

ZOE LEONARD - Available Light

September 10 - October 29, 2011

The title for the show at Galerie Gisela Capitain is reflected in both a new body of photographs and an installation of a camera obscura.

For the work *St. Apern Strasse 26*, Zoe Leonard has transformed the large gallery space into a camera obscura. Daylight filters in through a lens which projects an image of the world outside into the space of the gallery.

The camera obscura predates photography, and is a natural phenomenon rather than an invention. From ancient times through the 18th century it was used as a tool to understand perspective and the physical laws of light. It was employed by draftsmen, artists, architects and scientists as a way to accurately render representations of the world. In this way, the camera obscura connects photography not only to the physical sciences, but to drawing, painting and architecture.

The camera obscura merges several different kinds of seeing that are familiar, but produces a unique experience. The image, which spills onto the floor, walls and ceiling, becomes a spatial experience. Like film or video the work is durational; time is required of the viewer to adjust to the light levels and to fully perceive the ephemeral panorama which unravels continually inside the space. The projection has an intense cinematic quality, depending on the light we see more or less of the outside world, colours seem to change, and movement seems slightly delayed. This slowed-down pace of viewing creates a heightened awareness of sound, one hears the mundane activities of street life and the accompanying street noise.

By bringing this ancient phenomenon into a contemporary art context Zoe Leonard is attempting to broaden the current conversation about what photography is and what it can be. Stepping aside from current debates about analogue versus digital (nostalgia versus progress) a larger question is asked about perception and visual experience. What is photographic seeing? How do we relate to the mediated image? How do we perceive the world around us and how does that perception affect our experience (emotional, political, psychological). In some ways, the black box of the camera obscura could be seen as an analogue for the mind, and the unconsciousness.

The photographs in the other two gallery spaces are pictures taken of the sun, pushing the limit of what is possible to record with a camera.

One is not supposed to look at the sun and one of the cardinal rules of traditional photography is not to shoot into the sun. The sun is the source of all illumination, but it is rarely the subject of a photograph. It is possible to photograph the effect of the sun – it's light as it falls - but not the sun itself. Turning the camera onto the sun reverses all the rules of photography, but it's also going back to the source, looking directly at its own starting point.

These sun photographs, taken over the last year, are equally balanced between their subject and their process, the glare and flare on the lens, the grain of the film in the enlarged print. Without spotting or retouching, the evidence of darkroom work remains visible.

*"I'm interested in the abstract possibilities of photography. By choosing a subject which is impossible to depict, I'm exploring a way of depicting sight, experience, and the actual process of perception."* (Zoe Leonard)