

Meir Rakocz: Otherwise, No Change History of the Past, Pall of the Future

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Illness is the night-side of life, a more onerous citizenship. Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick. Although we all prefer to use only the good passport, sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place.¹

History

In recent years, Meir Rakocz has been moving about with a passport of that “other,” less desirable place in his pocket. His illness makes itself present in his work in diverse ways. Medical procedures, physical scars, and pharmacological treatments were presented directly in his previous exhibitions, *Space-Occupying Lesion* and *Morbidity & Mortality Report*. In the current exhibition, they are shown metaphorically and allusively.

At the throbbing core of the exhibition are three spaces in time: prehistory—presented in geological metaphors of massive stones millions of years old; biological time—that of the artist and his practice on borrowed time, the kind that is measured out for all human beings and may be threatening in the nearer term due to the pall of the illness; and the last and most elusive time at the exhibition—the duration of the exposure, a time cadenced by photography or, to be more precise, by the camera shutter. It is a time without duration, the blink of an eye, a fragment of a moment that sets itself within eternity.

Otherwise, No Change

Change is the most acute manifestation of the passage of time. When something does not change, time is not evident. Rakocz tracks the changing of the horizon and, particularly, the undulations of a random buoy. He photographs the buoy steadily, hour after hour, day after day, as though accompanying it distantly but persistently and devotedly. Like Claude Monet, who paints haystacks or the Rouen Cathedral consistently,² he allows light and weather to determine the conditions of visibility and the ambitus of the shades of color.

Rakocz photographs a volcanic stone that was formed millions of years ago in a lengthy process that ended at the abrupt moment of the change, bringing to mind a disruption that changed the form and density of the stone instantaneously and forever.

Uneven Orientation

In another series, Rakocz continues to track configurations of volcanic ash that billow into the air as the camera looks on, once facing the sea and then against the backdrop of the grey facade of a structure. With each projection, a different, singular, and nonrecurrent blotch is created. It's often claimed that one cannot take the same picture twice, least of all a photo in which there is motion. This series of Rakocz's carries that argument to its extreme. The unevenness of the volcanic

¹ Susan Sontag, “Illness as Metaphor,” *The New York Review of Books*, January 26, 1978, retrieved from <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1978/01/26/illness-as-metaphor/>

² In 1890, Money began to produce a series of paintings that depict an identical object—a house of parliament, the Rouen Cathedral, a poplar tree—in different states of illumination.

staining heightens the sense and the uncontrolled spread of randomness. As a rule, Rakocz's works oscillate within a range bounded by what is held and controlled and what is random and sovereign.

Further Investigation

The artist's gaze, although steady and systematic, searches for the fleeting and the temporary. It investigates configuration and structures, indulges in protracted pausing, and tests various possibilities that it and the camera make possible. We do not behold even one particular photo of unique status; we do not encounter "the" photograph. Instead, we find a categorical negation of the very conceivability of a definitive photographic moment. The images that Rakocz portrays create an intersection of indefinite and non-hierarchical moments that are then summarized. As a case in point, study the rope that sways in the breeze—a trio of similar photographs that describe a minor change. Like the exacting examination of a clinical change, the comparison concerns itself with minutiae.

Almost All

All the images on display at the exhibition were created during the artist's stay in Iceland—a place of untamed nature, thermal springs, cold temperatures, and volcanic landscapes. Almost all the photos were taken near the ocean. Rakocz photographs neither Iceland nor the landscape nor the ocean. He establishes the visibility of his state of mind, of fragility, and of the existential ambitus between the eternal and the momentary. His gaze is placated, his language unexpressive (as one would expect). Above all, he is immersed in a state of contemplation—deep but silent contemplation, contemplation of what's outside—as if he were inside.

New Findings

The texts displayed alongside the photos at the exhibition are fragments of the deciphering of CT tests. Deciphering is an interpretive gesture, a subjective reading (insofar as science can deliver subjectivity). One may construe Rakocz's images as visual decipherings and his medical terms as verbal ones.

Where the medical imaging (and the medical field at large) is concerned, there is a professional terminology. Foreign to the patient and largely meant to be so, it tends to establish distance between the giver and the recipient of care, creating a disciplinary barrier between those in the know and those less so. Within the grammatology of medicine and the recesses of the laconic descriptions, in shades of black-grey-white, elements of poetic language exist. External to the full diagnosis, beyond the span of the medical document, and far from the findings, they serve as wondrous metaphors. Rich in imagery, they impart tone to the dry evaluation and redefine time.

Impression

A medical impression is an overview of a patient's condition, a collection of findings that precedes a plunge into details that, in some cases, will mar if not contradict the impression.

French Impressionism was profoundly influenced by mid-nineteenth-century photography. One of the salient features of the revolution brought about by Impressionism was the artist's exit from the studio into the landscape. The Impressionists painted what they saw—not in Realistic reproduction but in an impressionistic image centering on the experiencing of light and color. Rakocz adopts the Impressionist approach not only as a visual language but as a conceptual outlook and a spiritual experience. Thus he invites viewers to dive in, reduce the impression to its components, and build them anew.