

CURATORIAL STATEMENT BY OLIVIER RENAUD- CLÉMENT

*Back Grounds: Impressions Photographiques IV*

19 June – 30 July 2021

What had always fascinated me with these negatives was the sense and idea of a walk towards such a glorious and enigmatic subject (here the castle of William the Conqueror) and the progression towards an increasingly more abstract treatment, inducing accidental, unforeseen results – a rare freedom for such an early practice – making it a modern practice.

The 19<sup>th</sup> Century was an incredibly rich period of experimentation, discovery and development of a brand-new medium allowing newfound freedom that yielded unforeseen and incredibly creative outcomes. It is interesting to note that these five works, for which no known positives were ever printed, were kept together for over 150 years up until the point that we acquired them. The fact that Humbert de Molard did not discard this work, indicates that he viewed it as representing an important step in his research.

With this in mind, we invited Sherrie Levine to look at the negatives. She has created the first ever positive printing of these images, presenting a sort of appropriation, or revelation rather, of what they might have been. Levine's practice demonstrates how photography exists past the act of shooting, revealing and printing.

Liz Deschenes revisits the first iteration of this exhibition series by re-using two of her originally selected works - *Green Screen #1 and #3 (diptych)*. Commonly used as backdrops in media production for the purpose of creating special effects, green screens go unseen by the viewer. Deschenes makes them both subject and object, confronting the mechanics of seeing in the most overt and simple way.

Matt Mullican's light boxes digitally create ambiguous interior environments infused with color and suggestive shadows. In their raw form, their immediacy is left untouched and seems to create a reversed world – a horizon that is hard to comprehend and to penetrate. A sort of negative of a non-existent realm presented as light box objects.

James Welling presents *Dye*, an evolving body of images created by printing pages of an illustrated book onto photographic paper. The process of creating these images involved soaking book pages in dye, pressing these dye-saturated sheets onto blank photo paper, and letting them sit before peeling them apart. A few years ago, Welling made a group of unique color photographs *Julia Mamaea*, (2018-2019) using a single negative, dyes and handcrafted emulsions. Many of the prints had flawed surfaces and uncontrolled rivers of dye running across them. The artist describes the work as bordering on chaos, expressing that he decided to embrace that same lack of control in his *Dye* works. Like Humbert de Molard and other early practitioners of photography, each print defied his expectations.

Martin d'Orgeval has made daguerreotypes of the sun in which the star insensitively passes from a deep blue, sharp positive image of a disk to a pale yellow, ghostly negative halo – echoing the work of Humbert de Molard both in the primitive technique and the enigmatic, ever-changing presence.

Helen Mirra's work offers the only straight forward photography in the show. Each piece is completed with a poem – a sort of reduced Haiku – and a seven-part walk that punctuates and resonates perfectly with Humbert de Molard's own walk in Normandy. The two bodies of work facing each other illustrate a resolution of the accidental and the realized, the controlled and the random. In both, we see an exploration of landscape and medium. With *Walking Commas, 28 June, Cape Breton*, Mirra revisits long held traditions in photographic and poetic practice. She offers us a striking conclusion to this series of exhibitions.