

L.F: Do you feel it may be necessary to combine your photographs with text?

G.L: No. Personally no. Because the language is visual, and personally I do not like the trends in the arts where people are infringing on other

art forms. Especially performance, most of the performances I have seen, to be honest with you, I have been embarrassed, or bored, or both. I think if you learn a particular skill, you must really learn it, and it is a full time job. I think if you use text, or performance or any other art form, if you know your trade it is perfectly justifiable, but if an image needs text there are problems, I feel.

L.F: You do not feel that text could enhance it, in any way?

G.L: No, not really. Probably it has got to do with my own abilities, I am not good at writing. I love poetry, I read a lot of poetry, but I'm not a poet. In terms of paint it is something I aspire to, I believe there is such a thing as poetic truth in images. But I do not think it needs text.

L.F: What would you say to critics who condemn photography as a limited and mechanical medium?

G.L: In a stage production for a play, they use lighting, they use sound, they use the actual stage itself with curtains, they use movable sets, is that mechanical? I think it depends on how you use the machine. I think the critics who say that are ignorant as to the degree of control you can have over a sheet of film.

L.F: Where do you see the control as being?

G.L: In previsualising and the techniques developed by Ansel Adams. I use his system, the zone system, using a spot meter. Before you

click the shutter, that is the easiest part, that could take 125th of a second, the set up, how you actually control the film is enormous, you decide how you are going to rate the film, how you are going to develop it, what paper you are going to print it on, and what tones are going to be in that print. You could put ten different photographers in front of any given scene, and they all come up with different solutions to the problem.

L.F: So it is a personal thing, and you think that there is a lot you can play around with?

G.L: It is a very personal thing. Yes.

FOOTNOTES

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