

once more from the street

Ann Shelton, 2004

Catopromancy is the process of divination by mirrors.¹ It not dissimilar to the process used by Nineteenth century Psychiatrist Charcot to “divine” the symptoms of Hysteria.² The concept that one should look at the surface rather than vivisect was popular in the Nineteenth century as is reflected in the then promoted science of phrenology. In psychiatric photography art and science collided, indeed psychiatric photography used the “art of the portrait” as an instrument of measure.³

Once more from the Street links photography – in its mirror phases – with the construction of these early ideas around psychiatry. The camera is framed and highlighted here as crucial tool in the establishment of this signage, a visual grammar that has shaped our understanding of psychiatric health. Through the images made at Salpêtrière and other institutions like it, pictures of auras, bodies, vibrations, and emotions became a tool with which to extract meaning from a surface: the two-dimensional surface of the photograph. As the title of this body of work implies, here there is a retreat from inside to outside, from viewing an individual to looking again at the site from a distance.

Photography and writing around photography no longer muses over the idea of reality, or truth, at least in any objective sense. Once more from the Street is concerned with this shift, with the endless modifications to meaning that occur when a set of viewers construct meaning as they encounter images. Once

more from the street is also crucially invested in a dialogue with the history of art. Art is a mode of articulation that has always been concerned with reading in absence, with vacancy, with the meaning that sits under that absence.

Like the reflections one often sees in New Zealand's South Island's stunning Lake Pukaki these pairs of images romance the idea of a gap in understanding, like a palimpsest they tend to erase and amplify each other in a kind of mutual rewriting. They encourage a re-examination, an opening up, of the knowledge we hold. In these landscapes we are presented with the sum of multiple realities. In their lay out as a grid of turning angles they further reinforce the maelstrom of meaning an image can produce. Here, as Basilico notes, an exceptional set of moments collide with each other, in each image there is an "archive of the emotions that the eye bestows on the world."⁴ With this phenomena "the photographic image has brought new ways of seeing artistically."⁵

1 *The Mirror: A History*, Sabine Melchior-Bonnet. P105.

2 *Invention of Hysteria, Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpetriere*. Georges Didi-Huberman. MIT Press. Cambridge Massachusetts. London, England. 2003. p26.

3 *Ibid.* p49.

4 *Landscape as Contemporary Experience*. Charta, 1996, p15.

5 *Ibid.* p 14.
