

Linda Fregni Nagler

Linda Fregni Nagler's work explores the nature of the photographic image and its relationship with reality. By analysing photography from its origins till the introduction of vernacular snapshots, the artist reflects on the ambiguity of this medium, which yields up merely a partial vision of the subject, conditioned by the cultural and aesthetic codes of the era in question. Her photographs reference historic archives of anonymous photographs, of which she collects magic lantern slides, daguerreotypes, tintypes and albumen prints.

Fregni Nagler often undertakes a manipulation work to mistify remote images, re-printing them and blowing them up on modern supports, restoring them or even faithfully reconstructing the sets and costumes of the day.

On Tokaido (An Idea of Replica)

During Meiji Period in Japan (1868-1912), a number of photographers were active in producing pictures of daily scenes of Japan. The pictures were particularly elaborate *mise en scènes*, rich in details, realized in a studio. The intent of the photographer was to offer a sort of picture postcard, even though refined, as souvenir from Japan to a Western World that was just starting to discover a country that, till then, had been completely isolated in its own economy and culture.

The iconographic source is probably an Ukyo-E print. The subject is symbolic, exactly an icon, and it is repeated by the various photographic studios without worrying to copy the work of a colleague. For example, there are more than fifteen pictures of women sheltering under an umbrella in identical pose, made by fifteen different photographers. The subject is at everyone's disposal: the hand of the author is not brought into question, here. Rather, what is important is the ability of photography of imitating the engraving at best. The engraving is first of all a drawing, which is an act of imagination, a mental act. The skill of the photographer therefore is not that of seizing reality, because reality, here, is imitating art; his skill is the theatrical return, the ability of acting, emulating a feeling expressed in a work of art. One hundred and twenty years later, this peculiar use of the photographic medium becomes conceptually relevant, mostly within the discussion of photography's relationship with reality, and of photography's debt towards the "High Arts".

I started a series of works staging the subjects that recur more often in Meiji photography in a studio. I wanted to give a contemporary contribution to a photographic tradition which died around 1920.

This work is an arbitrary appropriation of abandoned iconography.



From the series "On Tokaido" (An Idea of Replica):
Beauties on the Oceans' Waves, 2009, cm 50x60
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From the series "On Tokaido" (An Idea of Replica):
Playing at Ball, 2009, cm 60x50



From the series "On Tokaido" (An Idea of Replica):
Two Young Geishas, 2009, cm 30x40





From the series "On Tokaido" (An Idea of Replica):
former page: Snow and Rain, 2007, dyptich, cm 18x24 each
this page: Winter Dress, 2009, cm 30x40





Things that Death cannot Destroy

Things that Death cannot Destroy is the attempt to recover a form of enchantment which lies at the origins of history of photography.

It is a double projection of antique magic lantern glass slides, some of them in black and white, some others hand coloured. All the photographic material shown in the projection, as well as the two projectors, is original. The photographs, shot between 1880 and 1940, have different geographical origins and have been conceived for different purposes: didactic, familiar, documentary... Some of them report exhaustive captions, with date, place and copyright, and sometimes they even carry personal writings of the photographer, the printer or the owner of the slide, whereas others lack completely in information. The material was bought by the artist over the years, and joined in categories that are absolutely personal and arbitrary.

Things that Death cannot Destroy is a series of different performances (part 1, part 2...), conceived as a continuous stream of formal associations. While two projectionists, placed at the sides of the devices, altern the images letting them slide into the projectors, a female voice reads of the original captions in the language they were written (mainly English).

In the different moments of the show, the spectator is suggested by various possibilities: a lecture of anthropology, a historical documentary report, a surreal, fictitious and sometimes even comical tale. The images' choreography raises issues about staging the human figure, social categorization, censorship and copyright.

Every photograph, though belonging to very different contexts, is fed by the former one, proceeding through formal associations, as in a sort of *cadavre exquis*.

In this personal and ambiguous archive, what is legible is not History, but a subsequent glance on many pieces of a mosaic that may be combined with infinite variations.







