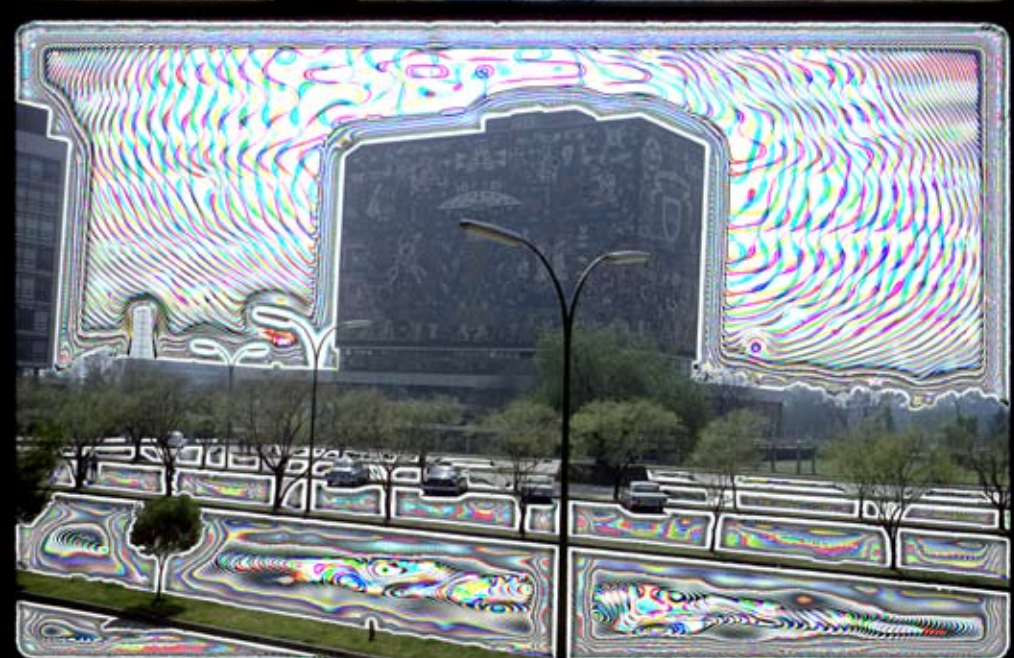
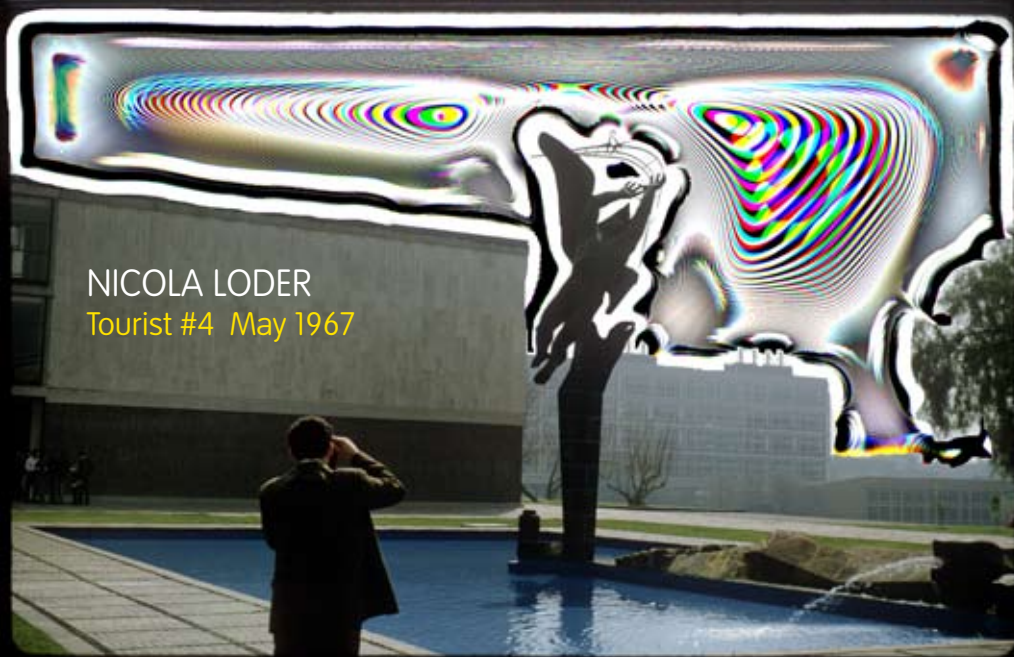


