

CHUCK KELTON

&

ERIC WILLIAM CARROLL

New Photogenic Drawings

Curated by Alison Bradley

ALISON BRADLEY

“ARS LONGA, VITA BREVIS”

“*ARS LONGA, VITA BREVIS*”, A LATIN TRANSLATION FROM GREEK, IS PERHAPS BEST INTERPRETED IN OUR TIME AS: “LIFE IS SHORT, ART IS ETERNAL”. AN ARTIST'S LIFE IS FILLED WITH CHALLENGES AND, ABOVE ALL, WITH THE SELF-RECONCILIATION OF WHAT THEY PRODUCE. THEIR WORK IS FORGED THROUGH A DEEP RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IDEAS AND SKILLS, FIRST OCCURRING BY CHANCE, THEN REINFORCED THROUGH REPEATED PRACTICE. FOR PHOTOGRAPHERS, TECHNIQUE IS NOT DEFINED BY A MERE CLICK OF AN APPARATUS OR A RENDERING OF A MOMENT BUT, INSTEAD, BY A DEEPER KNOWLEDGE OF THE MEDIUM: THE HISTORY, MATERIALS, AND FOIBLES.

I MET BOTH ARTISTS BY CHANCE AND, AS TIME PASSED, MY INITIAL INTUITION OF THEIR WORK — BEING SOMETHING INTERESTING — BECAME A CONVICTION THAT THEIR PHOTOGRAPHS WERE INDEED PROFOUND. CHUCK KELTON WAS FORMERLY MY OWN TEACHER OF THE ART OF GELATIN SILVER PRINT. NOW, HE IS THE MENTOR ONE FINDS ONLY RARELY IN A LIFETIME. I MET ERIC WILLIAM CARROLL THROUGH A DISCERNING COLLECTOR, IN WHOSE HOME WE UNFOLDED (SECTION AFTER SECTION) *BLUE LINE OF WOODS*. WE WERE ALL ENCHANTED BY THE BOOK'S UNIQUENESS, HISTORICISM AND STRENGTH OF VISION.

INDEED, I AM STRUCK BY THE FACT THAT BOTH ARTISTS SHARE A DEFIANCE OF THE REPRODUCIBLE TRAIT OF PHOTOGRAPHY, YET SHARE A REVERENCE FOR ITS PROCESS AND QUALITIES, AS WELL AS THE ALCHEMICAL PROPERTIES AND MATERIALITY OF WHICH IT IS DEPENDENT UPON.

IN THIS EXHIBITION, BOTH ARTISTS WILL DEBUT BODIES OF WORK AND ARTIST BOOKS THAT DRAW ON THE LEGACIES OF EARLY PIONEERS IN THE PHOTOGRAPHIC PRACTICE — SUCH AS ANNA ATKINS, CARLETON WATKINS AND TIMOTHY O'SULLIVAN — AND PRESENT A COMPELLING NEW VISION.

CARROLL AND KELTON EXPLORE PHOTOGRAPHY IN ITS FULLEST SENSE, THROUGH PROCESSES AND SUBJECT MATTER. IN THEIR UNIQUE WORKS — IRREPRODUCIBLE AND MADE WITHOUT NEGATIVES — LIGHT AND CHEMISTRY MANIFEST THEMSELVES AND CREATE UTTERLY STRIKING RENDITIONS OF NATURE.

CARROLL'S DIAZOTYPES ARE CREATED BY HIS MITIGATION OF LIGHT AND PHOTSENSITIVE PAPER IN SITU IN NATURE, WHILE KELTON'S MASTERFUL PHOTOGRAMS ARE CREATED IN A DARKROOM, AT TIMES DEVOID OF ANYTHING BOTANICAL OR ENVIRONMENTAL IN THE PROCESS.

IN ADDITION TO THEIR UNIQUE PRINTS, THE EXHIBITION WILL FEATURE BOOKS BY BOTH ARTISTS; ERIC WILLIAM CARROLL'S "BLUE LINE OF WOODS", A LIMITED EDITION ARTIST BOOK, MEASURING 11" X 9" X 1.5", COMPOSED OF ACCORDION BOUND PIGMENT INK PRINTS WITH AN UNFIXED GELATIN SILVER PRINT ON COVER, INCLUDING A PRINTED TEXT INSERT, AND CHUCK KELTON'S ARTIST FOLIO, "NIGHT AFTER NIGHT", COMPRISING NINE UNIQUE, HAND TONED, PHOTOGRAMS.

PLEASE ENJOY THIS EXHIBITION OF UNIQUE WORKS AND ARTIST BOOKS.

LYLE REXER

INTO THE WOODS

EVERYWHERE WE LOOK, NATURE CONFRONTS US – IN IMAGES AT LEAST. YET IN BRINGING US OTHER PLACES, PHOTOGRAPHY SEEMS TO HAVE UNANCHORED US FROM PLACE, MADE NATURE A SPECTACLE WITHOUT A MESSAGE, AND CATALOGUED THE SUBLIME AS A FIRST STEP IN ITS DOMESTICATION AND ULTIMATE EXPLOITATION. IN A FAMOUS SERIES BY MYOUNG HO LEE, TREES ARE PHOTOGRAPHED AGAINST CANVAS BACKDROPS, LIKE PROPS FROM A NINETEENTH CENTURY PHOTO STUDIO. NATURE HAS BECOME A MERE SIGN, WITH NO POWER OF AUTHORSHIP.

