

**(DE)CONSTRUCTED
REALITIES**

Recent photographic work by Larry Glawson and Sheila Spence

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Gallery 1.1 1
School of Art
The University of Manitoba

The photographs of Larry Glawson and Sheila Spence, as deconstructed images, do more than demystify. Both photographers question the ideological signified and allow levels of meaning and of thought to collide. No total reading of one evident posture or agenda is possible.

Through two very distinct visions, the photographs of Glawson and Spence question our cultural myths and demarcate cultural signs in an attempt to problematize the activity of reference. These works frustrate desire, (de)constructing the myths of our culture that have provided the subject matter of truth to photography, truth to relationships, reality to relationships and of reality to the photograph. As Michel Foucault suggests in 'Cogito Incogito', a meditation does not simply establish a truth. Instead it engenders a subject who is capable of seeing the truth that it has established.

Today no photograph can be fixed, stable and completely circumscribed by its predetermined standpoint. Deconstruction has disrupted the insistence that a photograph be read in a prescribed manner. To deconstruct the reality of the photographic image is to offer an account of what is going on, not by seeking out the meaning of its component parts or the implication of its systems, but by examining the relationship to other relationships - to itself, between themselves, to one another and to the viewer. These photographic images are read in the context of their marks, traces and ambivalent features in terms of their margins limits and frames. To undermine implicit (non-explicit) attitudes the photographs of Larry Glawson and Sheila Spence bring out what has been excluded by what they ultimately include: compassion, empowerment and dignity

Sheila Spence's investigations through her photographic images pertain to representation. The truth faithfully represented from reflection to allegory, becomes its double, - the Other - by reason of its likeness. Reality to allegory. In Spence's photographs there is an unveiling in both a real and a metaphysical (symbolic) way. One vision is read through another - fragmentary, intermittent, sometimes even tentative. For Spence

it is important to destructure, become dislocated, to dissolve the old order; the clues, signs and assumptions. By stripping down to the most vulnerable moment- naked and in bed, but not alone. The camera, the photographer as distancer, separates and allows scrutiny. To be deconstructive in Spence's work is to embrace a contradiction for she must exist in a field of cultural terms and reexamine her presumptions from the beginning.

Immanuel Kant, in the Critique of Judgment said that the tulip is beautiful because it is free or vague,- independent. Like Kant's tulip, these suites of images are free and vague and independent. Their completeness lacks nothing because they lack an end. These are sentences that do not complete themselves, do not stop even to ask a specific question. To ask a specific question would be to frame an answer. To alight upon the signifiers is to denounce their beauty and reduce the photographs to historicism.

Traditionally the male gaze has projected its fantasy onto the female figure, which has been looked at and displayed to signify male desire. Conversely, the male as subject is not the erotic object of looked-at-ness but of powerful ideal ego, the-one-who-makes-things-happen. In Spence's photographs both the male and female subjects, herself included, are presented for scrutiny. The history of each subject has come to bear on her/his own response to the gaze of the camera/viewer. The empty sheets give gentle pause to the questions we desire answered. There is a determination here born out of compassion. To question the constructs by reducing them to their most elemental and vulnerable forms- to understand passion and power. Hers is a gentle, tender probing. As Roland Barthes in The Responsibility of Forms proclaimed "In a society which has not yet found peace, how could art cease being metaphysical?"

As Spence's work is representation Glawson's work is presentation. His photographic pairings deconstruct and examine the signs (clues) to find the space between what is implied (perceived) as real and what is real (truth). Glawson's paired photographic images imply a disjunction at the moment they are perceived as one. Fictional couples-real relationships. There is imposed and controlled destructuring of the relationship.

Interest in the singularity the irreducible specificity of the photograph and/or the relationship is evident. Can the two be separated? -the relationship in the photograph from the relationship of the viewer to the relationship of the two photographs which make up the relationship in the photograph? This truth to the relationship is not one that looks sufficiently like itself to avoid the notion of illusion but instead divides itself to engender itself twice to the truth of the narrative and its construction. Glawson deliberately breaks down the unity of the photograph, and a belief in its oneness by light and perspective shifts and by the frame(s).

In life there are no frames but the frame(s) in Glawson's work exist to deconstruct notions of closure and stasis. Jacques Derrida states that the practice of fiction always runs the risk of believing in it or having us believe in it. Glawson's photographs serve to remind us against having a metaphysical truth (re)presented under the (dis)guise of fiction.

In Glawson's photographs the narrative affords the greatest possible yield of meaning. Through an entire history of the reading of a photograph, the decisive moment of Henri Cartier-Bresson is deconstructed through Glawson's work. The moment is artificial- a necessary total, for it is not one moment, but several junctures that make up each work. Like a heiroglyph, the disjunction of the time sign is read in a moment. This moment is the presence of all the absences, memories and promises. Meaning begins with this moment. As Bertold Brecht says "In a way because they are empty they are self sufficient."

In the photographs of Glawson and Spence, (de)constructed realities reveal hidden truths and are collaborations between themselves and their subjects to reveal issues of power and control. In relinquishing control of the power of the narrative, they have empowered us. In Derrida and Deconstruction , Derrida's favorite metaphor for deconstruction is weaving. These 'woven' (de)constructed photographs have a texture that "stretches, shrinks, can expand, can be grafted onto, can wrap or unravel, like the weaver's looping and knotting which explore patterns and interlacing of composition." The weaver cannot delude him/herself to surveying all the threads at once without risking the addition of some new thread.

Curator
Sharon Alward

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