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Lisa Oppenheim
Blood to Ghosts
6 November - 18 December 2010

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Blood to Ghosts



Installation view
Blood to Ghosts, 2010



Lunagrams 1851/2010 (#6)
Silver toned photograms,
exposed to moonlight
Unique in a series
40,64 x 50,80 cm



Lunagrams 1851/2010 (#2)
Silver toned photograms,
exposed to moonlight
Unique in a series
40,64 x 50,80 cm

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Lisa Oppenheim's third solo-exhibition at Galerie Juliette Jongma, *Blood to Ghosts*, features

two new projects: a series of new photograms, and *Cathay*, a double 16mm film projection.

Lisa Oppenheim explores the underappreciated aspects of visual culture: the tell tale expressions of contemporary life which are often overlooked, exposing the erosion of information through the passage of time. Much of Oppenheim's work is research, looking for images and objects that point to something larger and then developing strategies and techniques to make these relationships visible. As a result the final form depends on the original material and ranges from 16mm film installations to slide shows, photographs and photograms, as well as prints and drawings.

In *Lunagrams* (1851/2010), a series of photograms, negatives depicting a lunar phase from 1851, are exposed by the moonlight of the same lunar phase in 2010, providing a translation of images of the past into the present. The source images are glass negatives taken by John William Draper -the first man to photograph the moon. An ongoing theme in Oppenheim's work is how celestial bodies, like the moon, can be thought of as generic markers of the passing of time. The process of making these images is bringing to life that which would otherwise be hidden away under a layer of dust in a library or archive - illuminating the past through the light of the present.

Ideas around translation and of reviving cultural objects from the past connect the two bodies of work in the exhibition and inspired the title *Blood to Ghosts*. „Blood brought to ghosts“ (Hugh Kenner in *The Pound Era*) is how Ezra Pound, the American poet, thought about translation. His theories of translation were based on Orientalist and mostly imaginary assumptions that Chinese is a pictographic language. That its characters are transparent signs of things, uncomplicated by the sound or meaning of words. Thus, according to this logic, Pound's task as a translator is primarily to translate the visual image into the written word.

It is within this context that Oppenheim set off to make the film *Cathay* (2010). She found a fragment of a poem that Pound

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constructed from the notes of Ernest Fenollosa, an American scholar living in Japan, presumably from his translations of the 8th century Chinese poet Li Bai. Neither Pound nor Fenollosa had any real knowledge of Chinese. Fenollosa produced this and other fragmentary translations that Pound would later turn into the extremely influential collection of poems entitled *Cathay*, an antiquated name for China.

Oppenheim then sent the original untranslated version of the poem to an East Asian Languages and Literature professor and received what is, unsurprisingly, a very different version. This film slowly shifts from Pound's translation to a more 'correct' or perhaps literal translation. The movement takes place through the substitution of words with corresponding scenes or objects found and filmed within the visual space of New York City's Chinatown.

In turning words back into images the artist is reversing Pound's strategy of translation. The left side of the double projection begins with the entirety of Pound's poem while the right projection shows a succession of pictures. The images on the right are the visual equivalents of phrases from the new translation and only have a correlation to the text on the left when both translations are similar. Images slowly substitute the text on the left and vice versa until the end of the film, when the left is entirely images and the right is entirely text. The poem is recombined, remade, throughout its seven iterations.

Lisa Oppenheim (1975, NY) lives and works in NY. The artist studied at the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program, NY, Arts Bard College, NY, Brown University, NY and the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam.

Recent exhibitions the artist participated in are (2010), *Haunted*: Guggenheim, Bilbao, *Free*, The New Museum, NY, recent solo exhibitions (2010), *Blood to Ghosts*, Martin Klosterfelde, Berlin, *Invention without a future*, Harris Lieberman, NY.