

Captain Petzel

"Natalie Czech. Capturing the Poetry of Synaesthesia", SLEEK Nr. 41, Spring 2014, p. 203

NATALIE CZECH

CAPTURING THE POETRY OF SYNAESTHESIA

Natalie Czech may be a photographer, yet she chooses to create images with words, and sees them as especially potent as a means of engaging other senses. "I am very interested in the different qualities of what a writer can do and



what a photographer can do. Probably their differences can only be found in the nature of their respective media. I'm trying to make this apparent."

The concept of synaesthesia, where experiences stimulating one sense are perceived through another, fascinates Czech, who is originally from Neuss and an alumnus of the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf: her publication of works with Spector Books includes around 40 pages of adverts that had appealed to other senses – touch, smell, taste – though using only sight to perceive them. She notes that words are always present in these adverts. Since a photo requires words to create an experience that creates a perception of another sense, she reasoned, how could a photo be truly synaesthetic?

Czech's work "Voyelles" from her recent Captain Petzel show, "I Cannot Repeat What I Hear", addresses this question head-on. Here, she asked several authors to write a letter to herself, the artist, describing a hypothetical synaesthetic photo. Photographs of these letters alongside addressed envelopes are shown, along with the Rimbaud poem from which the series takes its name. This poem suggests colours for each of the vowels, which are used on the letters and envelopes of Czech's work. The authorship of the photo may seem confused, but Czech is

clear on her intentions: "They [the author] suddenly become the photographer. Even though I photograph the letter, it's them who are the producers of the picture we finally imagine in their texts."

That show also featured works from the series "Poems By Repetition", where the artist presented photographic prints of texts, highlighted to create a poem that sits next to the piece on the gallery wall. Take, for example, her work based on three photos of the cover of Pink Floyd's single for "Money", highlighted to create the Aram Saroyan minimalist poem: Ney. Mo. Money. "It was obvious that I was looking for the word money, somewhere it could make the complexities of the poem visible. This single was about everything bad that money brings. But it turned out to be one of their biggest successes."

Czech's process is not planned from the beginning, but rather she discovers these contextual meanings as she works. "It's once I find the poem in a text, then I start to go deeper into the context, the history of the object where it is embedded. Finally, for me, they have to work as images too."

The title of the exhibition gives another clue about the effects of poetry Czech works to bring



out: repetition. Arguably, one of the defining features of photography is its capacity for reproduction. This concept of repeating is crucial

to both poems chosen and the mode in which it is displayed. "What does repetition mean? It means sound, rhythm, refrain, even stuttering. So I tried to find poems which use this rhetorical stylistic device." Poetry is a literary form that invites re-creation: "A poem is meant to be reread", as Czech puts it.

This culminates in works that challenge both mediums, photography and poetry. "The poem only becomes readable when you start to work with the photographic means of reproduction. They only exist the moment I reproduce the same medium or source." The photographed objects have been reproduced again and again: a Kindle eReader, the covers of famous records. It is what Czech does with these "unoriginal" photos that makes them unique. JT-J



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