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Lisa Oppenheim

Point de Gaze

7 September – 20 October



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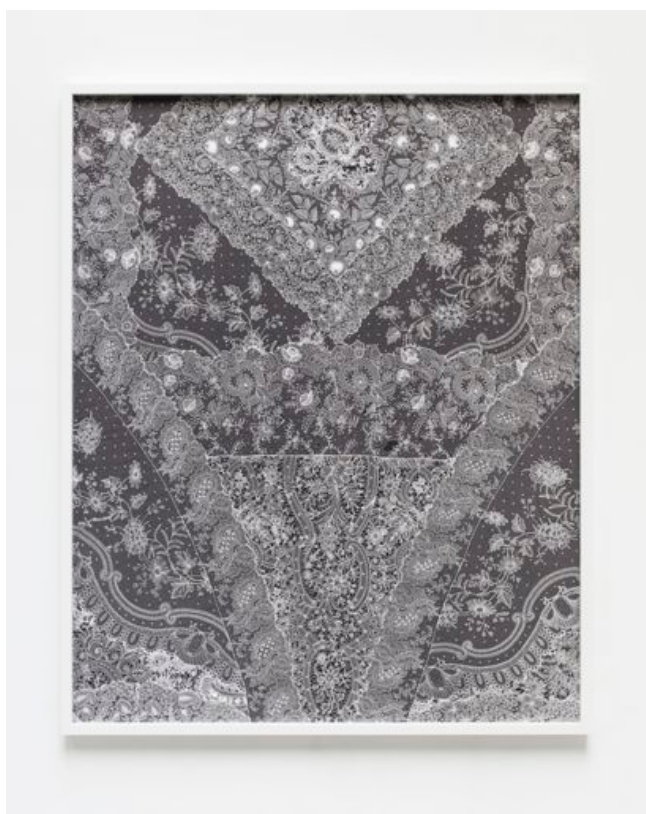
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Point de Gaze

Some men active in the first half of the 19th century who figure in the present or at least who are present in this exhibition by way of the technologies they invented. Charles Babbage and his Analytical Engine (his great unfinished project, the ur-pc), Joseph Marie Jacquard and his punch card driven mechanical loom (his mechanically woven silk portrait hung over Babbage's desk) and Henry Fox Talbot (who sent early examples of his photogenic drawings of lace to his friend Jacquard for potential use in the recording and production of textile patterns).

Talbot's art of fixing shadows, of positives and negatives is rooted in the same binary logic through which, one hundred and seventy five years later, I am sitting on a bench in the shadow of a tree, typing these words in zeros and ones on my laptop on my lap.

In a letter sent to Babbage in 1839 Talbot writes about showing a photogram of lace to a group of friends and asking them whether it was a "good representation." They replied they could not be so easily fooled for it was "evidently no picture, but the piece of lace itself."

Like the audience running away from the train coming towards them in the first film screening of the Lumiere's arriving train.

Logged onto Facebook a few days ago, I saw that a curator "friend" I have never met had posted an image with a question. "Black Smoke on the 59th street bridge! What happened?" There were six likes and no answers. Smoke but no fire.

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This is the fire I used in my darkroom to create the contact prints of smoke that were then scanned and reassembled to make the animations seen here. Two clips of volcanoes erupting and one of smoke stack fumes found on the web and exported to 35mm motion picture film, seen from a window in one of the administrative offices of MoMA, pictured with an i-phone and posted immediately. Two floors below, a different articulation of this project is on display in a windowless gallery.

Ada Lovelace, daughter of Lord Byron wrote that the Analytical Engine "weaves algebraic patterns just as the Jacquard-loom weaves flowers and leaves."

A patterned order of flower motifs constructed from the presence and absence of light like zeros and ones.

By Lisa Oppenheim