YET THE EARLIEST PHOTOGRAPHERS FELT DIFFERENTLY. IN *THE PENCIL OF NATURE*, WILLIAM HENRY FOX TALBOT CELEBRATED NATURE'S ABILITY TO DRAW ITSELF, THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF LIGHT AND PAPER. HIS CONTEMPORARY OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES SUGGESTED THAT REALITY GIVES OFF A FILM FROM ITS SURFACES, WHICH SOMEHOW IMPRESSES ITSELF ON THE PHOTOGRAPHIC NEGATIVE. AT THE BEGINNING, THEN, PHOTOGRAPHY WAS NOT MERELY A MATTER OF IMAGES OR "SIGNS," BUT OF IMPRESSIONS, CONTACT.

JUST AT A TIME WHEN IMAGES SEEM TO HAVE LOST THEIR POWER TO INSPIRE A REVERENCE FOR NATURE (THE PICTURES JUST GET BIGGER AND BIGGER), THE WORKS OF ERIC WILLIAM CARROLL AND CHUCK KELTON TAKE ON A SUBTLE URGENCY. THEY RESTORE TO PHOTOGRAPHY A SENSE OF PHYSICAL TOUCH THAT CONFIRMS THE WORLD. BOTH THESE ARTISTS ARE DEEPLY IMMERSSED IN THE PROCESS OF MAKING CAMERALESS, CHEMICAL PHOTOGRAPHS, AND BOTH HAVE SOUGHT A MEANS TO REPRESENT NATURE BY RECORDING ITS PHYSICAL CONDITION. THEY HAVE CONVENED PHYSICAL EVENTS AND HARNESSSED CHANCE TO MAKE PICTURES. CARROLL'S DIAZOTYPES (MORE FAMILIARLY KNOWN AS BLUEPRINTS, A TECHNIQUE AS OLD AS THE 1840s) ARE RICH IN VISUAL TEXTURE AND METAPHOR. CARRIED INTO THE WOODS AND LAID ON THE SUN-DAPPLED GROUND, THE PAPER REGISTERS THE SHADOWS CAST BY THE MOVING BRANCHES. DEVELOPING YIELDS THE EVOCATIVE BLUE COLOR OF "BLUE LINE OF WOODS." THE PROCESS SEEMS TO HAVE CAPTURED HOLMES' "FILM" OF THE REAL.

TO MAKE THE POINT IN A SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT WAY, CARROLL SET UP A MOVIE SCREEN IN THE WOODS AND LET LIGHT AND SHADOW COMPOSE THE SHIFTING IMAGES ON SCREEN – NATURE’S HOME MOVIE. OF COURSE WE ARE AT A REMOVE FROM THE SOURCE: WE COULD JUST WATCH THE LIGHT THROUGH THE TREES WITHOUT RECOURSE TO THE SCREEN. YET THE SCREEN SUGGESTS A COLLABORATION BETWEEN NATURE AND THE ARTIST IN THE PRODUCTION OF IMAGES AND REMINDS US THAT OUR INTRINSIC AESTHETIC SENSE IS THE MEANS BY WHICH WE IDENTIFY WHERE WE ARE. WALKING CAMERAS, WE REGISTER CONDITIONS AND FRAME THE LANDSCAPE.

MORE TACTILE ARE CHUCK KELTON’S PHOTOGRAMS, WHICH INVOLVE THE DIRECT PLACEMENT OF OBJECTS ON PAPER TO CREATE A SILHOUETTE IMAGE WHEN EXPOSED TO LIGHT. ONCE AGAIN, NO CAMERAS ARE INVOLVED, AND THE CONTROL OF EXPOSURE YIELDS THE DELICATE GRADATIONS OF OPACITY AND TRANSPARENCY. THE PAPER RECORDS A PHYSICAL CONTACT WITH OBJECTS AND LIGHT, JUST AS IT WOULD HAVE 150 YEARS AGO. KELTON HAS PRODUCED MOONLIGHT EXPOSURES OF TREES AND FOLIAGE, PALE NIGHT VERSIONS OF CARROLL’S NATURAL WORLD. NATURE PERFORMS UNDER THE ORCHESTRATION OF THE ARTIST.

YET KELTON HAS ALSO FABRICATED ILLUSORY “LANDSCAPE” PHOTOGRAMS IN THE DARKROOM, FROM THE CONTOURS OF ROCKS, CANS, WOOD AND OTHER MATERIALS PLACED ON THE PAPER. HE HAS AUGMENTED THE INITIAL IMAGE WITH CHEMICAL TONING OF THE PRINT TO PRODUCE RICH AND STRANGE BACKGROUND HUES. THE RESULT IS A HYBRID: PART ILLUSION, PART DOCUMENT; PART PAINTING, PART PHOTOGRAPH; PART IMAGE, PART OBJECT.

IN A MEDIA-SATURATED WORLD WHERE NATURE IS KNOWN THROUGH IMAGES, KELTON AND CARROLL DISPENSE WITH THE CAMERA TO DEMONSTRATE THE EMBODIED REALITY OF NATURE. NATURE IS NOT A PICTURE, IT MAKES PICTURES. WE LIVE WITHIN IT, AND IT TOUCHES US.

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48 Orchard Street
10002 New York, NY

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