11 Ourang Outan



10 Wild Animals in Captivity. G.W.W.
Chimpanzee
Anger-Pleasure-Fear



33 Races of Men



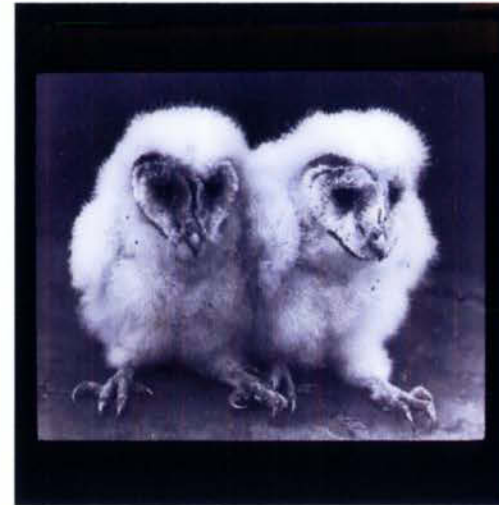
Neg. 99778 Slide 40 Lect. Old Book
Blind Brailians
Made by The World Service Agencies, 740



5 Women of Mumbles Head. Trade Mark



Wood Pigeons Nest



96 ZT A Pair of Young Barn Owls.
Yellowish feet down ground (?),
Newton & Co, 43 Museum Street London



Two New Guinea Boys.
The Living Races To Mankind

The Boat

One of these images (on the right side) is the photographic reproduction (a gelatin silver print) of a tintype shot probably in the United States around 1880/90.

Fake or painted props were used to shoot funny pictures as set up-souvenirs. In particular, fake boats were very common. I chose this particular image among many, because once enlarged and printed on a modern photographic paper, betraying its original support, the image revealed interesting details: the eyes of the subject moved, leaving on the boy's face a sensation of blindness. Behind his head, invisible on the original tintype, there is a headrest. The general atmosphere of the picture is of stillness. The photographic pose becomes a constriction, a long pause, but finally a sort of truce.



Beauty on the Ocean's Waves, Gelatin silver print, cm 50x60
The Truce (Boy on a Boat), 2008, Gelatin silver print, cm 50x60



Unidentified Mourners

The source for the subjects of these pictures came from the so called "Grieving Widow" photographs appeared in USA ca. in 1870-90s. At the origins of photography, mortuary pictures were very common. Today the image of death is considered repulsive and mortuary photography seems to have died out. In those images of "Unidentified Mourners", the viewer's normal desire to have a recognisable likeness of the subjects is frustrated. Yet, there is no evidence that these images were commercially used. Whatever the original purpose of these pictures was, it is now lost to us.

Printed in a small format on a white background, the pictures of two weeping women become dark, symmetrical blots that are deliberately reminiscent of Rorschach tests. The onlooker is thus invited to decipher what he sees.