NICOLA LODER
Tourist #4 May 1967



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Tourist: #4 May 1967

Instability and displacement lie at the core of Nicola Loder's long-term photographic series, entitled *Tourist*. In its first instalment, vision itself was the subject. Loder digitally manipulated six images of blind children, creating a hallucinatory flux that engulfed her portraits and ruined portraiture's conventions of mimesis. In the second instalment, Loder transformed particular subjects – a lovingly-remembered dog or a Hawai'ian hula dancer – into digitised, psychedelic fetishes. The contexts and spaces in which those fantastical subjects were located – a backyard or a beach – remained, however, untouched and maintained their snapshot qualities.

In this, the third exhibition from *Tourist*, Loder continues her practice of displacement in various ways. As with the second instalment, Loder sourced the images from the personal archive of an independently wealthy couple who, prior to their deaths, journeyed across the globe together. The photographs taken during these travels are tinged with tragedy; as Loder has written, 'on the man's death he was asked by his wife, "did you ever love me?" to which he replied, "no"¹. The husband's admission reframes the snapshots and the medium's usual connotations of nostalgia and yearning for other places and prior times. The wife's absence from these images, (first) taken in May 1967, highlights instead a failed utopia of romance: a misplaced and displaced desire.

This second-hand narrative provides a personal subtext to other displacements at play. The first is authorial: Loder treats the archive as a text to re-use analytically rather than cherish as memorials to moments once lived, as an appropriation of another's property that she then retouches and calls her own. The second is visual and marks the shift in the *Tourist* series: Loder has digitally veiled the geographical and environmental contexts in which the photographs' main subjects – modernist buildings in Mexico – are located. The oft-declared permanence of architecture is reinforced in extremis when set against the visual flux and implied pollution of the digitised environment around it. Yet rather than reassert this architectural – and, by extension, photographic – impression of permanence, Loder's digital retouches focus attention on the hubris of such claims.

Just as the couple's marriage masked a failed utopia, so do the buildings: each signifies ambitions for a regional or national idiom within Latin America. The cathedrals trace the migrant inflections and localised translations of Spanish baroque design into a colonial context. The sports stadium echoes with allegiance to football teams seeking local and national glory. The office blocks draped in murals attest to the desperate search for a nationalist architecture in the 1950s, one that contested the international style and spread of glass and concrete boxes with designs that harked back to Mexico's renowned political murals by Diego Rivera, David Siqueiros and others. Presented as tourist snapshots, however, the architecture's social propagandist aspirations fade and the echoes of nationalism are displaced by the patina of 'exotica'.

As the snapshots suggest, then, such nationalist ideologies are contingent on context: they are never markers of stable tradition but always change with time and personal perception or socio-political conditions. It is precisely these contexts that Loder sets in flux: they can be remodelled through individual narratives of pain and loss (such as the remembrance that one was not loved during one's travels) or they can be 'etched away', as Loder claims, through later artistic media and intentions. Such thematic and contextual shifts are also made literal in these works: in the optical jumpiness induced by the digitised psychedelia itself and in the potential for movement within the normally calcifying medium of photography. Any pious claim to permanence – whether nationalist, artistic or romantic – is thereby threatened with the impermanence of its unforeseeable future and its inherent instability.

In a sense, this is the tourist's condition: one's presence in a given place is perpetually precarious and always on the move. Yet Loder's work provides viewers with more than mere analogy. Her interest in the impermanence of memory, photography, ideology and place is also a pertinent and, of necessity, contingent standpoint given the contemporary fascination with all things digital and, increasingly, neo-nationalist. The point is thus not to relapse into nostalgia for supposedly 'better' or more stable times: the illusion of solidity is not an answer. Rather, it is how we are aware of and embrace the social and contextual flux that perpetually surrounds us, that may provide a more adequate means to reflect on present contingencies.

¹ Email to the author, 27 April 2006

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may 17 - june 03, 2006

gallery hours

tues-fri 12-5.30, Sat 12-4.00

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all works are 780mm x 510mm, clear mounted to 10mm acrylic