

On the Photography of Steel Stillman

Any image open to mechanical reproduction traffics in a mild form of time travel in the establishment of a brief slot of wonder between the eye and the picture. Critical writing around this subject plunges us down the rabbit hole into a mirror world of language populated with Zen koan-like riddles and duck/rabbit illustrations visualizing the “absence and presence” condition attending the photograph.

Steel Stillman’s “Untold Truths” series meditates this there/not there shell game by the censorious “masking” of information via cropping or in the addition of opaque forms that both occupy and negate pictorial space. The introduction of often inelegant shapes to an image pressurizes content into activating messages once dormant. A work like “No 5 (1994)” 2012 “blocks” window light transforming a bedroom into a spectral “darkroom” (or camera’s interior?) that still permits a great deal to be seen. Stillman’s intrusions are not decorous—they burst like protective airbags within the picture as we scrutinize it for the mournful Barthesian punctum or hover like the dubious manifestations contrived by “spirit” photographers operating since the medium’s inception. A valued art writer, Stillman recognizes his work’s shifting “double engagement with time which is registered in the parenthesis component of the individual.” ■

steelstillman.com

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