

Daniela Zeilinger: Yonder

*This dull but serviceable image returns when I think of yonder, one of those wonderful words I later discovered linguists call “shifters” – words distinct from others because they are animated by the speaker and move accordingly. In linguistic terms, this means that you can never really find yourself yonder. Once you arrive at yonder tree, it becomes here and recedes forever into that imaginary horizon.*

*The truth is that what fascinates me is not so much being in a place as not being there: how places live in the mind once you have left them, how they are imagined before you arrive, or how they are seemingly called out of nothing to illustrate a thought or story ... These mental spaces map our inner lives more fully than any “real” map, delineating the borders of here and there that also shape what we see in the present.*

*If language is the most profound feature of any place, and I think it is, then perhaps my childhood history of forgetting and remembering enacts in miniature the dialectic of all immigrant experience: here and there are in a relation of constant strain that is chiefly determined by memory.*

Siri Hustvedt. “Yonder” in *A Plea for Eros: Essays*. Picador Books. 2007.

Yonder, an English word, has several meanings. It is a place that is distant, a bit farther removed from a compared place, for example. It is far off, but still within sight. This term is not only the title but also the appropriate point of reference for Daniela Zeilinger in her recent series of works.

In making these pictures, Daniela begins by making drawings, which may or may not become partially collaged and may or may not be used for the final picture. This image is then subjected to a few or many more levels of intervention by the artist, whether collage or removal of elements of the image, and eventually being transferred as digital photograph to a large flatscreen and re-photographed, to perhaps being collaged or painted upon, or indeed having elements cut away from it. The process may involve several or many steps until the image nears completion. It is then finally photographed using analogue diapositive slides which are then used in the darkroom to create a print that is the negative of the image in the slide. The final image printed out as a large or small scale photograph on glossy photo paper, and then mounted and framed. The final analogue prints are actually a 1:1 scale of the original drawings, if not resembling them very much in the end. Due to this inversion of the image through the darkroom process (ie. the use of a positive slide, not a negative, in the enlarger), she must carefully select, adjust and alter her colours, as they will be eventually inverted. Then the aspects of chance and unexpected result must be dealt with, as the analogue print in the end, as well, is never exactly accurate either.

Daniela sees parallels between the work of a writer and that of a painter. She makes clear reference (and homage) to the text quoted above by Siri Hustvedt, which explores aspects of memory, place and belonging through the journalistic musings of a woman whose

parents immigrated from Norway to America. She is especially interested in images which arise out of words, which are not concrete, not fixed, and yet bear a relationship to an actual time and place that had existed. These pictures as images formed out of a careful process of altered duplication echo these sentiments, for one, while also seeming to be a stand-in for memory as it inevitably blends with reality, fiction and desire, for example. A painterly technique that is combined into a form of painting is here fixed as a document, and yet unfixed as unclear in its very abstract formal qualities and the subjective set of decisions made that act almost as fictive plot-twists in the process.

The larger works tend to have more layers in this process, where for example in one larger work, one can see the addition of a wet, transparent paper onto the image, which is photographed naturally, but will then always appear to resonate with this impossible residue in the final image. It also, of course, contends with the viewer as a cypher of this state of change, now fixed as an indexical record of that time passing. Each abstract composition arises in a similar scheme of decision-making and contemplation, a pushing and pulling of the shape-shifting that eventually settles into a final image. Something is always lost, and something is often gained. The illusion of space, and the confusion of what is before the viewer, is always at play, however again, in reverse, where shadows, we must remember, commenced as white light and vice versa. This use of the positive slide in the darkroom (as opposed to a negative slide) to produce an inverted image is a recent development for Daniela.

One set of three smaller pictures carries references, one might even say remnants, of an acquaintance of the artist who died a few years ago. The work is not only an homage because of these barely-visible, ghost-like traces, but also due to the fact that the individual in question was someone who had instructed Daniela in Japanese calligraphy. The influence of this form of calligraphy is palpable throughout all the work, where we see gestures of form, colour and contrast that echo those potentially found in Japanese calligraphy. Equally so, the hint of an apparition of a person and personality who had impacted upon Daniela is palpable, once one is given a small clue as to the origin or the intentions behind the work. These intentions flow along as with her other work through her process, and end up in a considerably different form and aesthetic. The artist must then always decide when the work has completed itself through this process. There is a heavily meditative aspect to this process, but there is also a sense of surrendering the work, at least somewhat, to the unknowns and accidents that inevitably arise. She may decide to control these as much as possible, which indeed she often does, but nevertheless, an aspect of surrender seems appropriate to the spirit of the work, as well as its compelling oscillation between painting, collage and analogue photography, while the works also end up resembling x-rays (a form of photography really) and photograms (a photographic process produced in the darkroom without a camera).

In another small series of three pictures, one might glimpse forms that begin to resemble animals, perhaps looking towards or beckoning at some "utopian space," as the artist suggests. The images often seem familiar. Indeed I had pointed out the uncanny resemblance between one of her pictures and an album cover, and it was remarkable to her as well. But there is no intention of this kind of echoing of previously-existing images, and this coincidence says much about the poetic nature of her practice, which can live with

these accidental similarities and resist all accusations of ever being derivative. As an elusive image moves from one process to another, never quite settled as something, we also sense an echo of movement through time, memory and history, where each stage of the process is another trace picked up and layered into the eventual picture.

At times, the artist enacts a very deliberate form of cutting and fragmenting of forms, so that original aspects of a seeming composition are removed. Here, in the end this gesture becomes a deliberate censoring of the image. Her intention is to reveal some kind of truth that is inherent to the image, or that the image itself speaks by its very elusiveness. By removing at times the majority of the previous composition developed in the process, she subjects the work to an estrangement effect. She references her interest in Brecht's ideas in theatre when using the *Verfremdungseffekt*. By making obvious the "fictive" qualities in a performance, the actors confront the audience in an attempt to alienate them from passively enjoying the play. This effect of making the familiar strange is meant to didactically implore the viewer to consider how fabricated theatre is and how it is contingent upon certain cultural and economic conditions. With the work of Daniela Zeilinger, this effect is upon the image as it is being transformed, and it is simultaneously upon the viewer as he or she are estranged from the experience of locating or identifying what the image actually depicts. She also often includes "hints" of the process itself, where remnants of a piece of tape or edges of the paper or shadows from the layering may be detected in the picture.

Nothing is real in these pictures, we must remember. They are all abstract referents and inversions, all ghosts and traces, settled however into the undeniable fixed and indexical fact of each being an analogue photograph. The space of the virtual and the space of the real collide in these pictures, where we can see an interesting, if very different, parallel to the exhibition in the Great Hall by Gabriel Abrantes. Here, Daniela Zeilinger is working on this collision in a process that is poetic and concerned with abstract, elusive imagery while Abrantes is clearly interested in representational narrative and its disruption.

Ultimately in her process as much as in the resulting images the most important aspect to take away may be questions of time and memory as enacted in these compositions. The immediacy of photography is met with the painstakingness of painting, where here a sort of poetic hybrid compresses these opposites into a unified, resolved if not quite referable whole, that is itself simultaneously a meditation on and an intervention against time. Yonder, we might remember, is neither here nor there, also it is between here and there, but always somewhere else, not quite fixed. However yonder is always in relation to where one is. The works in this exhibition are thus anchored very much in the artist's metaphysical musings, but also very much anchored on her own body and self, which in the end, fixes and grounds her work within a concrete splendor.

Text by Séamus Kealy