

Jodie Carey, Immemorial

By Manuel Wischnewski for the exhibition catalogue 'Immemorial', Galerie Rolando Anselmi, Berlin, Germany, 2013

In all of her works, Jodie Carey concerns herself with the complex dynamic between remembering and letting go. The artist's approach attempts to trace the idea of mortality while simultaneously setting it against a moment of retaining. The result is an obscuring of the lines usually dividing documentary-style archiving and poetic narrative. In the case of Carey's works these two seemingly opposite methods of recording are woven carefully together.

The question of material sits at the core of Carey's work. The artist uses materials that are at times mundane—dust or ashes from a cigarette—and at other times loaded with symbolic meaning—blood or bone fragments. These materials, however, consistently transcend the level of pure materiality: Carey is interested in materials that derive from the actual object or moment that she is concerned with. Using this approach Carey attempts to create authentic moments of memorialisation. Much like religious relics, the artist's works are not merely a symbolic representation but more so, the repository of a material essence. In this duplicity, we see the reinforcement of a remembering that is so typical of Carey's work.

On a fundamental level, Carey's constant merging of documentary and narrative poses questions on the treatment of memories, especially of their truthfulness and authenticity. The question of the adequacy of a particular way of remembering is always at the centre of Carey's interest. The artist's aspiration to find an appropriate presentation of the material reflects our own quest for a meaningful, perhaps even dignified, treatment of those moments and objects which we want to secure in our memory.

Carey's works never function as mere replacements for that which is disappearing. They refrain from being static memorials or pure aesthetic representations of what has been lost. The works are deeply melancholic references to an emptiness and a loss. The artist thus moulds her work into being a visible sign for this underlying mortality rather than shrouding its ubiquity. Through this approach, Carey renders the realm of the lost an invisible and intangible part of her work.

As a point of departure for the exhibition *Immemorial*, the *Elegy* series consists of five prints from original photographic glass plates. Glass plates were used as a photographic medium before the rise of celluloid and were at the centre of the new, rapidly developing photographic technique. Today, their usage has almost entirely faded and original plates are extremely rare. The five *Elegy* plates depicting floral arrangements were likely produced in the 1920s. In an attempt to save the fragile and somewhat damaged photographic traces on the plates, the artist chose to carefully produce digital prints. By deciding not to "clean" these prints, and thus keeping the original plates' physical defects visible, the artist saw a possibility to memorialise the entire history carried by these plates, and the possibility to uncover not only the fading images originally inscribed on the plates but also the marks of their history. By making these blemishes visible we can view these objects in a direct and honest way, while also picking up clues to the depth of their story.

A traditional symbol for mortality and vitality alike, the simple bouquet of flowers subtly hints at the questions Carey addresses in all her work. In many ways, the exhibition may be understood in its totality as a detailed study of the glass plate's motifs: *Untitled (Study)* charts the traces of dying flowers on paper while in *Untitled (Watercolour)* the paper is soaked with flower dye. These works carefully reference the *Elegy* series as Carey uses flowers in her *Untitled* paper series that are alike to those depicted in each of the *Elegy* prints. Beyond this conceptual knot, there are striking instances of similarity to the blue stains present on one of the prints in the *Elegy* series. And much like these negative prints, the paper works are a copy of an object that is no longer within our reach. They are the record of their disappearing.

At the centre of the exhibition, the installation *Untitled (Immemorial)* consists of seven pieces of handwoven fabrics that gently flow from the wall into the main gallery space. Coloured with flower-based dyes, the pieces hold in them an essence of the flowers represented in other of Carey's works and thus function as a vessel for the remains of their history. However, as their colour gradually fades, these pieces subtly interfere with the idea that the process of retaining can ever be a complete one. The colour seemingly seeps into the lower parts of the fabric, infusing them with a heaviness while leaving the very top of the pieces almost colourless. The effect of this allows for a gentle disappearing into the white of the wall. Here, the artist inscribes an unsettling moment into her work which serves a reminder of mortality's quiet force.

Further underscoring this idea, the work *Untitled (Rope)* contrasts its massiveness with a sense of fragility. Though bound together by meticulous labour, the rope, which consists of exactly one thousand single threads, appears vulnerable and almost on the brink of falling apart again.

Shying away from using representative elements in her work, Carey creates a space in which our view of the work is subtly perfused by our own experiences. By merely indicating recognisable forms—as with the shroud-like fabric pieces of the *Untitled (Immemorial)* installation—Carey explores the realm between the evocative and the abstract, challenging the viewer to come to their own conclusions.

Carey's works hint only slightly at answers to the questions that they pose. The artist carefully formulates the idea that the personal culture of remembering is closely connected to two moments: one of the selection and one of the arrangement of a memory. While in *Untitled (Rope)* or *Untitled (Immemorial)*, the artist is heavily involved in the laborious process of making the works, Carey's involvement in the *Elegy* series is of a far subtler nature. An awareness of the range of the processes required for building a memory materialises in these works. The question of which work is more authentic or more successful in setting itself against the ephemeral is left intentionally unanswered by the artist. The works shown in this exhibition may be understood as insight into a process in which Carey's work continually moves forward, posing an open question which we ourselves face everyday.