

I start most discussions about my work by saying that I am interested in perception; in vision itself and in *how* we see, more than in *what* we see. I want to foreground this perceptual experience over anything we may think about whatever it is we may be looking at. I want to immerse myself in the visceral experience of looking at something, for prolonged periods of time. I do not want to be distracted from looking by getting lost in all of the thoughts and interpretations one's mind will spill forth about subject matter. I simply want to learn how to see.

Given that as the primary interest, many of the conventional activities of making photographs do not apply. Mostly we think about the camera as some sort of pointing device. We use it to point at things interesting, important, beautiful or memorable in the world. Then we are given back a picture of that thing or moment. More often than not we think that what the picture is *of*, is also what the picture is *about*. Most of the history of photography is tied up in photographs making meaning in this way. Subject matter, content and meaning are inseparably linked.

The inescapable choice every photographer has to make each day is what to point the camera at and how to deal with the meaning that this subject matter might suggest. Well, if you are not so interested in this type of meaning, if you are not invested in pointing at things in the world but instead are interested in the act of pointing (or looking) in itself, you have a big problem. How do you shift the viewer's attention away from thinking about what is depicted in an image? How do you lead their attention towards their own engagement in a visual, perceptual experience? How do you invite them to invest their attention, slow down and immerse themselves in *looking* for its own sake? Is it possible to invite a heightened visual experience through an image that then may be carried outside the gallery and into everyday life?

Each body of work I have made throughout the years takes a different stab at some of those questions. I have used different strategies to undermine the predictable read of "subject = meaning." The *Ground* series simply eliminates the subject by focusing the camera on an unoccupied foreground plane, leaving only an out-of-focus container for something that is not depicted. The camera is pointed at an empty volume, focused on negative space.

Other works search out peripheral vision, glimpses caught in passing “out of the corner of one’s eye.” Moving, looking off to the side and then looking back again, the image repeats from a slightly different position. Repetition and redundancy open the door for all sorts of useful questions about more than just what is being depicted in a single frame. If the image were about this tree, why would we need two or two hundred of them? Perhaps, something else might be going on?

By 1999, with the beginning of the *nowhere near* series, I had spent a lot of time thinking about the problem of choosing where to point my camera. Finally I made the choice to make no choice at all. I would make photographs wherever I happened to be, in the environment most familiar to me – and that environment is my home. The home is so visually familiar that it has become almost invisible. One moves from room to room without any sense of scrutiny or discovery, almost blindly, navigating it at night, reaching for things without even looking. It is so well known that it becomes a blank slate in which nothing stands out. It is an ambient visual field we live in and has become the perfect location for me for a long time now. It is always at hand, it allows me to work with repetition and duration, as time has become one of the primary elements in my work. Slow time, uninterrupted time, time that traces no change, or only the slightest change that might occur in my vision while staring at something for so long.

*nowhere near* and *...and of time* were the first two projects I made within these guidelines. The view from my living room window is certainly what I spend more time looking at than anything else. I stare at it daily, when talking on the phone, looking up from a book or laptop, when just sitting around. I am told that I spend an unusual amount of lot of time sitting around “lost in thought.” The implication might be that I am wasting time, but to me it seems just the opposite. It is a time when I am truly engaged in the moment and aware of what is around me. And perhaps I am less lost in thought than in looking. I value the idea of getting lost in looking. A type of looking that is not motivated by trying to identify, find, discern or discover something, but is looking just for it’s own sake. *Seeing is Forgetting the Name of the Thing One Sees* is the title of Robert Irwin’s biography. Before that, it was a line in a Zen text. Since I am interested in a visual art that is about the visual, learning how to really see and spending much time doing so, seems a very valuable practice to me.

*nowhere near* was photographed over a period of about nine months. I would simply make a photograph, or a series of photographs, whenever I would catch myself immersed in the view. There are countless negatives from this series and the final printed project is quite large. It was exhibited simultaneously at Tanya Bonakdar in New York, at ACME in Los Angeles and at Andrehn Schiptjenko in Stockholm 1999. Each exhibition of this series had different images in it and the book published to accompany the show has many images that were not in any of them. It was important to me that the shows ran simultaneously, that each show was different but on casual observation might appear to be the same. The seemingly endless repetition of this same view was very important to me. It posed the question of what might be going on here that could not be explained by a single frame and invited questions about duration that might lead to the heart of the project.

When I processed the first rolls of film from this series I was very shocked. What I saw in the prints did not in any way resemble what I saw looking out my window. I could not understand what was going on and it took quite some time to sort this out. We all know that what the camera sees is not what the eye sees, but often it's pretty close. The problem here turned out to be that what the camera and eye saw was not what the mind saw. My mind had perfectly erased the grid-work of the windows and only engaged with what lay beyond. All I was "seeing" was a plain looking yard and barren tree branches in the distance. The aperture, the window I was looking *through* had been neatly erased by my brain as not relevant to the view.

So when you look through this series you will find images of what I thought I was seeing (made by removing the grid by moving the camera outside) and you will find images that focus exclusively on the window or on some space between foreground and background, on empty or negative space as well as on objects. I am very fascinated by these differences of what the camera finds that the mind does not. And I am continually surprised by it. It sure raises questions about how we might truly know what is right in front of us.

*nowhere near* and *...and of time.* were photographed at the same time. The first traces my view out the window through fall, winter and spring. The second traces the changing light streaming into the house through

the same window. The light inhabits the room and creates yet another “view.” The light traces time, ever so slowly. It erases objects into pure blinding white. It breaks the division of inside from outside. When it reaches where I am sitting it blinds me.

Vision, time, stillness and light are the elements that run through all of my work; motivate all of my work, from one project to the next. But it is never that simple. The viewers desire to create narratives and interpretations; to assign other meanings and motives is strong and perhaps impossible to escape. I try to undermine these potential readings within the images and also whenever I speak or write. So: no, the choice of photographing in my home is not a metaphor, is not about domesticity, the telephone pole does not comment on communication and no, the pictures are not intended to be “sad.” My close friend and designer for the *nowhere near* book, would relentlessly tease me, insisting that everything about this series was sad, melancholic and about longing. After all, it is solitary, empty and nothing ever, changes, only time passes along. He knew precisely that this was the type of melancholic reading I was fighting but there is always the danger of protesting too much. Still, I do not want this type of narrative to take over. I place much more value on the thing itself than any interpretation of it. I go to great lengths for the work not to be swallowed up by the anecdotal.

For this and all work photographed in this house I do a lot of editing. I take out all images that have CDs, mail, newspapers or books lying around, shoes on the floor or a sweater hanging over the chair. I do so because I don’t want the viewer to spend time trying to uncover or construct an identity of who lives here, to create a narrative about *me*.

Narrative in art makes us think about all sorts of interesting things, but it derails the engagement with a visual experience. Narrative asks for interpretation, for us to spend our time making meaning out of what we are looking at. Narrative seems a quick and easy diversion from the more difficult and more interesting challenge and adventure of actually trying to see. But the human impulse to read or create narrative is very strong. It’s just what we do. No matter how careful I am to edit out elements that might invite it, the interpretations still get made. At the end of a recent lecture, a woman told me it was so interesting to meet me and to hear me talk about the work because I was nothing like she imagined. I couldn’t

resist asking and she told me that she had imagined someone impeccably dressed, who ironed shirts daily and was a devout Catholic. This because my house was so neat in the photographs and the color red used frequently in a recent series made her think of church. (I was wearing jeans and a sloppy shirt and had said things that clearly identified me as non-Catholic)

Vision, time, stillness and light are the elements that run through all of my work; motivate all of my work, from one project to the next. They also motivate my day.