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Miracles

Luc Sante

In *De Rerum Natura*, Lucretius proposed a theory of vision in which "images are like a skin, or film, / Peeled from the body's surface, and they fly / This way and that across the air". They travel at random, seeking a host, and lodge themselves on various surfaces – reflective ones such as water or glass or polished metal, "but on rock or wood they are shattered, broken, lost". Elisa Sighicelli has, fearlessly, upended this order of nature. Her photographs appear on surfaces where by rights they should not be: on marble, travertine, satin. They thus suggest miraculous intervention. It seems no accident that she lives in Turin, home of the Shroud.

Photography itself is a kind of miracle, a notion that does not dissipate even if we understand the chemistry behind it. The fact that a narrow slice of memory can be preserved – including details that the eye might take in while the mind does not fully register them – can still challenge our metaphysics, even in an era thoroughly saturated with photographic images. Sighicelli's works return us to this primal state of wonder, vaporizing our conditioned responses to photography.

Pictures of sculpted marble that are themselves printed on marble suggest that the stone is endowed with a memory of classical forebears.

Untitled (7056) 2018
direct UV print on travertine stone, 136 × 187 × 4 cm

Pictures of glass printed on satin transform that substance into matter whose beauty is inseparable from its fragility, as if it could shatter as you look at it.

Untitled (9647), *Untitled (9664)*, *Untitled (9638)*, 2019
photographs printed on satin, 209 x 143 cm each
Installation view, Museo Pignatelli, Napoli, 2019

Pictures of mirrors, their silvering partly decayed, showing a reflection of the room in which the mirror has been hanging for centuries, imprint the long flags of satin that hold them with a condensation of all those centuries: the days, the nights, the dances and receptions and formalities and the emotions solicited and suppressed by them (fig.1).
Pictures of the insides of carriage lamps, with concave and convex reflective elements within, framed in fat rectangles by copper mounts with curved corners, containing inverted images of spoked wheels from a past that predates photography, cause the satin to comprise a summary of the art's manifestation: the camera obscura, the daguerreotype, the silver print (fig.2).
Sighicelli's photographs, which must be viewed in their material reality to be fully appreciated, return photography to its primal aspirations. They are a kind of alchemy, and looking at them forces us to set aside our analytic faculties and what we think we know.

Fig.1
Untitled (9156), 2018
photograph printed on satin, 214 × 143 cm

Fig.2
Installation view, Museo Pignatelli, Napoli, 2019