

In Photography I can never deny that the thing has been there.<sup>1</sup>

Roland Barthes' nostalgic overture to the intrinsic essence of the role of photography hangs by a thread. The advent of the digital phenomenon attests to the mutability of the photographic process. The function of the human eye as an empirical observation tool has been calibrated into the multifarious digital technologies. The juxtaposition between the photochemical optics of the conventional camera and the digital technology is the point of investigation in the exhibition *Textural Apprehensions*.

As a cultural experience photography delineates a 'temporal-spatial effect' as it has become culture's central nervous system. Viewed as either performing the role of mirror or window there is no doubt that contemporary photographic practices has entered into the discursive arena with gargantuan impact. Photographic representations are regarded as active agents and mediations of cultural forces, their potential meanings fluid and determined by multifarious contextual nuances of production, transmission and reception. Routinely we now treat photographs as representational and material constructions. as sites of analysis and interpretation, as part of the public discourse about images, Photography is discursive, not passively reflective, where the artists do not simply depict culture, they produce and in a certain sense enable us to understand culture.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, Fontana, London, 1984 p.76

<sup>2</sup> Gael Newton, *Photo Files, An Australian Photography Reader*, Power Publications, Australian Centre for Photography, 1999, p.2

The edges of the photograph have now gone. Not just the white borders, but the very edges of the image, and the print too, as the photographic image slips, melts and dissolves into the computer, the video monitor and the installation. Photography, in its post-photographic period has closed the gap enabling artists to proliferate into other practices such as sculpture and installation.<sup>3</sup>

In Textural apprehensions, Robert Colvin and Sean Loughrey are pre-occupied with the matter of the physical condition and appearance of the print as well as the notion of representation. They juxtapose the textural qualities of the print with the, general mood of the subject matter. Specifically, they have used the You Yangs, in Western Victoria as the backdrop for their investigation. However the landscape is incidental to the exploration of processes particularly in the work by Robert Colvin. The landscape becomes the backdrop rather than the protagonist, a starting point for their explorations. Colvin investigates the photographic process, the relationship of the image to light, chemistry and the camera itself. Using traditional methods he blurs the edges of the photograph subverting the boundaries of photography as 'mirror'.

Colvin uses the camera in a fairly conventional sense. He goes into the landscape and takes photographs of trees, saplings, and clumps which he subjects the landscape to a series of processes, reducing the image to markings, abstracting, and mutating the landscape. The fragmentation of the image to a series of lines and marks and its high contrast challenges the viewer to consider that things are and are not just what they are. Colvin distorts the image by moving away from conventional photographic paper,

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<sup>3</sup> Clare Williamson, Mirrors and Windows, Art Monthly, October, 1999

exposing the image on paper that bleeds, contorts and abstracts his subject.

With the abstraction of photographic content has come an elevation of the status of the photograph as physical object and the incorporation of photographic thinking onto other media.<sup>4</sup> Colvin has extended the materiality of the photograph by tearing the photographic paper in half, dividing the image in various ways and reconfiguring the components to create new meaning. The textural qualities of the print saturate the photography with highly evocative and provocative nuances. On one level the very fabric of the landscape has been debased and denuded of power, on the other hand Colvin has imbued the landscape with an aura of mysticism and a foreboding omnipresence, which we associate with the sublime, 'romantic' landscape. Overt representation has been removed and a portal site established where the viewer is challenged and asked to peel away at the layers as the sense of place is obscured.

Robert Colvin's body of work has been described as photographs which well up from misty skies and looming shadows, as if they are engaged in a perpetual struggle to hold onto the fading light.<sup>5</sup> His black and white photographs often evoke a stillness but simultaneously connote a sense of struggle on a cultural, social and esoteric plane, through the fragmentation of these in particular the landscape which identifies self to place. These abstractions seem excruciatingly beautiful, the markings having a ritualistic fluidity, which at once attacks and subdues our perceptions of the medium and the subject.

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<sup>4</sup> Clare Williamson,, op.cit

<sup>5</sup> Scott McQuire, *The Rites of the photographic passage, Trios Photographes Australiens* a Geneve, 1999

Sean Loughrey's digital prints on watercolor paper, on canvas and video is art incorporated part of his practice as an artist who explores various modes of visual representation. He is interested in the history of photography and its power as a vehicle for representing. His digital images begin as photos and video stills which they are transformed and superimposed in digital form. Loughrey's work has evolved from an interest in the history of montage, particularly through its development during the Weimer Republic years in Germany and Russian Constructivism. He collates images from television, video footage of his immediate environment, 20<sup>th</sup> century cinema, historical Australian landscape painting and early settlement visual material.

Through these images Loughrey explores problems associated with representation. He asserts that 'one way in which I have tried to do this is to align images appropriated and edited from these areas of interest to create congruent relationships. Re-working such visual material enables me to activate a kind of dialogue between particular histories. A dialogue, which deconstructs, or at least changes the focus of fixed meaning. This form of catharsis leads to a point from which I can then inscribe or juxtapose new layers of meaning.'<sup>6</sup>

Through referencing of television, or cinema, the nature of the photograph as screen is such that distinctions between the still, the moving picture and interactive image, between original and copy and between fact and fiction are

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<sup>6</sup> Sean Loughrey, artist statement, 2001

increasingly blurred.<sup>7</sup> The digital process brings into question the definition of photography, particularly as the 'fetishistic' phase of the digital image has now moved into a discursive stage where new technologies challenge our perception of reality, mind and body.

The artists' photographs confront the gaze on another level, they are taken out of the safety of the frame and pinned on the wall challenging the gaze without the constraints of borders, glass or perspex. We are faced with exploring not only the content but also the textural qualities of the print, uninhibited by usual casements. In this way viewer and the photographs get up close and personal, forcing the viewer to enter into a dialogue with the individual works. This deliberate freeing up or undressing of the art aims to challenge how we view our cultural environment.

Georgia Rouette, 2001

McClelland Gallery

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<sup>7</sup> Clare Williamson,, op.cit, p.6