Unidentified Mourners, 2008
12 Gelatin Silver Prints, cm 24x30 each

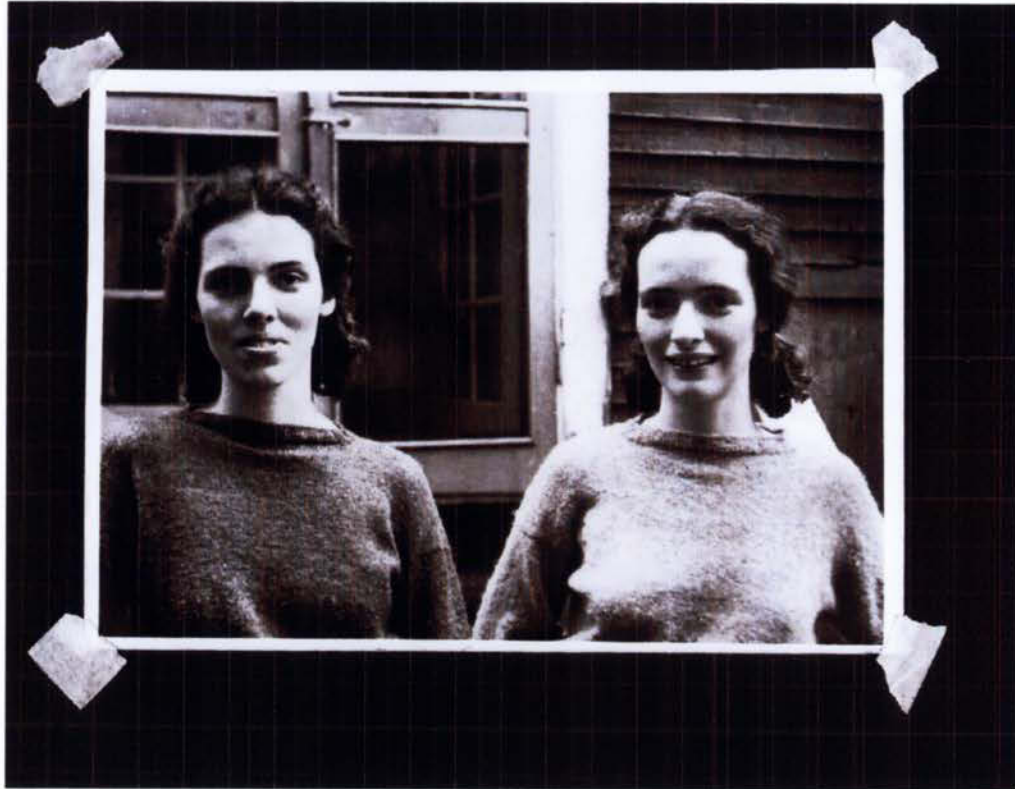
Immemore

The origin of this group of works, created for a solo show in Milan, 2008, comes from other photographs, either found or purchased over the years. Original images by unknown authors date back to the 19th century and first half of the 20th century. Working on this material, I have created a series of new prints, which are often formally very far from the original.

The largest group of works (White Sound, Fleurette Africaine, Without Title [Family], Anytime in the second half of the XX Century, The Truce [Young Man on a Boat], Old and New Friends at the Zoo), is the result of an activity that lies somewhere between restoration and a circumstantial investigation. Patient work in the dark room has changed the images so that they depart from their subject definitively. Paradoxically, the fact that the prints lose the opaque patina of time makes them even more impenetrable. The title of the exhibition, Immemore, hints at the impossibility of returning to the original meaning – emotional and existential – of the photographs, and to the sense of loss that derives from this. That which they “document” (if the word has any meaning in this context) is merely the continuity over time of the need to portray oneself, to mirror oneself in a photographic image.

In all of these works, the purpose is to make the spectator aware of a basic fact, but one which we tend to forget in the age of digital technology: a photograph is not simply an image, but is the union of an image and a medium, and so it is an object. Each time that a photograph is rephotographed and changes medium, a translation or a betrayal takes place.

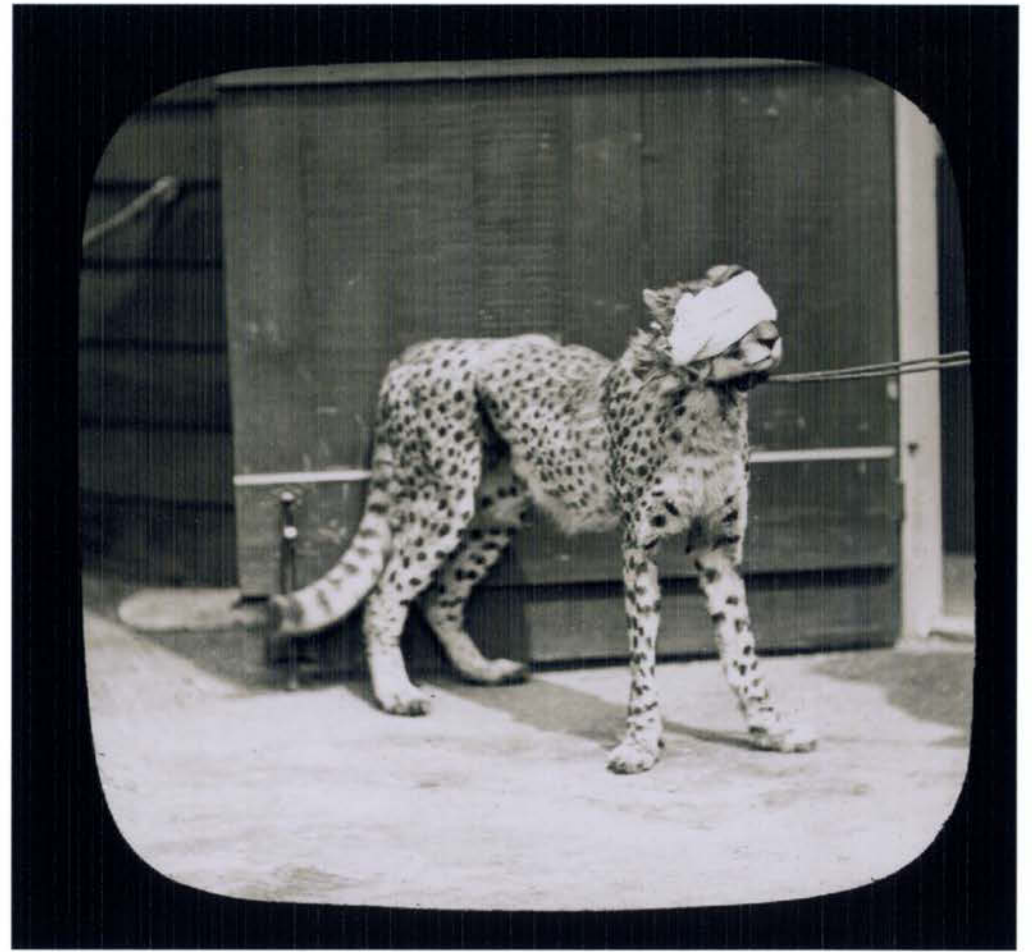
My objective is to create photographic reproductions which, if reproduced in turn, lose all meaning.



