



Nicola Loder

Tourist

i am not a hula girl, i am not a dog

SPACEMENT GALLERY
OPENING THURSDAY 10TH NOVEMBER 6.00PM
8TH NOVEMBER - 26TH NOVEMBER



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The photographs are initially banal: one woman cavorts with a dog in a suburban backyard; another performs a hula in Hawai'i. Two distinct rituals that are the flipside of each other: the tediously quotidian and the touristically 'exotic'. Two cherished memories from the same source material – the personal archive of a now-deceased couple of independent means – served up for our voyeuristic delectation. There is a fine line between the mnemonic and the fetish, between the catalyst for remembrance and the locus of its containment. It is this fine line that effectively sums up one of the conditions of the photograph, of the image that at once solidifies memory, sparks it off and eludes it, an image to be consumed but that can also be productive, an image both physically static and always shifting as a conceptual hallucination.

It is a fine line accentuated in the second instalment of Nicola Loder's ambitious series, *Tourist*, by its own lurid hallucinations: the dog, its owner, the hula-girl are digitally re-worked to become technicolour chasms. Even with their still-discernible outlines, these iconic figures devolve into uncertainty, drawing with them our desire to see these images whole, to understand these memories wholly. The rapidity with which our gaze locks onto these stark figures marks them out as fetishes; or rather accentuates them as the fetishes they already were, for the dog and the women are markers of cultural difference, stand-ins for other times, other places and other people's senses of time and place. As sensational abstractions, these figures are fetishised on a general level by drawing our attention to them. Yet that fetishised relation is denied on a particular level, for details of faces, fur or clothing are masked by that same digital abstraction. The act and expectations of looking at photographs are both played up and frustrated in Loder's photographic equivalent of Lucio Fontana's slashed canvases.

It is precisely this dual sense of the heightened and the denied that underpins cultural difference itself, especially within tourism. Happy snaps of Hawai'i supposedly reinforce our difference from 'the locals' (as though our sunburn, thongs and daggy shirts didn't do that already). And if we think that photographing 'local traditions' such as hulas on the beach connects us to a 'local culture', then we are very much mistaken. Not only does the camera's (and the tourist's) colonising gaze only record the most fleeting relation in time and space, but those 'traditions' are always remediated for the camera, for the tourist, so as to generate capital. The photograph, in a quintessentially pomo-spin cycle, becomes a simulacrum of a simulacrum (the ritual performed for the camera) of a simulacrum (the 'tradition' to which the ritual supposedly refers).

But to believe that this cycle is specific to tourism would also be mistaken, especially within today's hypertrophy of images and camera-hybrids, from bombardments of billboards to taking photographs with mobile phones (the urge to photograph my cheek while talking on a mobile remains both surrealistic and overwhelming). Momentous life events are no longer seen through the private viewfinder of the camera, but (as though mimicking pre-Leica modes of looking) through the extra distance, that little bit of public space, b/w the eye and the digicam's display panel. While the internet and cable TV fill the West with 'world spectators', as Kaja Silverman called us, then the flipside of that effect is that we are also 'home tourists', snapping everything as though it were both novel and important, publishable on blogs for all the world spectators to see. Distance and proximity, public and private, are recycled in the spin of the digi-age, though in somewhat different ways and by somewhat different means from what they were in analogue days.

Hence the importance of Loder taking the elliptical home photographs from someone else's private archive, recycling them, reworking them and displaying them in public. But we must remember that, like Fontana and his canvas rips, Loder seeks to rupture contemporary ways of seeing rather than reinforce them. As with her previous instalment for *Tourist*, her even more abstract and digified *Blind Child 1-6*, Loder is concerned with fetishising and then disrupting the privilege of sight within our heyday of media spectacle. If the latter makes other people's lives our source of entertainment – exemplified by the proximity/distance relations of, say, *Big Brother* – then Loder's *Tourist* denies the easy legibility of those others to be consumed, vampirically, for our own sense of self. Before Loder's works, perception becomes a political act, one based on how we choose to see the works, and thus the world, beyond our jaded, home-tourist eyes.

Anthony Gardner

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