stanleypickergallery:

7.9 Cubic Metres

A gallery within a gallery

Voids, Corners, Plentifolds

Alexandra Hughes
Born 1982, Canada.
Lives and works, London.

17 Hours of a White Wall, 2009
Installation
80 x 35mm slides, slide projector

Loud and blinding, bare and mute - the white-washed space could be as banal and platitudinous as it is utopian, as trite as it blankly imagines a plethora of meanings, as flat as it is voluminous. It remains rhetorically ambivalent; functions as a pretext for perfection.

What will we make of white walls and white spaces?

Alexandra Hughes negotiates the question quietly and unassumingly, where the artist has chosen to locate the dimensionality of the white cube through a process of photographing a single wall in Stanley Picker Gallery's Studio 2 over the duration of 17 hours. Beginning from sunrise to sunset, a snapshot was taken every 12.45 minutes, resulting in a series of images which record the subtle colour variations reflected on the chosen wall. Then projected, or in effect, 'replayed' back onto the surface of *7.9 Cubic Metres*, the series of rhythmically timed slide projections dramatize and make apparent the colour shifts over the duration.

17 Hours of a White Wall (2009) is an evaluation of both medium and method. Shying away from conventional image content or subjects such as people, landscapes or objects, Hughes' work returns to explore the formalistic principles of abstraction. Inverting the function of the gallery wall as a hanging surface, the artist has appropriated the vertical plane as a canvas. Engaging not only the characteristics of site beyond symbolic conventions, Hughes' installation demonstrates the rudimentary nature of photography as a nuanced document of light and captured time.

Technological variables and the mechanisms of documentation, as Hughes' illustrates, alter the conditions of our viewing and implicate perception. Having chosen to deploy neither videographic modes nor methods such as long-durational exposure, the artist's choice of automated snap-shooting underscores a re-consideration of "the decisive moment". The "decisive moment" approach, as photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson had coined in the 50s, is 'the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as the precise organization of forms which gives that event its proper expression." Hughes' process for this particular work, however, involved minimal real-time intervention by the artist, instead privileging the fully automated, serial development of the image, where contingencies of movement and event have been minimized. The resultant material gathered from Hughes' photographic process is nonetheless poetic, alluding to ephemerality and residual memory. Where the long duration of collecting and of archiving is juxtaposed against the short duration of exhibition, we are reminded of the long and short durées of historical as well as personal memory. Where we find ourselves perpetually seduced by the beauty of the image, we are reminded to question the fleeting moment of its viewership and consumption.

The 'whiteness' is in this case, reveals itself as a spatial dimension of speed and of slowness.