

NICOLA LODER : THE APPRENTICESHIP OF SILENCE

Centre for Contemporary Photography
Melbourne. May-June 1994.

THE INFINITE GRID

Grids by their very nature suggest the endlessness of repetition. Their mathematical precision is both comforting and disturbing. On the one hand they provide a metaphor for order through geometric precision but on the other a somewhat disquieting sense of the vastness of things. In our imaginations they are not contained by the edges of each work but go on forever.

Those of Agnes Martin and other minimalists of the '70's posit the possibility of meditation through the fact of repetition itself, where the gridded work performs as a visual mantra, a means to explore the infinite and the impossibility of comprehension. These minimalist works exist within a perceived spiritual frame, at the end (the new orthodoxy tells us) of the modernist project, where the avant-garde finds itself exhausted, hegemony ends and the disparate begins.

Many other artists before Loder have been interested in grids and it is hopefully illuminating to cite the work not only of Martin but of Ad Reinhard as well and the early works of Frank Stella. Each of these artists believed that important truths were available in minimalist abstraction, and that the grid was critical as a mode of expressing the infinite. The photographic works of Nicola Loder, arranged as huge grids on the walls of the gallery and made up of tiny framed images, borrow quite consciously from these earlier works and their spiritual, mystical framework. Of course Loder's work is not abstract minimalism but it plays, ironically enough, with the possibilities.

As well Loder is interested in the writings of the French theorist Lyotard and to what he calls the 'immanent sublime'¹, that crisis where the artist is exhorted to allude to the 'non-demonstrable'². He also sees abstraction as the most appropriate vehicle. Loder views photography as a suitable medium with which to express the 'gap' between the real and the illusory. It is within this perceived fissure that she locates the possibility of the sublime. The artist adds another layer, that of silence as a gestured emotional withdrawal. This, according to Loder, as expressed on photography, exists within the 'gap between the real and the illusory ... (It also)... simultaneously embodies both states'³.

In other words Loder is seeking a kind of synergy in the gridded images she places on the wall, between the images within the work itself and between her own work in the present and that of other artists in the past who have been interested in using them. Hundreds of tiny framed images are laid out precisely enough so that they resemble, from a distance anyway, a large abstract minimalist grid. On closer inspection, however, it becomes clear that each work is in fact constructed from a variety of imaged moments drawn from both a real and artificial, or constructed, world (and of course the fact of photography itself poses another kind of artificiality, through process).

The grid itself forces relationships between the images through a matrix both structured and taut, however, as Deborah Hennessey in her introductory notes for the catalogue of the exhibition ponders :

“It is a small point but it lingers - does the process of gridding give information or only coordinate it. Should I affirm, yet again the grid as an ordering device, dynamically referring to itself; a structural matrix spread across a single surface or can I look for more fleeting incidents, something more casual than causal.”⁴

This raises the problem posed by the work - that of the contradiction between the enormity of the grid and the intimacy of each image used to construct it. It is in this apparent dislocation that Loder very deftly reminds us that the visual logic of the overall grid is challenged by the eye itself as it perceives each separate and intimate image. The tiny scenes capture worlds themselves, in moments of real time at events of minute significance. Their totality however suggests much more than their individual meanings, a complex and arbitrary world in which images float in odd relation to each other - where the disparate and chaotic are ever present profoundly denying the imposition of the geometric, ordered grid of rational minimalism. Loder's work is not anonymous and cool geometry but an emotionally resonant and compelling apprehension of the complexity of an individually perceived world. The oblivion of the grid, its impersonality, its refusal to be idiosyncratic is denied.

Notes :

1. Lyotard *Presenting the unrepresentable* as quoted in The Apprenticeship of Silence by Nicola Loder. Catalogue, 1994. P. 11.
2. Ibid.
3. Loder, Nicola *The Apprenticeship of Silence* in The Apprenticeship of Silence, Catalogue, 1994. P.11.
4. Hennessy, Deborah. *Essay 1* in The Apprenticeship of Silence, Catalogue, 1994. P.6.

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