

An Intimate Discussion

Anne Zahalka

> One set of pictures that I have made that touches on some of these ideas was taken within the homes of people that are no longer alive. Mostly, they are the homes of artists or collectors and they are filled with their treasures. Photographing as I have done amongst these riches is a very intimate experience. There's a strong sense of the person and the things they loved and collected. Peering into the rooms, paintings, drawers, bookshelves and cupboards is so compelling and revealing. I feel a pull as though I might discover something about the owners through their things. It is a very private space and yet I feel I am an intruder recording there in order to capture their essence. It's like looking for something and not having been given permission, to pry, to open rooms and to sit amongst their possessions. This may not necessarily impart a feeling of intimacy for the viewer but we can relate to that feeling of being in someone else's home and having the pleasure of casting our eyes across the surfaces of their things.



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A.Z

Haefliger's Cottage Series _ 2010

Haefliger's Cottage, Interior #7_ 2010

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> In thinking further about the theme of intimacy and photography I wondered whether you'd thought about the physical relationship of the photographer to the camera and the intimacy that is established between them. The way the body of the camera is held and how it is manipulated and controlled. How intimate the space is between the eye and the viewfinder – eyelashes gently touching the window, warm breath on its body, sharing a field of vision. The camera creates a private space behind which the photographer can gaze and hide. It allows them to see without being seen.

The physical space that is also established between the photographer and the subject involves a certain intimacy. It relies on trust and a willingness to let the photographer in, in order to reveal something to others. It's a fine line that we tread in establishing this relationship with the subject who gives us permission to take a little of them away. In looking at photographs, these moments between the photographer and photographed trigger an awareness in the viewer of this contract. It is self-reflexive and involves our own personal relationship and experience to that which is represented. Feeling intimacy to a photograph comes from identifying with the subject whatever it might be – a landscape, a portrait, an object. It involves memory and our own personal histories that connect us to these places, situations and objects. It is simply in the appearance of these things that one might find intimacy.

Yvette King

> When I look at Anne Zahalka's images of homes and possessions I feel intimate with them. To be clear, I have a sense of the homes, the people who lived in them and their life, that feels tactile and emotive beyond the fixed image or the particularly necessary significance of what I'm looking at. Now perhaps I am just making out with a window (or technically some sort of emotional smearing with my computer screen) but I think I can call that an intimacy. It might in part be their 'objectness', that display of things, the tactile, the lived space, with that repetition of a person. It's certainly been mentioned in this discussion how much we respond to, and perhaps even require a physical form for intimacy, from a tintype, to wallet picture or an unfamiliar elbow in the dark.

Anne's images display belongings and space; but beyond the physical they show an accumulation of decisions, forms dictated by close activity; which are things seen but not simply to be seen, that now form part of the absence they express. I think intimacy, that closeness of experience, is something I am happy to find, that I seek out even and is important to processing information and experience for me. If I am interested in something, it's always that close.



Haefliger's Cottage Series _ 2010

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> Are we all so concerned about putting out because we might not get anything back?

I thought I was set on intimacy, I thought I felt sure about what it was. The more I can hear other people talk, think over on this; I feel less sure. But this is good, surety leaves no room for expansion.

Reading back through this discussion, one of the issues isn't whether the photographer, or photography via the viewer can be emotional; but the idea that for emotional experience to be intimacy there needs to be an exchange. I hear Louis talk about intimacy being two equal things occupying the same space at the same time (actually that was the line that lured me in) and it feels fucking beautiful, egalitarian, harmonious, impossible. I see a great romance to say that, no cynic.

My intimacy is so intimate it only exists always and forever for me. I can make a guess how things are for you, but they're a guess and if wishes were horses then beggars would ride. Not that we're necessary wrong in how we read an accompanying reaction, it was a special thing between you and me, I met your eyes and you looked at me with repulsion. But we often won't know, and there'll never be a measure; it cannot be compared. So I don't need my intimacy to be an exchange.

While I don't necessarily think intimacy requires form, I am also really into things. Objects, surfaces; I'm into physicality and I'm into stuff. Which I think is why I've been invited into this discussion, since as an artist I work across all sorts of areas; but I am perfectly comfortable having a serious relationship with something inanimate. While it might sound contradictory to have such an interest in objects, with an emotional, irrational almost interpersonal exchange, it means that I would never see merely a surface as a barrier to connection with something. I think I just don't separate forms, which honestly is how you end up as rock woman and working in the kitchen because you can't access your desk. You may spend your free time filling in online hoarding surveys, but it's a lifestyle choice. Besides, part of it is how I make work.

Thinking about physicality, will digital photography warm with age? I know my interest in photography is different between film and digital. It actually isn't something I like to mention a lot, I'm not a luddite and I don't want to glamorize the difficulty and technicality, the stupidly wide margin for error, which can be film photography. I just know with digital I mediate every image I take- I am editing the experience before it has happened and that puts something extra there. With digital there might be less fuck ups, but image for image I don't know if that's better. But if I am interested it will always bridge across surface or device and find welcome.

I think photography actually gets to have multiple and unique surfaces of perception, specific to different exchanges. All of them possibly intimate. The point of capture and shared air between photographer and subject, the image and the photographer removed as a photo in relation to themselves. The image as itself, what it shows to someone else, as a form, motif; the photograph and viewer, the photograph in relation to the view and the photographer. What the photographer becomes to mean to the viewer.

Even the most analytical of us could admit to using art as a negotiation, making works to shift our relationship to forms, and what this does is often unmanageable in any other way. I think intimacy is actually one of the few guaranteed pay offs of being an artist, with or without acknowledged intimacy in your own process. For any artist, someone who knows your work well will always know an uncomfortable amount about you.