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Awoiska van der Molen



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12.02.16 - 12.03.16

Purdy Hicks Gallery / London / England

Awoiska van der Molen / Reviewed by Ollie Gapper / 04.03.16

Wandering between the crisp white walls of Awoiska van der Molen's current show at Purdy Hicks is to be struck at once by a perfect fusion of classical rhythm and jazz-like atonality. It's an experience akin to hearing Thelonious Monk play Chopin, for Awoiska's images seem to work in a perfectly, pre-clumsy manner – as though her compositions constantly tiptoe on the edge of total collapse, and, while on this knife's edge, perform the most spectacular dance. I'm struck by how Awoiska's images seem to work so perfectly while refusing to break down into individually assessable parts – it's as though each image is mined from the earth as a complete entity – irreducible – elemental, even.



Awoiska van der Molen
'375-15 2015', hand printed
silver gelatin print © Awoiska
van der Molen, image courtesy
Purdy Hicks

Awoiska van der Molen
'382-14 2015', hand printed
silver gelatin print © Awoiska
van der Molen, image courtesy
Purdy Hicks

While her prints invite the viewer to be seduced into the world they create, they do so not by virtue of picturesque exploitation of the sublime, nor through spectacular representation, but by existing as very present, physical objects within which an alternative existence is created. As I stand before a landscape I do not smell the outdoors or the sea, but the musky, slightly unpleasant smell of Baryta paper and darkroom stop baths. I am not reminded of the sound of leaves nor water, but the bi-tempo drum solo by Max Roach on "Brilliant Corners" as he bites and attacks the high end, only occasionally using the kick to "drop bombs" as Laurent de Wilde describes it. The images exist very heavily as prints, the subterfuge of the photographic illusion put on hold to present the image as a part of the paper and the paper as part of the image. This is where Baryta paper's very specific properties become so important to the work: the photographic emulsion is soaked into the very fibres of its structure, rather than sitting awkwardly atop a resinous outer layer. When staring at the image we do not gaze onto the print's surface, but into the very pulp of the paper – the images are given a real, physical space in which to exist.

I view Awoiska's work now with the reverence of an expedition to the edges of our existence – how much farther are we willing to send her? It is as though as she nears the ends of earth she is forced to slide on her stomach to get near the edge, for fear of the earth crumbling beneath her, plummeting her from known existence. The image grain is more present in these images, as though some latent radiation from the big bang is beginning to take hold of her negatives; the universe's attempt to censor representations of its outer-most limit.

When I first purchased *Sequester* at Paris Photo in 2014, I found it a hard book to put down and an even harder one to stop thinking about. Purdy Hicks' show is similarly agitating and seductive; while I cannot simply pick it up and experience it again when I please, I can no less stop thinking about it.

– review by *Ollie Gapper*