

Tom Callemin

An unmarked incident as scenery

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The dark-haired young woman has an athletic appearance in her snugly fitting apparel. We see her falling forward, fully extended and seemingly with complete surrender. It is as though she gives off light in the black void of darkness that envelops her. She does not float, she falls. The speed of that fall could not be captured by the camera. Which is why *Freefall*, 2016, by the Belgian artist Tom Callemin (1991,

Ostend) shows a lack of focus in the woman's face. Within an abstract context of time and space, the photograph shows us an image imbued with physical presence. The simultaneous experience of presence and absence in the photograph generates a sense of hallucination.

Photography is false on the level of perception, true on the level of time, Roland Barthes once said.

According to Barthes, a photograph is 'a new form of hallucination', so to speak, a modest, shared hallucination (not being there, on one hand, but having indeed been there): a mad image, which has that *glimmer* of reality. In his first solo exhibition at the gallery, Tom Callemin plays with that glimmer of reality *and* with the camera's capacity to let us, as he says, 'look between the folds of time's continuum and discover what our eye overlooks.'

Callemin's photographs show the paradoxical, alienating character of photography. They are not 'readable', not descriptive, although they do involve a narrative through a play of suggestions. These are constructed images that question, in a conceptual way, photography as a medium in these times of unbridled visual production. Callemin: "In an age in which we see everything around us changing rapidly, the photograph may well be the only thing that continues to remind us of what once existed. The photograph is an anchor in times when the flow of time seems to be a prime issue. More than ever before, for instance, we need to look at what was always there: the moon, the sea."

The work *Orbit*, 2016, shows the face of a man with Slavic features. The portrait is a close-up on a scale that is slightly larger than the actual scale. Because the photograph is dark, the man's face reveals itself only gradually: the contours of the cheeks, the ears, the neck and the chin, the curves in the upper lip, the nose and the edges of the eyelids. And then we see the big dark eyes staring straight at us. Shining in the circles of the irises, like stardust in the sky, are specks of light. Beneath our gaze the man's face turns into an object, a mirror reflecting, as it were, the path of comets. Intimacy and immeasurable vastness coincide in an image which is, in fact, a portrayal of deceleration.

The shaping of an experience - through the glimmer of reality - is characteristic of Tom Callemin's work. That can be seen in *Dive*, a recent video work on display in the exhibition. We are taken to the shores of a lake. There we see a woman walking into the water and disappearing beneath its surface. There is still daylight. The scene is shot in a cool, almost detached manner. Dusk falls, and the anticipation of the moment when woman reappears takes an agonizingly long time. Does the knowledge of someone being under the water make seconds suddenly seem like minutes? The fact that the film is shown in a loop allows us to sense that the place changes. This gives rise to *an unmarked incident as scenery*.

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