

Both, Together, Shifting: On Micah Danges' Two Parts

Kaitlin Pomerantz

Like an animal skittering into the woods, the work of Micah Danges eludes our collective consumption. We can compare our impressions, tell the tale of what we saw, but we will never have seen exactly the same thing. What we see is determined by how long we look, at what precise moment, from what vantage point, and in what conditions. While this could be said of any work or witnessed object to some degree, here, the effect is deliberate, with each piece's layers, reflected and refracted light, and unnamable color palette composed to evade fixity and reduction to a singular image. As the artist himself describes, the featured works are "photographic constructs that resist documentation." And this book-- documentation of the undocumentable, along with its source imagery (hence, "two parts") -- is an effort to allow a distant viewer to take in a form of the work, while also witnessing the multitude of its forms, its final ungraspability.

With so much art, particularly in the age of the internet, boasting a click-to-share immediacy and declarative unity, what does it mean for an artist to offer something slower and more indeterminate? What do we do with this challenge, or invitation, to our individual experience and attention? For one, we reflect on seeing itself. And what I can offer here are my reflections, offered in relation to passages from two writers who tackle questions of vision and representation so compellingly that I often find myself returning to their ideas as I try to consider my own.

First, I think of the famous scene in Don DeLillo's postmodernist ode, *White Noise*, in which two characters visit "THE MOST PHOTOGRAPHED BARN IN AMERICA." One character remarks upon arrival that, "No one sees the barn...", and calls the glut of barn images "An accumulation of nameless energies", "...pictures of taking pictures". The chapter ends with the question, "What did the barn look like before it was photographed?" indicating a distance between things as they exist in reality versus their existence as images captured ad nauseum. While this all-too-familiar phenomenon pervades our current visual reality-- the destruction of

wonder caused by an excess of access to imagery of that which first provoked it-- Danges work might function in curious counterpoint. While Danges is also engaged in a kind of amassing of imagery-- taking and re-taking photographs, remixing and reconfiguring them digitally, manually and materially-- his pieces do not dull the affect of the original source material but rather allow it to be experienced once again. For example, here, Danges began by shooting photographs at a greenhouse in West Philadelphia (which can also be considered in interesting contrast to Delillo's defunct barn-- two agrarian muses-- one an active growing space, another now functioning only for tourists). While we only ever see this greenhouse in distilled fragments in the final works, their careful configuration and layering start to build a feeling of askance impressions and peripheral forms, teeming in their quietude. We start to sense the density, history, and futurity of this place. And so the works do not show, but offer us an opportunity to feel. They instill a sort of greenhouse-- a space for growth, and wonder-- within our minds.

Annie Dillard's description of early cataracts-surgery patients, and how they experience their surgical restoration of vision after blindness, allows for another inroad for considering Danges' work. In *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, she writes of the patient accounts that, "In general, the newly sighted see the world as a dazzle of color patches," and that rather than embracing the ecstasy of vision, many find it overwhelming: "It oppresses them to realize... the tremendous size of the world, which they had previously conceived of as something touchingly manageable." Here is a frame for thinking about the freedom of fragmented vision, and the overwhelm caused by seeing a whole. Of Dillard's own reaction to reading these accounts, she notes its temporary effect on her way of seeing, "I saw color-patches for weeks after I read this wonderful book. It was summer; the peaches were ripe in the valley orchards..." And yet, she concedes that her attachment to language and knowledge ultimately trumps the purity of raw sight: "Form is condemned to an eternal danse macabre with meaning. I couldn't unpeach the peaches." In relation to Dillard's vision of vision, Danges' work hangs in a curious state of suspension. If photography can be understood as a form of sense-making, a capture and framing of witnessed reality, Danges' acts of fragmentation, printing, collage, and re-materialization (a sort of literal pastiche), are like a hands-on attempt to unpeach the peaches: to defamiliarize, un-name, and allow us to see, and encounter, anew.

As artist William Kentridge declares, "Art must defend the uncertain," or as I might prefer to say, with Danges' work in mind: "Art is a slippery fish." This work is an effort to frame

and sequence the uncertain and slippery and offer it up for personal encounter. What we get, here, from this body of art and its representation in the form of this book, is a sense of work that is still work-ing; constructions not seen in past tense, but that are, rather, available for see-ing; not the view, and not quite the lens, but both, together, shifting.