former page: White Sound, 2008, gelatin silver print, cm 38x48

this page: Anytime in the Second Half of the XX Century, 2008, dyptich, Gelatin silver prints, cm 15x20





Old and New Friends at the Zoo, Indian Phyton and Blindfolded Cheetah, dyptich, gelatin silver prints, 46x46cm each

It is common habit to observe photographs reproduced in books, magazines, posters, etc. Viewers generally care of the images' subject and rarely of the photographs as objects in themselves, believing that a replica is *just as* the original. This is why in several works, including *Caribe* (2005), *Limbo/Convertible* (2006), *Friends* (2008), I focused on the 'surface' of the pictures, intervening with slight scratches, signs and other artifices that can easily be perceived as part of the photographed scene, but can be distinguished just at the sight of the original photograph. To underline that also photography, like painting and sculpture, has to be seen from real.



former page: Caribe, 2006, poster, cm 180x 300
this page: Friends, 2008, Gelatin silver print and ink, cm 48x38





LIMBO/CONVERTIBLE, 2006
cm 28x28, gelatin silver print

Nothing But A Show

The show was realized in 2009 to celebrate the restoration and the museographical set-up in 1958, after its bombing and its almost complete destruction during WW2 of the Castello Sforzesco in Milan by the group of rationalist architects BBPR (Banfi, Belgioioso, Peressutti, Rogers). Though very discussed and continuously menaced of dismantlement, this set-up of the Museum of Ancient Arts is a symbol of elegance, sobriety and dialogue between History of Art and Architecture in Milan. A group of contemporary artists were invited to design site specific works in order to create a "course within a course", generating connections and alliances, contrasts and short-circuits with BBPR's work.

Le Musée Imaginaire

The title is inspired by André Malraux' homonymous literary work, a reflection on the establishment and the functions of Museums in Europe. Inside the eleven caskets arranged along the walls of one room at the first floor of the museum, designed by BBPR to house part of the Fine Arts Collection, I replaced the background, that was originally arranged for the show of the objects, with big photographic prints.

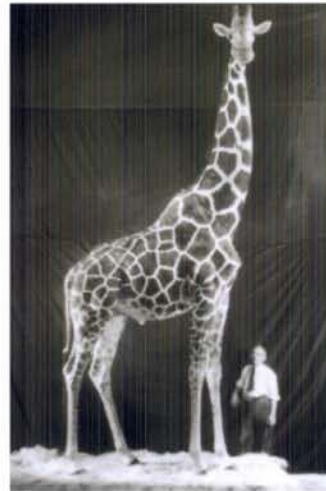
These are peculiar images drawn from a series of "Magic Lantern Slides" shot in the first part of the XX Century, in New York City's Natural History Museum. Their subject is the staging of some Diorama (set up in scale which recreates natural scenes and environments of various kinds). My intervention is developed as a sort of chinese box: inserting the objects of the collection in a dysfunctional context, it triggers a reflection on a more general de-contextualization operated by the museum intended as a historical product, as a place of conservation in which Art is extrapolated from its originary social environment. Doing this, it also casts light on the creative processes which regulate the set-up projects, establishing a short-circuit with the displays by BBPR.

