

Of Landscape and Light

Most of us take photographs of our families, friends and the places we visit in an effort to give our memories substance. Cameras have become ubiquitous as digital technology has revolutionized picture-taking; the effort to acquire pictures almost supercedes other experiences. Sara Angelucci's artwork is based in the everyday activity of taking pictures, but in her journeys she is not looking for souvenirs; she is looking to unravel the threads of how we identify with a place – the national, cultural, family and personal memories that define identity. Her method is to intervene in the technology of image-making, to literally and figuratively “shed light” on the issues. Colour, framing, light and the associations of one image and another are as much the subject of the artist's work as the landscapes through which she moves. The accumulation of multiple frames reveals an effort to grasp something impossible to hold onto. The weight of what cannot be pictured is the inevitable presence implied by this effort.

In the most successful photographs, time and light are perfectly calibrated for clarity and contrast of the image in the frame. In the images selected for *Landscape and Light*, Angelucci works against perfection by starting with a cheap plastic film camera with little possibility of control. She also ensures that there will be light leaks from places other than the lens. The work makes apparent the materiality of traditional photography at the moment of its demise in the popular imagination. The “frames” are erratic, overlapping, disjointed, blurred by movement. Though some images, like *Marianne with Fire* for instance, are strikingly singular, most are contingent with others in a series, referencing film strips or home movies. The results are uncanny and fluid associations of place and time, beautiful and painterly images with rich saturated colour and light cascading in organic rivers across the image, spreading colour on the surface, inserting itself as a dynamic element of the picture. Occasionally cryptic numbers and geometric forms - evidence of the film itself - add to the texture. Unlike the static quality of a completely resolved image, these images continue to move through the landscape and in and out of the frame, merging with the surrounding light, creating a kind of osmosis between now and then, that place and this one, a reminder that the photograph is only a fragment of the fullness and randomness of the experience of a place.

The artist invites the lighting effects and the consecutive images to evoke a sense of the immediacy of the context surrounding the photograph as well as to reveal the mechanics of the process. By implication, the image reveals its maker as central to an evolving and fluid experience. The images the camera records are prosaic, banal and accessible – glimpses from a family outing, a walk or train ride. In *The Perfect Past* series the images cluster around a particular moment while the *Timescapes* are like film strips limited only by the length of the film. The subjects are generic Canadian landscapes: pastoral Southern Ontario fields, northern skies, snow dusted slopes, orchards, the Nova Scotia shoreline. They invite identification with these places. The ephemeral style of these pictures explores the shifting ground of memory and the sensual details that evoke it.

The associative nature of the work is at its most condensed in the diptychs from the *Stillness* series. These works pair small sections of family photographs from another time with details of the landscape of another country. They were taken during Angelucci's visit to the family home in Italy - evidence of a search for the lineage and histories embodied in a place. The images portray both intimacy and loss, the double schisms of time and geographic separation and the tenuous connections through memory. This attempt to reconcile the past and the present is a melancholy effort, evoked - remembered or imagined - in the spaces between the photographs, like the retelling of stories that maintain the thread of family connection over time.

In their reliance on association and chance these works share some affinity to explorations in the 20th century by the surrealists who used chance and montage to evoke the subconscious, the dadaists who promoted performance works using controlled and random elements and the minimalist artists' investigations of time and the relationship of consecutive forms. These practices tried to move away from the authority of the singular art object and explore the nature of

communication through the artwork. Artists interested in feminism, gender and cultural identity further particularized the subjectivity of the artist as the ground of communication. Angelucci also begins with identity – her own explorations of Canadian landscape and the vestiges of displacement experienced as the daughter of Italian immigrants - using the material of her life in a narrative and open-ended way akin to Allan Sekula's investigation of landscape and documentary in the early 1980s and to the work of Canadian artists Marian Penner Bancroft and Raymonde April.

The most recent journey pictured in this exhibition is to new territory, arising out of the artist's residency in Shanghai. The digital video *When the Cricket Sings* is shot in one long pan. There are associations between the narrative and formal structures of the still photographs and this continuous flow. The movement along the street from one situation to the next challenges the technology to adjust to the reality of changing light and for brief moments the bright light flares. The open storefronts of an old Shanghai district are separated by vertical walls that visually reference photographic frames and echo the narrative structure of the still photographs. A product of an evening walk through the urbanscape, the camera portrays the community life of this place - families and storekeepers relaxing, cooking, smoking and talking. The piece is characterized by sensual changes in light and the details of street life such as a stack of pears, a hand holding a cigarette, conversations and family suppers and faces as they casually watch a passer-by. The title of the piece references the steady chirping of the cricket – which sings only at night. The melodic improvised soundtrack includes the cricket and a subtle composition for the Guzheng, an ancient Chinese plucked instrument.

The journey is a consistent trope in Sara Angelucci's early work. She has explored this through rephotographing family memorabilia and photos and through her own photographs and videos. There is a persistent sense of moving from place to place and of what is beyond the frame. In the images in this exhibition, the artist has pursued an aesthetic that deconstructs time and light, the two elements of photography, and their counterparts in the human psyche: memory and imagination. The results represent the physicality of time and invite the viewer to share the journey.

Karen Henry

About the artist:

Since graduating with a BFA from the University of Guelph (1993) and receiving her MFA in photography and video from NSCAD (1997), Sara Angelucci has exhibited largely in eastern Canada including solo exhibitions at the Art Gallery of Hamilton (2007), Cambridge Galleries (2006), McLaren Art Centre in Barrie (2004), Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto (2003), Ace Art, Winnipeg (2000), TPW, Toronto (2000), Anna Leonowens Gallery, Halifax (1997) and Macdonald Steward Art Centre, Guelph (1994) among others. A few of the most recent group exhibitions that have included her work are *That Obscure Object of Desire*, Cambridge Galleries (2004), *The Found and the Familiar*, TPW and touring to galleries in PEI, PQ, NB, and NS; and *Snow*, Women's Art Resource Centre, Toronto (2002). Her videos have been shown at a number of Canadian and international venues. Her work is available through Wynick/Tuck Gallery and Vtape, both in Toronto. More information about her artwork is available on her website: www.sara-angelucci.ca

About the curator:

Karen Henry is a curator, writer, editor and consultant in the visual arts. She has produced a number of exhibitions including *Glenn Lewis: Utopiary, Metaphorest and Bewilderness* (1993, with Brice McNeil); *War Zones* (1999, with Karen Love); *By Land and Sea (Prospect and Refuge): Marian Penner Bancroft* (1999); *Allyson Clay: Imaginary Standard Distance* (2003); and *Variations on the Picturesque* (2005, with Karen Love). She was formerly Director of the Western Front in Vancouver and the Burnaby Art Gallery and currently works as a public art consultant.

The Gallery and the curator would like to thank the artist and the lenders of the artworks:
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