

What is lost... what has been

John Paul Evans

What is lost... what has been is a visual soliloquy to 'absent friends', people I considered my family. The works are also a coda to my installation 'in the sweet bye & bye' which was a photographic cathexis in response to the death of my closest friend in Dec 2017. His death brought back memories of my father's close friend, who died some years before. My father's friend was a kind and caring man, who had helped me through some very difficult times in early adulthood. The autoethnographic process of weaving one's personal history into a visual dialogue is useful to explore photography's tendency towards memorialisation and also to analyse ideas of belonging/otherness, mourning and melancholia in relation to the photographic family album.

As an academic, I was critical of what the 'family album' represented in terms of normality and otherness so there is little photographic evidence to represent the 33 years that my husband Peter and I have spent together.

As Peter is now in his 80s and almost 30 years my senior, there seemed to be an urgency to make work together exploring concepts of couples and family representation. The performative gestures I would describe as tragi/comic, depicting an 'odd couple'. But this couple at odds with their environment also evokes "anticipatory grief,"¹ of a couple who are at a different point in life's journey. "Even before the loved one is gone, the ghost of their disappearance is set into place".²

The title is an amalgam of ideas of mourning and melancholia explored by Darian Leader in *the new black* and Roland Barthes reflection on the loss of his mother, *camera Lucida*. The concept of memorialisation is particularly pertinent to Photography. Roland Barthes famously declared "the photograph does not necessarily say what is no longer, but only and for certain what has been".³ We try to capture our loved ones through the photographic moment, but the attempt to freeze/capture/isolate time only testifies to the fact that this moment has passed, 'this has been'.

The tableau memorials often incorporate a frame within a frame which allows the possibility of collapsing time in order to create a dialogue between the living and the dead. Reanimating the deceased draws “our attention to the register of artificiality”.⁴ The indexicality of the photographic referent and the suggestion of characters communicating across time and space creates the illusion of what is not possible in real life, the desire to communicate with what has been. Self-portraiture enables us to participate in the act of loss/death, to mourn lives lived to the full and of lives suppressed by notions of otherness.

“in mourning, we grieve the dead; in melancholia, we die with them”.⁵

¹ Darian Leader *The New Black*

² Ibid

³ Roland Barthes *Camera Lucida*

⁴ Darian Leader *The New Black*

⁵ Ibid

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