

Ways of perceiving

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Estefani Bouza

Echoes of Presence

Photography has been known as both a documentary reality of the world and life, and the complete opposite, all depending on the style of photography used. Dorothea Lange stated, "The camera is an instrument that teaches people how to see without a camera." This dualism represents the difference between seeing and interpreting, which creates the foundations for the exhibition Echoes of Presence, laid out in a mission gallery space. The architectural and historical vibe of the mission gallery works really well with improving the viewer's experience; it also nicely strengthens the exhibition's themes of identity and memory. Mission galleries are commonly in former religious or colonial spaces and can carry histories of its community and the cultural changes over time. By having Echoes of Presence in this place, it gives the exhibition more of a story and makes the building itself feel like it's part of the story. The walls around the building frames with photographic work that again questions and makes the viewer question how identities are made, inherited and remembered. This exhibition is made with 5 photographs from 5 artists, through their individual style, aesthetic, and subject matter, each image contributes to the themes of the exhibition in its own and unique ways. This adds a great interaction between the artwork, viewer and the environment behind the exhibition's structural integrity and captivating vibe.

Photograph 1: "Inheritance" by Amira Haddad. The first photograph, Inheritance, appears to be a young woman standing in a barely lit kitchen surrounded by things that belong to her grandmother, old photos, handwritten recipes and worn-out utensils. This was placed in a small alcove in the mission gallery. This image connects with the feelings in the architecture around, giving off a vibe of quiet reflection similar to what is found in private praying places. Haddad's work studies intergenerational identity through domestic memory; the photography could suggest that identity is passed down through objects or rituals and isn't locked to one person. These material traces seem like a vessel of memory, embedding personal history inside of everyday, normal spaces. This strengthens the link between history, tradition, and inheritance. The viewer can now see how both personal and institutional histories can shape identity over time.

Photograph 2: "Tourist Season" by Daniel Kovacs. In a complete contrast, Tourist Season show the story of a chaotic and crazy beach shot filled with colour, commercial signage and a lot of environmental waste. This image is installed in a larger and more open section of the gallery; the photography breaks up the contemplative aesthetic provided by the last piece of work. Kovacs looks at the consumer culture and the commodification of place, representing identity as something acted and moulded by external forces. The extra emphasis on the noise of the image copies the overpowering influence of global capitalism against local cultures. Inside the mission gallery, this image gets an extra meaning behind it from the setting it is in; the historical unions of the mission, often connected to the colonial expansion and cultural imposition, echo

the photograph's critique of global tourism and cultural homogenization, according to an interview with Kovacs. As Henri Cartier-Bresson suggested, photography captures not just the moment but the significance behind it; here, the significance lies in the uneasy relationship between identity and globalisation. This difference shows us a deliberate curatorial tension, stopping the exhibition from representing identity as a coherent or durable concept.

Photograph 3: "Faces, Phases" by Lindiwe Ndlovu. Faces, Phases is a gorgeous black and white portrait photo of a non-binary person staring into the camera and reaching the viewer's gaze. This image has been placed perfectly in the centre of the mission gallery; the photograph takes the place of something traditionally and culturally important, like a statue or an altar. This has been placed here on purpose. Ndlovu's work opposes fixed beliefs of identity and presents it as fluid and evolving. The subject in the photo is staring directly at the viewer, almost looking like they are demanding to be seen and recognised. The photograph, with its placement in the mission gallery, shows its link to structures of belief and identity, turning it into a place of inclusivity and self-definition. This all works great with ideas theorised by Annie Leibovitz, who emphasised that portraiture is about understanding the subject beyond surface appearance. Ndlovu adapts this by questioning the categories through which identity is usually understood.

Photograph 4: "Subway Reverie" by Marcu Chen. Chen's Subway Reverie captures a solitary and lone figure asleep on a train, with city lights shining around. The photography is placed in a narrow corridor inside the mission gallery, where the lighting is dimmed, and the confined amount of space creates a dreamlike vibe and makes the viewer feel like they are there. The image makes memories seem like they are disconnected and ephemeral. The layers of light reflection mirror the way memories overlap and blur over time. This In the mission gallery setting, the vibe of distortion and disorientation are temporary increased. This links to the building and its layers of history, making it a metaphor for the collection of memories. Chen's work links with broader photographic traditions and practices that adventure urban experiences and psychological mindset. It also makes suggestions that photography can capture short moments that show deeper truths about the human race. It also does a create more silent pause at this point in the exhibitions overall story rhythm.

Photograph 5: "after the fire" by Sofia Alvarez. This final photograph of the exhibition, After The Fire, is a burned landscape with a lone tree still standing. This image is placed near the exit of the exhibition, and it is used as a silent end to the exhibition. The placement of this image being at the exit is to make the viewer want to keeping thinking and reflecting after they leave the gallery. From an interview, she said, "My work addresses collective memory and environmental loss." An important difference between the destruction of the environment and the survival of the tree makes out a strong and powerful metaphor the resilience through the image. As for the link to the theme of the exhibition, I think it works quite well, with having no other photos around this one, it makes the photography feel the same as the tree, and when the viewer sees the image on its own, they can feel how the tree feels, helping them understand the message behind the image. I think the tree stands for a symbol of hope and endurance.

Strategy and the role of space: The choice to include Echoes of Presence in a mission gallery is because the space itself is not neutral; it holds historical and cultural significance that enhances how viewers perceive the images. Each photograph is deliberately positioned to connect with the surrounding environment, fostering an interaction between the image and the building. This arrangement encourages viewers to experience the exhibition as a journey through the images. Research on exhibition design shows that emotional and spatial engagement can deepen audience understanding. By integrating the narratives with the

historical architecture, Echoes of Presence offers a layered and compelling experience that surpasses a typical gallery visit. By thoroughly choreographing where everything went, the exhibition guides the viewer where to go without them even knowing themselves.

Photography, memory, and identity: The best way to sum up is that the exhibition investigates photography as a thing that can examine identity and memory. Susan Sontag stated that photography is not just images but interpretations that shape how we understand the world. This is important to Echoes of Presence as each photograph presents a different story and perspective for everyone to see how they want to and feel the image in their own way. The mission gallery setting strengthens this by being a repository of history, showing the importance of photography and how the images are always preserved in time. Photography is not only used as a tool of representation but also as a mechanism through which meaning is constructed and contested, as also argued by Susan Sontag.

Conclusion: Echoes of Presence is used to show how photography can be used to adventure about ideas of identity and memory. Bringing together these five quite different and significant pieces of work in a mission gallery, the exhibition becomes an incredible message between image, space and the viewer. The mission gallery setting isn't just a place for the images, but an important and significant part of the meaning behind the exhibition. It shows us how identity can be presented as the spaces that we live in and the pasts they have, and not just by our own personal experiences. Another good point I would like to include is that identity is never still but is always changing through interactions with memory, space and representation. In the end, the exhibition welcomes the viewers to think back on their own identities and the memories that define who they are. By doing this, it confirms how photography has the ability to capture not just what is in front of it but also what is behind the image.

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