

Well-Swept Yard

Looking. Seeing. Commenting

Friday, August 1, 2014

Notes on Istanbul Photographers: Ege Kanar, *Mortals*

Among recent works exhibited by Ege Kanar is a remarkable series of portraits on glass called *Mortals*. Kanar is a photographer steeped in theory and philosophy. His work explores being, existence and the unfathomable relationship that photography has to being. He writes

How can photography, a tool that is presumably incapable of depicting what is beyond the visible, that which lies not on the surface but beneath it, possibly be used to contribute to the formation of a new transcendent representative state, a hypothetical real, which exists beyond dualities such as visible or invisible?



Mortals immediately reminds one of nineteenth century portraiture, that time when Europe and America celebrated the surface and rarely questioned what the surface really meant. I find that Kanar's *Mortals* journey back, taking with them the questions that should have been asked but were not. Because the surface ideas of photography's beginnings

remain with us, Kanar's work is relevant, more: crucial to an understanding of what the photographic world does today.

As the best nineteenth century portraits do, Kanar's are silent at the same time as they murmur. We encounter them and they are silent even as they pose important questions.

William H. Mumler's spirit photographs of the 1860s cleverly "demonstrate" another realm through trickery that nonetheless satisfied an audience eager for photographs that reached into another realm seemingly uniting the here and the there.

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This work, the appearance of which followed a period of research and discussion regarding the ontology of lens based images, aims to harvest an uncanny photographic metaphor regarding the burden of mortality and the unimaginable state of death.

Kanar's sitters, seen in nude busts, are conspicuously slow to rise to dialogue with the viewer. Only when we zero in on the eyes do we begin to grasp the metaphor made visible. The eyes, "the vehicle to the soul," blink during an exposure of several seconds.

Mortals stare right into the eyes of the observer, blinking only to vaguely indicate the inherent nature of the act of photography which produces death whilst trying to preserve life.

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Kanar creatively uses time and change to leave a trace of transformation. The eyes carry the busts into a questioning realm of the moment and the passage of the moment, the here not bound by present.



These quite images ask questions. So too the viewer. Both are metaphysical. But the questions are different, resembling two one-way "conversations." Therein lies the profundity as well as the beauty of these traces.