

Reflections on Paul R. Solomon's Boundaries of Eden

The first exhibition of Paul R. Solomon's new work *Boundaries of Eden* opened December 7, 2013 at Canvas Chicago, in Wicker Park, Chicago. The exhibit is sponsored by Brave New Art World, LLC, which celebrates its official launch with this show. The reception was sponsored by Journeyman Distillery. The exhibition is hosted by Canvas Chicago.

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Photographic images establish a specific context, framings, bounded horizons of legible selectivity that distinguishes them from viewing the world face-to-face. One striking aspect of Solomon's *Boundaries of Eden* is that it echoes and transforms the limits of its own frame as a photography exhibition in meeting with its viewers in the gallery. New technologies and shifts within social environments have given individuals new ways by which to access the world and project their pieces of it – through images anyone can make and acquire using an iPhone and related media in an age of seemingly unbounded communication. While the need to direct oneself outwards to anchor the self is as strong as ever, there still exists for many a paradoxical sense of dislocation, frictionless spinning in the void: a shady fear that the world does not answer; the nightmare that the meeting with a mirroring other is a fiction.

The title *Boundaries of Eden* echoes the first fall from grace in the quest for knowledge (and thence power), and in this exhibition the artist has broached the issue by acknowledging the condition of photography as mirroring the first act of rebellion. Solomon works with a model of consciousness as necessarily embodied, a stance on the individual as someone who is always already *part* of the world she inhabits, as he explores our relationship with historical, natural, and urban environments.

The experience of watching Solomon's pictures points to cinema in that it involves a paradoxical movement back and forth between the fragmentary segments of the still photographs and their poetic rhythm as organised visual wholes. Take the image 'Titan'. While you grasp its pictorial content in an instant you have to watch the picture as a sequence – as with the experience of seeing moving images. The sequence in which Solomon's photographic images are to be looked at is proposed by the order of the individual still shots, itself generated by the automatic functions of the iPhone medium. But nothing holds readers to the recommended order; like scrolls,

they can be read from right to left or left to right. Both the order and the time for dwelling on detail at each shot require the participation of the reader.

One way to approach an understanding of the creativity that may become Solomon's legacy, the seemingly raw self-taught Muybridgesque technique that is akin to shooting film, is to contemplate the curious images and search for clues. Suppose you take the presence of the absences in the blank regions as your ground, the lack of data in the black mosaic-like spaces of the pictures that Solomon refers to as the 'digitized artefacts' of the *Boundaries of Eden* project. It does not matter how you get to such a point (I arrived through the notion of "seeing in", how images let us see what is not there in its surface properties; another route the poetry of the absurd, and much else beyond) as long as you can see the availability of blank space as a ground. It challenges you with nothing. It invites you. The blank space is powerful precisely because of what it has not: wilful power. With the blank, unspecific and nameless centre of the digitized artefacts as grounds, it would seem that Solomon's photographic images clears a clearing, a ground for openness. On it you can lay out your mind, build a space with which to meet with reality and address yourself.

I suggested that we may think of the creative process of the *Boundaries of Eden* project bearing a similarity to film, but this does of course not foreclose other models of comparison. Rather than using images to illustrate or ornament preconceived ideas, the work shows how photography can be made both the subject and object of critical reflection. Three levels are apparent here. First, photography can raise philosophical questions, e.g. about its own ontology, epistemology, ethics and aesthetic value. Second, photography can address these questions in a philosophical way. Third, photography can address questions about its own status and abilities as a philosophical mode of inquiry in a philosophical way.

In conclusion, the framing of the exhibition *Boundaries of Eden* takes over part of the function of the title. It preserves an internal anonymity of the work where awareness of its possibilities is suspended, allowing activity at its edges that imply something that can be filled. Perhaps this is all you ever really need in the usually murky traffic between art and truth: a ground for openness, a willingness to be impressed.

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