
Senior Projects Spring 2012

Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects

Spring 2012

Silhouettes

Curtis Wallen
Bard College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2012

 Part of the [Photography Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License](#).

Recommended Citation

Wallen, Curtis, "Silhouettes" (2012). *Senior Projects Spring 2012*. 333.
https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2012/333

This Open Access work is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been provided to you by Bard College's Stevenson Library with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this work in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@bard.edu.

Silhouettes

Silhouettes began as an experiment in reduction. I was looking to capture emptiness; to photograph nothing. However, it was important to work within the confines of the program of the camera. I didn't want to cheat the apparatus, and end up with something not quite photography. I wanted to meet "straight photography" on its own terms, which got me thinking about the function of a photograph.

Photography has long served as a medium for documentation. From its genesis to today, it has been used to a breadth of ends as a creator of records. One particularly interesting case is crime scene photography. Forensic photographers are given the responsibility to photograph a scene after an event has taken place, with the hope that their documentation will help shed light on the past. In a sense, they attempt to create a document of something that isn't there. I followed that train of thought in *Silhouettes*. I began photographing as if I was arriving "after the fact." I approached scenes with a curious eye, hoping my scrutiny would lead to discovery.

Shortly after adopting this way of working, I came across an article by Ana Longoni titled, "Photographs and Silhouettes: Visual Politics in the Human Rights Movement of Argentina." In the article, Longoni focused on the "aesthetic implications of the visual strategies [in the] protests and remembrances of those who disappeared under the Argentinian dictatorship of the 1970s and 80s". Photographs became a big part of the protests and remembrances, as documents of existence. During the Argentinean dictatorship of 1976-83, 500 concentration camps were established, where approximately 30,000 people disappeared. Small posters were made with images of the disappeared. These images were worn on bodies or held up on signs as Argentines protested around the Plaza de Mayo. "These images of the disappeared reaffirmed the existence of a biography that predated these subjects' kidnapping, an existence that was categorically negated by the regime". The photographs declared that this was, this took place: this person existed. "The photographic apparatus contains this temporal ambiguity of what still is and what no longer is". I find that opportunity for temporal ambiguity, and specificity, interesting.

Using the psychology of the crime scene photograph as the primary model, *Silhouettes* explores the function of the photograph as document, and its implications of biography.

A black photograph was included in the exhibition, as part of a sound installation. Attached to the top of the frame were two binaural microphones that were plugged in to a recorder hidden behind the frame. Plugged into the recorder was a pair of headphones, hung on a nail below the frame. The viewer was invited to put the headphones on while looking at the photograph. What the viewer heard through the headphones was realtime 3D audio of the noise of the room, amplified to a level above normal hearing. One could hear every footstep, shuffle, and conversation. Behind the glass, the black image became a mirror. The viewer saw themselves and everything taking place around them. The amplified audio and alluring reflection created a heightened sense of awareness, that simultaneously connected and disconnected the viewer from the space of the gallery. They became hyper aware of the space they were in, but also felt a sense of its otherness, as their experience of it was mediated through the photograph and the headphones.

For installation shots/images please visit: <http://curtiswallen.com/silhouettes/>