“Un crucifix roman n’était pas d’abord une sculpture, la Madone de Cimabué n’était pas d’abord un tableau, même l’Athena de Phidias n’était pas d’abord une statue. Le rôle des musées dans notre relation avec les oeuvres d’art est si grand, que nous avons peine à penser qu’il n’en exista jamais, là où la civilisation moderne est ou fut inconnue...”
André Malraux, Le Musée Imaginaire





Le Musée Imaginaire, 2009, view of the installation



Magic Lantern Slides from the Natural History Museum, NY (Archive of the Artist)



Running a Lap around the Track, 2010, Video, 15''

The distance of 400 meters corresponds in athletics to the complete lap of the running track.

In slang, people dealing with athletics refer to this competition, being a contest both of speed and endurance, with the expression "the death lap".

The film narrates the venture of a man aged 50 who has never practiced sports at professional level, and decides to undergo vigorous training in order to establish a speed record for the 400 meter distance for his age. The protagonist is an artist, Cesare Pietroiusti, who is challenging himself to the limits of his physical and mental possibilities.

Linda Fregni Nagler and Cesare Pietroiusti work very differently, Pietroiusti emphasizes the analysis of experience, and Fregni Nagler focuses on the ambiguity of visual perception and photographic vision.

They aim to find a difficult common ground between their positions. They tried to realise a work that transcends the genre of performance art and where lived experience merges with the formal/aesthetic qualities of the filmed image.

Taken Over, Video, 20'36", 2005

Brief synopsis:

A man and a woman spend their life in a big house, apparently not needing any contact with the world outside. Their repetitive life flows quietly, until, one day, some strange noises start scaring them, but they passively accept the situation just closing one door after another, reducing therefore their living space.

The noises get nearer, and the protagonists are suddenly pushed outside the house.

This work was my first experience with video.

The inspiration came from the tale *Casa Tomada*, by Julio Cortázar.

The intent was to create an atmosphere out of time, in which space is the most important element.

I expanded the duration of the frames to return the sensation of slowness in daily habits. In the second part a change is imposed by an external source: then the rhythm changes, becoming more and more intense.

To represent a life long of these two subjects I chose to show only four days, precisely the last four days in their house. I shot them at first with wide frames that become more and more narrow on details while getting towards the end.

There are neither music nor dialogues, but an important rule is given to the sounds: little imperfections of the wooden floor; the scratching of a match on its box, the tinkling of an old Venetian chandelier; the rubbing of the sheets during the night sleep.





Linda Fregni Nagler

Born in Stockholm, 21.10.1976. Lives and works in Milan, Italy.

2006 Diploma in Cinematographic Photography at Escuela Internacional de Cine y Television (EICTV), San Antonio de Los Baños, Cuba

2004 Diploma in Visual Arts at Fondazione Ratti, Como, with Jimmie Durham

2000 BFA in painting at the Academy of fine Arts of Brera, Milan.

Solo Shows:

2009 Un Giro di Campo, con Cesare Pietroiusti, Galleria Franco Soffiantino, Torino

2008 Immemore, Alessandro De March Gallery, Milan

2007 Playgrounds, Italian Academy at Columbia University, New York

2006 Taken Over, Fondazione Adriano Olivetti, Rome

2003 Bambini, curated by Gabi Scardi, ViaFarini, Milan

Group shows:

2010 Person in Less, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Guarene d'Alba and Genova, palazzo Ducale, curated by Chris Fitzpatrick, Erica Cooke, Angelique Campens

2010 Mal d'Archive, La Galerie de La Friche La Belle de Mai, Marseille, curated by Chiara Agnello and Katia Anguelova

2009 La Différence, CAB Centre d'Art Bastille, curated by Vincent Verlé

2009 Nothing but a Show, Museum of Ancient Art, Castello Sforzesco, Milan, curated by Alessio Ascari

2007 Just in Time, Riccardo Crespi Gallery

2006 Arcipelago, 14th International Festival of Short Film and New Images, Rome

2006 Metaphysics of Youth, curated by Luigi Fassi and Irina Zucca Alessandrelli, Pescara

2005 Uscita Pistoia, Spazio A Contemporanearte, Pistoia

2005 Racconto di un luogo, Triennale Museum, Milan

2004 Surely we will be Confused, Fondazione Antonio Ratti, with Jimmie Durham, Como

2004 No Parachute, Artandgallery, Milano

2004 Alta Attenzione, MIART, Milano

2003 In Movimento, curated by Gabi Scardi, ViaFarini, Milano

Grants and Residencies:

2008 Dena Foundation, International Residence at Recollets, Paris

2007 New York Prize, offered by Italian Foreign Office and Columbia University, NY

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