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Forever in Stasis: Dialectical Dynamics between the Photograph and the Taxidermy Specimen



Specere II: Fixing the Shadows
12x14" salt print, 2016



On Transience: Memento Mori
Carte-de-Visite Albumen print, 2018



Dogs: An Inert State
Giclée print on canvas, 2014

The museum is an encapsulated structure, a labyrinth of hidden spaces and public places. As a *heterotopia*¹ of the modern age, the visitor experiences a complex arrangement of museological display, and is presented with narrated histories and spectacles. This is particularly so with the natural history collection - carefully (re)constructed and (re)represented for a public gaze, these taxidermic species are the products of a preservation process. And so too, is the photograph representative of a product conceived to prevent decay and eventual demise.

Like the museum, the photograph and taxidermy specimen are also outcomes of 19th century modernity. They are both made of the skin of the thing itself² and as signifiers of preservation against eventual death, the specimen and the photograph both reveal a dialectical ability to represent both the past (death) and the present (life).

This paper examines this relationship between the taxidermy specimen and the photograph focusing on 3 projects that explore through a haptic experience, varying dialectical notions of the public-private, hidden-seen, known-unknown, lifelikeness-death and past-present.

Roland Barthes stated that the photograph authenticates the existence of a certain thing³. Geoffrey Batchen describes the photograph as a chemical fingerprint⁴. So, perhaps it is plausible that through a tactility of photographic process and (re)representation of the

¹ Michel Foucault. "Of Other Spaces". Trans. Jay Miskowiec. *Diacritics* 16/1 (1986) 24

² Michelle Henning. *Skins of the Real: Taxidermy and Photography* (UK: Black Dog Publishing Ltd, 2006) 138

³ Roland Barthes. *Camera Lucida* (USA: Hill & Wang, 1981) 107

⁴ Geoffrey Batchen. *Forget me Not: Photography & Remembrance* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2004) 31

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subject, the photograph's inherent ability to present a trace of life through its physicality is revealed, changing what is seen and experienced by the viewer.