

Exceptional Journeys

Brion Nuda Rosch e Sean McFarland

Colagem e fotografia

Curadoria: Rita Sobreiro

25 MAI 2012 – 30 JUN 2012

Inauguração *opening* 25 MAI | 22H00

3+1 ARTE CONTEMPORÂNEA

HORÁRIO *SCHEDULE*

TER – SAB *TUE – SAT*

14H00 – 20H00

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3+1 Arte Contemporânea presents for the first time in Portugal, the work of American artists Brion Nuda Rosch (1976, Chicago) and Sean McFarland (1976, California).

Based in San Francisco and exhibiting consistently since 2003/2004, both artists have been praised with very positive reviews, having received important awards such as the Artadia Award (Brion, 2009) and the Baum Award for Emerging American Photographers (Sean, 2009) as well as being represented in the collections of major institutions such as the MoMA and the Deutsche Bank, New York (Brion) or the SFMoMA and Whitney Museum of American Art Library (Sean).

Brion and Sean share the interest in landscape as a subject for their visual constructions, making use of composition and assemblage as the basis for the hybridization between fiction and document, artifice and truth. Their images are, in a large extent, representations of conceivable landscapes that inhabit an idea of reality. They exist beforehand in our visual system because they are able to evoke approximate memories and fit the stereotype. The outcome of a system of layers, appropriations and impossibilities, these works present a meta-reality, a composed and amplified world, nevertheless a plausible one.

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*All Nature is but art, unknown to thee
All chance, direction, which thou canst not see;
All discord, harmony not understood;
All partial evil, universal good.
— Alexander Pope*

The myth of the American West as the last fortress of wilderness and as a land of opportunities was largely shaped by its representation in images, having survived as an idea much after the unbridled occupation of its territory and its consequent transformation. As Sean McFarland states, “the American West really could no longer be wild after being photographed”. Images – especially in the form of photographs due to its supposed trustworthiness – become this double agent that cooperates in the preservation of the American landscape as well as in its ruin.

The birth of this myth and the process of its deconstruction play an important role in the understanding of Brion Nuda Rosch’s and Sean McFarland’s works. In a way, they belong to the lineage of American landscape artists – from the romantic mysticism of the Hudson River School’s painters to the luminous grandiloquence of Ansel Adam’s photographs – although acknowledging a different aesthetic, political and ecological consciousness.

One might expect to encounter reproductions of paintings by Thomas Moran, Albert Bierstadt¹ or any of their disciples in the overlaid found book pages that constitute Brion’s works. However, his reasons to appropriate these images have little to do with the belief in an idea of America as a country blessed by God and destined to prosper. In his works that idea is indeed presented, but only to be subverted. The motivations underlying the usage of such imagery relate to issues of personal and collective memory, reproduction and reconstruction (all necessarily intertwined).

While visiting his studio, I remember Brion telling me about the road trips his family used to do when he was a child and the moments when they would stop to admire a particular landscape; unique framings of the natural world that would be imprinted in his memory. But because memory is a creative beast, the accuracy of those records would become blurred, images over images, reshaping themselves, creating new landscapes with a life of their own. At the end, he would say at some point, we are always looking at [and for] the same landscape.

These mountains found in book pages function therefore as archetypes; more than geographic entities, they stand for the myth of an untouched nature that we now recognize as deceased. Pasting one mountain over another, lining them perfectly so that the brain is able to accept it as a legible image, Brion asks us to look more carefully at what might trigger the questioning of our relation to nature and its representation, as he performs an impossible act, a truly poetic gesture. To move mountains, to create new landscapes from preexisting ones, without inflicting upon them the destructiveness of the human hand. To create new worlds with a minimal gesture, leaving no trace.

Sean McFarland is interested in landscape and particularly in its history. The photographs presented in this exhibition – from the series *Pictures of the Earth* – are, in his words, “a witness to the landscape, showing its history, our trace in it, and admiring its beauty.” Little does it matter if the artist doesn’t shoot most of the photographs on location, rather producing them in his studio with found or previously taken pictures. All history is fiction, a creation of mankind imbued with subjectivity and belief. However, the apparent distance of fiction works as a filter in order to convey the core of an idea. And here the idea is that of the attempt to approach an untouched nature, one that no longer exists but that can still be presented as true.

¹Painters of the Hudson River School

By using the Polaroid as the final capturing device – a camera that takes and prints pictures instantly, therefore associated with the immediate and the value of index (the evidence of presence) – a sense of veracity is brought to these images which enhances their visual and conceptual effectiveness. The fact that they are presented as truth not only generates the always-compelling mechanism of the uncanny, but also prompts the questioning of our relationship with the landscape and its representation, the latter being the definitive aim of the artist.

While portraying a fascination and nostalgia towards the idea of wilderness, these images also talk about its disintegration, on an ecological and aesthetic level. They remind us that landscape, both as a territorial site and visual representation, is always a composition, a product of a selective process that calls for synthesis and therefore exception.

Sean McFarland and Brion Nuda Rosch work around this premise of landscape as a mental synthesis, in it exploring the possibilities of the minimal or the imperceptible gesture. There is in both oeuvres a classical and timeless quality, a humble way of creating elegant images. Dreamy atmospheres. Short poems filled with meaning(s).

Rita Sobreiro, May 2012

Parceria: Eli Ridgway Gallery, São Francisco, EUA

