

*It's awfully considerate of you to think of me here, and I'm most obliged to you for making it clear that I'm not here.*

— Syd Barrett

## Thoughts on the Work of Evan La Londe

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the lumber room  
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The goal of this short essay is to consider Portland-based artist Evan La Londe's photographs in the lumber room exhibition *Terrain Shift*, as a way of offering, at the invitation of the artist, an introduction to La Londe's work. First and foremost I offer these thoughts to the artist, and to lumber room founder Sarah Miller Meigs, who curated this wonderful exhibition. To the reader, as well, I offer my experience of these photographs and some of the material and historical issues that they call forth.

One of the first and most critical elements of La Londe's work that we discover (and we should clarify that we are studying photographs created with physical pieces of film imprinted in the physical "room" of the camera) is that the works are vitally concerned with the phenomenology of vision and sense perception, in both intimately *comparative* forms, and in more immersive *totalizing* forms. This inquiry takes shape within *spaces* or *fields* of sense experience that La Londe describes as both "inside the camera and in the world at large." La Londe's creation of photographic space takes shape through a series of visual "stages" condensed and pressurized within the final photographic object. Unlike many contemporary photographers, La Londe restrains himself from exposing the nuances of his artistic process in performative form, allowing temporal density to resonate within the final image like a faraway star imparting visual *substance*.

We encounter his first work in *Terrain Shift* in the stairwell of the lumber room. *Untitled (A Shard of Glass)*, 2011, offers us two images whose indeterminate relationship present the work's first essential question. The title of the work generates

the catalyzing *frisson*, for it asks us to consider “one” shard of glass, while, logical beings that we are, we see that we are presented with two representations. Which path we venture down at this philosophical fork in the road says everything about *us*, and is not the burden of the work to resolve, but, rather, the gift of the artist in positing philosophical considerations of choice and appearance to begin with.

Perhaps we decide that at least *one* of these two images represents a shard of glass, or perhaps we choose to dwell (which we certainly would have during Postmodernism’s heyday) in the doubt that there is any “glass” represented in the photographs at all. The first time I saw this work by La Londe I felt a kind of excitement not dissimilar to my first physical encounter with Duchamp’s *Fountain*. I could feel the “shard’s” representational claim to realness doubling in on itself as I tried to grasp what might *actually* constitute the work *pro tem*.

Within *Untitled (A Shard of Glass)* we encounter dualities—literally (two objects), and associatively (in the work’s making)—yet this duality is not a doubling, but rather a slippage of the properties of one image into the next, circulating between them with no formal resolution, presented, I believe, with the condition that our possible knowledge of their differences is a future knowledge, a coming knowledge, only possible over time, and involving forms of perception that are not immediately apparent, and may never be.

The work’s meaning unfolds through stereoscopic interpretation, echoing the asymmetry of our own visual apparatus—the manner in which we process discrete pieces of information into provisionally accepted moments of judgement. The work solicits us into making meticulous distinctions, and I believe that this solicitation is a tender one—an embrace, as opposed to a confrontation. The soft gradations and pale chromaticism of each image mitigates the arresting mechanism of the camera.

The work’s logic reveals itself beneath a sheer veil of otherness, offering us an experience that, I believe, engages photography’s capacity to shadow human *empathy*. The practice of empathy on the part of the artist, is further revealed when one learns how the work is made. It is a fascinating contrast to the expansive mosh pit of transformation found in the work of Corin Hewitt, or the sculptural domesticity we encounter in the work of Elizabeth McAlpine, also in the exhibition.

In *Two Rooms (Dual Residency)*, 2011, the same inquiry is at work, but this time it is stretched deep within the image through the inversions of positive and negative vision at the core of its creation. La Londe describes this image as a stage, and it is one that has been offered to the camera, embracing the conditions of photography where they are most interesting and mysterious to the artist, in conversation with the act of photography. Again, the metaphor, or the methodology, resists the “making strange” of experience, or deception, and instead pursues a “human” process of finding ways to engender vision through its slippage into bare life, as presence, given the constraints of a technology of seeing within a world inundated by images—and thereby allowing us to do so as well—as though we, as observers, deserve to do this alongside the artist, and for ourselves.

La Londe’s photographs are beautiful and elegaic, and this beauty is essential to their eidetic rhetoric. They slow us down—way down—with painterly guidance. They allow us to identify with the lonely embrace of representation and disembodiment, offering us a vision of empathy in relationship to the anxiety of the gaze, in the word’s of Surrealist André Breton, the “convulsive beauty” of the gaze ... again, offering us philosophical and emotional modes of encounter that are compassionately reparative. — S.S.