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1. Vision

There's a painting of the Annunciation in London's National Gallery. To be fair, there are a lot of paintings of the Annunciation in the National Gallery, but there's just one by Filippo Lippi. Lippi was a fifteenth-century priest and artist who, most notably, worked for Florence's Medici family during their rise to power.

Lippi's Annunciation was made for the Medici and originally lived above a doorway in their Florentine palazzo. It's painted in egg tempera on a wood-panel hemisphere. Gabriel is in a garden in the left half of the image. He's bent on one knee; his wings mimic the downward curve of the panel. Mary is seated in a courtyard on the right, leaning forward in a bright blue-robe. Both bow their heads to accommodate the shape of the support. At its apex, God's hand emerges from a cloud and points to the Holy Spirit (as dove anamorph) floating by the Virgin's womb.

Some five-hundred years after its painting, someone noticed that Lippi had gilded a series of dotted waves and rings on the painting. They flow out from God's hand to the dove. From the head of the dove, they reach out to the womb, and reciprocal waves reach back from the womb to the dove. It turned out that Lippi was aware of a medieval theory of vision which thought that every person and object emitted a certain amount of light depending on their proximity to God—the original source of all light. *Vision* occurred, not in the eye, but in the place where those emissions meet.

Lippi's wavy golden dots were an attempt to depict the process of the light of the Spirit meeting the light of the freshly conceived divine foetus. In embossed gold, raised above a painted panel, he demonstrated (in his own Renaissance Christian way) an understanding that vision is a site of mediation and exchange. The vision of an instance isn't centered around an individual's optic organs, but in the interaction between sense and all the other phenomena that make up a moment.

2. Sight

Photography comes with such a predatory vocabulary. We take, capture, and shoot. Later, we fix and frame. Following the development of lightweight, dry-plate negatives in the late-nineteenth century, there was a fashion for owning concealed hand-held cameras. Known as *detective cameras*, they were often disguised as different objects. Some looked like a set of books, others were hidden inside hats and walking sticks. Many were shaped to look like pistols—fulfilling the promise of 'shooting' a picture.

The chronophotographic gun—an early ancestor of movie cameras—was built like a rifle. The aperture was at the end of a long barrel, and it had a stock with which to brace the camera against your shoulder while shooting a dozen images per second. There has always been an understanding, even if implicit, that there is a kind of force or even violence to photography. To take a photograph, especially of a person, risks enacting a play of power—taking, possessing, even controlling the subject.

Photography confuses vision for the technical capabilities of individual eyesight. Take a photographic print of a landscape—an index of an index of an original scene. It's almost entirely divorced from a holistic sense-experience of place. Absent the feeling of weary legs, wind through trees, sun on cheeks—unnaturally flattened and glossed. What's left but perfect sight?

The camera, as an extended organ of the individual who holds it, constructs vision as a one-way affair. Photographic sight starts in the eye and finishes with whatever the eye has taken. It's no coincidence that the individual eye of photography emerged during the height of European colonialism. They look the same way at the same things.

How can this medium ever really understand what it means to be in a place, or what a place really means? The sight-dependency of photography isn't so much an achievement as it is an obstruction—an act of distancing that makes the real utterly unnatural. Experience, especially experience of place, is comprised of so much more than what can ever be captured by light fixed on silver nitrate. We lose something in so intently valuing technical sight above all other senses. We lose the understanding of vision that Lippi knew to exist.

3. Place

In 1840, looking out over the Piako and Waihou rivers, Felton Matthew observed their valleys extending southward *as far as the eye can reach*. Matthew, the first Surveyor-General of New Zealand, knew there was a force behind his eye. Where he looked, the hungry eye of the British Empire followed, reaching out and grasping for the rich alluvial soil lying beneath the kahikatea forests of the Hauraki plains.

If there's a thread that passes through all the works made by Conor Clarke it might be this very kind of looking. Her photography takes this culturally and historically encoded vision as its subject. It's a way of seeing the world enmeshed in a collage of ideologies: romantic, imperial, colonial—charged with notions of possession and property. Clarke interrogates this looking, imported to Aotearoa from Europe three centuries ago, and asks how it still shapes relationships to land in the present.

The photographs in this series wrestle with the possibility that this predatory looking might be embedded in the act of photography itself. And if it is, in a culture saturated with photographic images, how this looking might be embedded in the ways we see the world.

Each of these images begins with a description of an outdoor experience recalled by a member of the blind or low vision community in Aotearoa. The photographs, recorded on large-format negatives in a pinhole camera, are not so much representations of each recollection but a response that evokes something of each experience.

Without a viewfinder (or the desire to reproduce perfect, technical sight) the images move and blur and distort. Some contain more visual information than others. They're mostly simple images—a dominant colour, a basic form. The original description is available to hear, read aloud by Clarke. But it's also present in braille atop each print in UV ink on PVC. Each experience can be seen peripherally through Clarke's images, but they're formed fully by being seen, heard, and felt.

Together, these techniques attempt to decenter the part of photography that privileges the eye as the primary organ of sense and meaning. With the sound of voices and in polyvinyl raised above a photographic print, Clarke produces an understanding of vision as a site of mediation and exchange. They are, through the collaboration between Clarke, each participant who shared their recollection, and the places themselves, works that show how the vision of an instance isn't centered around an individual's optic organs, but in the interaction between sense and all the other phenomena that make up a moment.