

Greta Anderson
Joyce Campbell
Conor Clarke

Bringing together the work of photographers Greta Anderson, Joyce Campbell, and Conor Clarke, the current exhibition *The Close*, examines concepts of danger, proximity and distance. These three artists are concerned with hazardous, poisonous, and industrial subjects, asking the viewer to consider how spatial and temporal remove is able to render them safe, engaging, and even beautiful. In all of these works there is an element of beauty, but also an element of danger. It leaks out of the saturated colours in Anderson's work and the awe-inspiring nature of Clarke's subjects, all of which have been photographed from "a proper distance".¹ With Campbell's images a sense of the perilous comes literally into focus, as the viewer's sense of scale and their closeness to the subject requires renegotiation.

Reflecting on her work, Clarke states that she is "preoccupied with finding beauty in the unspectacular." And find beauty she does – in rather unexpected places such as compound mines in Heringen and industrial structures such as power stations from the former East Germany. Subject matter that would generally be considered unattractive, in this case gives a good impression of the overwhelming forces of nature and architecture. Clarke is mindful of German photographer, Hilla Becher who describes such buildings as "living, breathing, producing organs, coal and water in, stream out...digesting, metabolising..."

The immense white, shimmering mountain mass featured in Clarke's *The beginning and the end of all natural scenery*² is actually composed entirely of discarded rock salt estimated to be around 350 million years old. The tailings of potash mining, which began in the area in 1976, these mounds are colloquially referred to as "kalimanjaro," derived from "kali," which is a shortened form of the compound that is mined (kaliumchlorid, or potassium chloride), and "njaro" meaning greatness/shining. They are also called Monte Kali (after Monte Carlo) or Wetterberg (Weather Mountain) for its ability to predict rain. The mountain will turn grey under low pressure taking on the moisture from the air. Otherwise it is shining white when the weather is clear. The result of a seemingly insatiable need for salt (mostly for fertilisers), this mountain towers over 200 metres high, and is constantly evolving, growing at a staggering rate of 900 tonnes per hour. It will continue to grow until its permitted 520 metres are reached (no higher than the highest natural elevation in the region). In some respects they are a blight on the landscape and yet these towering piles of glistening salt are eerily beautiful; majestic in their monumentality and spectacular in their artificiality.

While Anderson photographs comparatively singular and contained subjects, her work similarly suggests something of the dangerous. In *Day for night, Datura, Taranaki* the delicate blooms of the trumpet-shaped flower issue forth from a blanket of darkness. Blossoming in fleshy pinks, the flowers are highly attractive, and yet, as a member of the Deadly Nightshade family, are also highly toxic. Photographed in extreme close up, and divorced from their natural surroundings, the lustrous flowers emerge larger than life causing us to rethink our conceptions of space, scale, and the natural world. Anderson is shooting her subjects in 'day for night' technique³ in camera, giving the appearance that she has been stalking her animal subjects in the dark, a dangerous activity in itself. Anderson says of this work "When I look at my images, I realise I have been photographing things that scare me."

The natural world looms out of Campbell's works, which feature the landscape of Arizona. Focussing on the Chiricahua National Monument, which encompasses a unique and famous strip of mountains - a so-called "wonderland of rocks" – Joyce's photographs capture the essence of a raw, dusty, arboreal environment. Like Clarke's and Anderson's photographs, an element of the precarious filters through Joyce's work where oblique shadows, gnarled trees, and twisted rocky formations border on the desolate and inhospitable. The sense of peril is heightened in Chiricahua Lion's Den, where we peer into the opening of a mountain lion's den. In the same manner as the other works in this show however the danger is mitigated by the distance traversed by the photographer, which allows the subject to be looked at by the viewer from a safe position.

Endnotes

- 1 Conor Clarke's earlier photographs of industrial cooling towers are always titled In pursuit of the Object, at a proper distance
- 2 "Mountains are the beginning and the end of all natural scenery" – John Ruskin, Modern Painters (1856)
- 3 Greta Anderson has used this term to title her series. It is a movie reference whereby the film is shot at dusk by using flash or continuous light to give the effect of a night scene. Named after the filmmaking process, Francois Truffaut famous film 'Day for Night' (1973) is famous for its sequences filmed outdoors in daylight using film stock balanced for tungsten light and underexposed (or adjusted during post production), to appear as if they are taking place at night.