**Movement in a Static Space – The Psycho-geography of a Gallery – a partial review.**

It can be said that “looking”, in the modern sense of the word, was invented in France, more specifically in Paris, during the Second Empire where, since 1748, every two years, in the Salon Carré of the Louvre, the French Academy exhibited what it believed to be the most representative paintings produced in the land. The success of the endeavour was phenomenal and by the time Jacque-Louis David stunned the world with his masterpiece “The Oath of the Horatii”, people were coming in, in their tens of thousands, animated by a new desire, the desire to see[[1]](#footnote-1).

With the advent of the industrial revolution looking ceased to be a matter of choice. Developments in urbanism and public transport forced city dwellers, for the first time in history, to look at each other for extended periods of time, and it did not take long for these observations to become part of the culture. In the Paris of Baudelaire, gazing became an art form. What he and his entourage embodied was the idea of a gentleman stroller, at home in the multitude, what Walter Benjamin called the essential figure of the modern urban spectator, an erudite vagabond who filters the existence of the city itself through the prism of a gaze and what the literary world defined as the *flâneur[[2]](#footnote-2)*. What this unconventional group of citizens set out to achieve was to document a fluid world of movement, the jostling crowds, the unpredictability of the city itself through the means of poetry, literature and art, but more importantly, through the act of looking itself.

And it is in this context of the history of the gaze that great deal of insight into the work exhibited at the 198 Gallery in Brixton entitled “*Movement in a Static Space*” will emerge.

The first work in the gallery, “*Undulate*”, by Eleanor Lines explores movement and change though the means of the material itself, the work consisting of a digital print on silk. What arrests the viewer at first is the unsettling beauty of the work and the ability of the two dimensional piece to mimic the ripples and folds of a billowing canvas. However, aside from the artifice, the corrugated lines of the print achieve a hypnotic definition of an idea, as the viewer is cajoled into a languid reverie that furtively invites his/her intellectual faculties to question the ontology of movement itself.

The second highlight is a piece entitled “*Inside a Moving Van*” by David Stupple which is a series of photographs taken by means of very long exposures in the back of a moving van. In order to record the movements, Stupple held candles in his hands as the car navigated around the streets that circle his London studio. What resulted was a document, a refreshingly innovative and precise map of the journey itself, its accelerations and deceleration and more astoundingly the translation onto a surface of the fourth dimension of time. That being said, the piece becomes more than a script, as it draws our attention towards the subjective parameters of the map-maker himself, by highlighting him through his very absence in an enchanting visual “play on words”.

As we advance through the galley the layout of the space invites us to enter a dark room, a piece entitled “*Cave (singularity)”* by Elena Colman. Suspended, temporally and spatially in darkness the viewer is invited to wait, until a flash of light, brings into view for a fraction of a second the three walls of the installation. On them, the abstract images produced through astute manipulation of photographs of the caves is Castleton, Derbyshire, printed in fluorescent ink, become a metaphor for the evanescent quality of the act of viewing and the brief instant of meaning we always struggle to achieve.

Through these three works, of which the above are only my personal highlights, and the others exhibited [Rachel Ridge’s *Insert Life Here* and Caroline Underwood’s *No One - Time Out*] the show[[3]](#endnote-1) explores our relationship with space and movement and playfully invites us to become Flâneurs, to transform like them, living (movement) into representation, a world away from the our pedestrian society of spectacle, in works saturated with meaning and artistic value. What sets the show apart from others is not that that it achieves a defamiliarisation with the notion of gazing but that it offers the parameters for a reconstruction of the our notion as well.

1. For a more complete account of the biennale show see Simon Schama – The power of art, Random House. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. (*flâner* – to stroll, French), for a full account see Walter Benjamin’s essay on Baudelaire. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “*Movement in a static space” was curated by Phoebe Antoniw, Clara Hatfield, Saskia Mercuri, Sergio Nieves, Camilla de Szyszlo, Emma Vooght and Jason Yen.* [↑](#endnote-ref-1)