

*Resurfaced Geographies* installation views, left to right: Izabela Pluta, Yvette Hamilton, Ellen Dahl



ELLEN  
DAHL  
YVETTE  
HAMILTON  
IZABELA  
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RESURFACED  
GEOGRAPHIES  
VERGE GALLERY  
11 APRIL-18 MAY 2019

Naomi Riddle

'We photograph things in order to drive them out of our minds. My stories are a way of shutting my eyes.'

Kafka, as quoted in Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (1980), p. 53

'The centre is earth, yellow; it lasts from the end of summer through the beginning of autumn. It has no bird, no animal.'

Susan Sontag, *Stories* (2017), p. 40

Out of the twenty-four image plates in Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* (1980), only two are landscapes. The first, Charles Clifford's 'The Alhambra (Grenada)' (1854-56), depicts a Mediterranean villa with a crumbling archway, an empty street, and, in the top right corner, a tree standing to attention. The second, Niepce's 'The Dinner Table' (c.1823) shows exactly that: a lopsided wooden table shrouded in a white cloth, and a bowl, plate, goblet, knife and spoon forming an orderly congregation. If these two photographs are connected—and there are many pages between them—it is in the way they both depict scenes where humans (whether absent or not) are the key markers of meaning and action. (The table will be sat at; the laneway will be walked; the shutters will be thrown open.) As much as *Camera Lucida* is about mourning and melancholia and loss, and the ways in which the photograph can prick or soothe or inflame this loss, it is a type of grief that is only reserved for the portrait. *I pass beyond the unreality of the thing represented*, writes Barthes, *I enter crazily into the spectacle, into the image, taking in my arms what is dead*. At no point does Barthes consider that a photograph of soil, or the cropped tips of a fur tree, could induce the same response.

Roland Barthes: *Is landscape itself only a kind of loan made by the owner of the terrain?*

NR: You believe that the landscape is the one feature of the photograph that remains certain. This is a mistake. It's this certainty that allows you to see the landscape as a set, as a hired backdrop in service of the image. You say that the focus (and meaning) of the image comes from what is in the foreground—the figure posing for the camera. You pause on this part of the image. You are willing to look at this figure because this figure is also a harbinger of death (a person that you have lost). But what happens when there is no figure and the window dressing is the focus of the image? And what happens when we are confronted with images of a landscape in collapse, and the grief we feel is the same grief you feel, but there is no figure to pin it to? It is a surprise that you would mention ownership only in passing. It is a surprise that you consider the landscape only as a space that can be rented and occupied, or as a mechanism of support.

RB: *The photograph itself is in no way animated (I do not believe in 'lifelike' photographs), but it animates me: this is what creates every adventure.*

NR: Why is it that you insist on the photograph as only ever mirroring the self or reflecting our own desires and needs? For you, the animation, or the adventure that you speak of, is always determined by the activity taking place on top of a landscape. I am interested in what it is that becomes animated when these activities are absent or buried—when all we are looking at is an image of a blossom tree flowering in spring. But you would say that this is beside the point, because we take and make photographs for us, even if they are a tracing of a particular place or an ecological record. You would say: if you are to mourn the change in nature, you are mourning this loss alone, as the tree (with its springtime blossom) is indifferent to this pain, and is only aware of a lack of moisture, or of sudden heat or cold.

RB: *A photograph's punctum is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me). For punctum is also: sting, speck, cut, little hole—and also a cast of the dice.*

NR: But the accident in each one of your image plates is how I cannot help but look for the features of the earth in the background—my eye lands on the cleared snow beside the horse-car, not the horse-car. For me, the *punctum* is also: insect, temperature, wilt, leaf curl and geological slip.

RB: You are looking for a *certainty* that such a thing had existed.

NR: You want to talk about a grief that is private, but I want to talk about a grief that is public. This is the bruise now: that the image betrays a landscape in distress, whatever the scene. This is the bruise now: you say that a photograph has the potential to reverse the course of time, but a landscape photograph can do no such thing. Instead it only reinstates the what-might-have-been—the time when we thought of rock as only rock, and the tides as only tides.

RB: *For me, photographs of landscape (urban or country) must be habitable, not visitable.*

NR: And if the landscape is no longer habitable, what then?

Author's note: all quotes in italics taken from Roland Barthes; trans. Richard Howard, *Camera Lucida* (London: Vintage Books, 2000 [1980])

## VERGE GALLERY

Jane Foss Russell Plaza,  
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OPENING HOURS  
Tuesday - Friday 10am - 5pm  
Saturday 11am-4pm

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Verge Gallery acknowledges and pays respect to the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional custodians of the land on which Verge is built and operates. We acknowledge Elders past and present who have cared and continue to care for Country.



[1]



[2]



[3]

### List of works

**Ellen Dahl**  
[1] *Untitled/Fissure*, 2019  
Archival pigment print  
33 x 46 cm

**Ellen Dahl**  
*Untitled/Void*, 2019  
Archival pigment print,  
custom made cabinet  
84 x 108 cm

**Ellen Dahl**  
*Untitled/Anorthosite*, 2019  
Archival pigment print  
33 x 46 cm

**Yvette Hamilton**  
[2] *I Think This is The Place (Pithead)*, 2019  
Archival Pigment Print  
92 x 62 cm  
Ed 1/3 +2AP

**Yvette Hamilton**  
*Survey*, 2019  
LED lights, acrylic, microprocessor, coal dust,  
custom frame

**Yvette Hamilton**  
*Blind survey I - XI*, 2019  
Unique silver gelatin prints

**Izabela Pluta**  
*Crepuscular rays (mechanical reproduction) #6*, 2019  
Xerox (unique prints)  
84 x 118 cm each (diptych)

**Izabela Pluta**  
[3] *Collapse*, 2015  
Pigment print on photo rag  
160 x 200 cm

Izabela Pluta is represented by THIS IS NO FANTASY dianne tanzer + nicola stein