

GALERIE ALBERTA PANE

GAYLE CHONG KWAN

BLIND VISTAS

07.09.2013 - 16.11.2013

PRESS BOOK

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*If the Eye Could Touch the Moon**

By Lea Bismuth

Let us learn to depart from the field of vision that we usually impose upon the world with an unconscious authority. Let us learn to push back the omnipotence of the gaze on everything; and to accept the necessary blinding in order to appreciate invisible places. Through an internal voyage and a sensory and sensitive experience, Gayle Chong Kwan invites us to do this through her works in *Blind Vistas*, with the moon - sister planet of the earth, enigmatic star, its legendary fantastic imaginings, its marble and battered solitude in the star spattered sky - that constitute the exhibition's leitmotiv.

The story begins in 1839, when John William Draper, an English scientist and thinker, decided to photograph the moon as a way to try to understand it better and potentially even to possess its truth through its photographic portrait. What remains from this gesture, apart from the scientific and technical prowess, is indeed aesthetic, almost affectionate - to take the portrait of a star, like one would take the portrait of a beloved being before he or she vanishes into the night.

One thinks of the earliest daguerreotypes capturing faces that no one had ever seen that way; 'new' faces which were immortalized by the machine with traces of light on a silver plate. When Draper photographed the moon, revealing its craters and rough recesses, perhaps he was conscious that he was sealing an eternal and legendary image, one which unites moon and night, revelation and disappearance, where through the photographic process, moon and sun finally unite in one image, before the eclipse that one day or another will succeed in separating them again.

Gayle Chong Kwan takes the role of a guardian over this impossible union, and decides to see in the darkness, to turn the blindness into a strength, in the most physical and corporeal sense. To see in blindness becomes a means to summon worlds and imaginary lives, to travel back to one's childhood, that territory of blurry images that emerge as memories whose form we cannot restore. Whether we want to or not, the shapes remain undefined, opaque, moving, but the visual sensation is strong and persistent.

The moon becomes a metaphor for the blind vision. First of all, it is an island territory, an isolated place, devoid of all human presence, confronted with infertile seas seen from the shores of the earth over hundreds and thousands of kilometres. And Gayle Chong Kwan likes islands: She turns them into non-places that are not found on any map; dark and strange territories that she has already orchestrated in the series *The Obsidian Isle* (2011), for which she created scenes of melancholy and romanticism between photography and sculpture: ruins and remains of ancient geography in a violet or reddish hued twilight. Today, the theatricalisation has disappeared in favour of purity, of oval and round shaped photographs like Renaissance *tondos* or keyholes, to suggest moon landscapes rather than

showing them. "I created a large panorama of versions of moon landscapes, in a way that the scenes we see becomes iridescent like liquid gold", explains the artist, who creates photographs that remind us of inversed mirrors; as if to project a vision instead of receiving its reflection. These gold mirrors are based on images from the works of Méliès, particularly his *Voyage dans la Lune*, to whom Gayle Chong Kwan renders homage when emphasizing the extent to which the artisanal aspect, regardless of perfection, permits the emergence of emotion and the access to phantasmagoria. She also refers to the photographs by James Naysmith and James Carpenter, who in the 19th century published *The Moon: Considered as a Planet, a World, and a Satellite*, a photographic and astronomical investigation that unleashed the star's poetical, theatrical and pictorial potential.

Gayle Chong Kwan is particularly interested in the mechanisms that create illusions and parallel worlds, to make us observe a magical world, speechless like children and forgetting the distance that separates us, with the strong will to believe, to be fooled, by a dream's deception. She thinks of Louis Daguerre's dioramas, of the fascinating theatrical experiences to which he subjected his audience; she refers to the great tradition of the magic lantern and to the enchantment we feel in the face of projected, 'empowered' light that carries moving forms in its rays with the appearance of similitude of life itself.

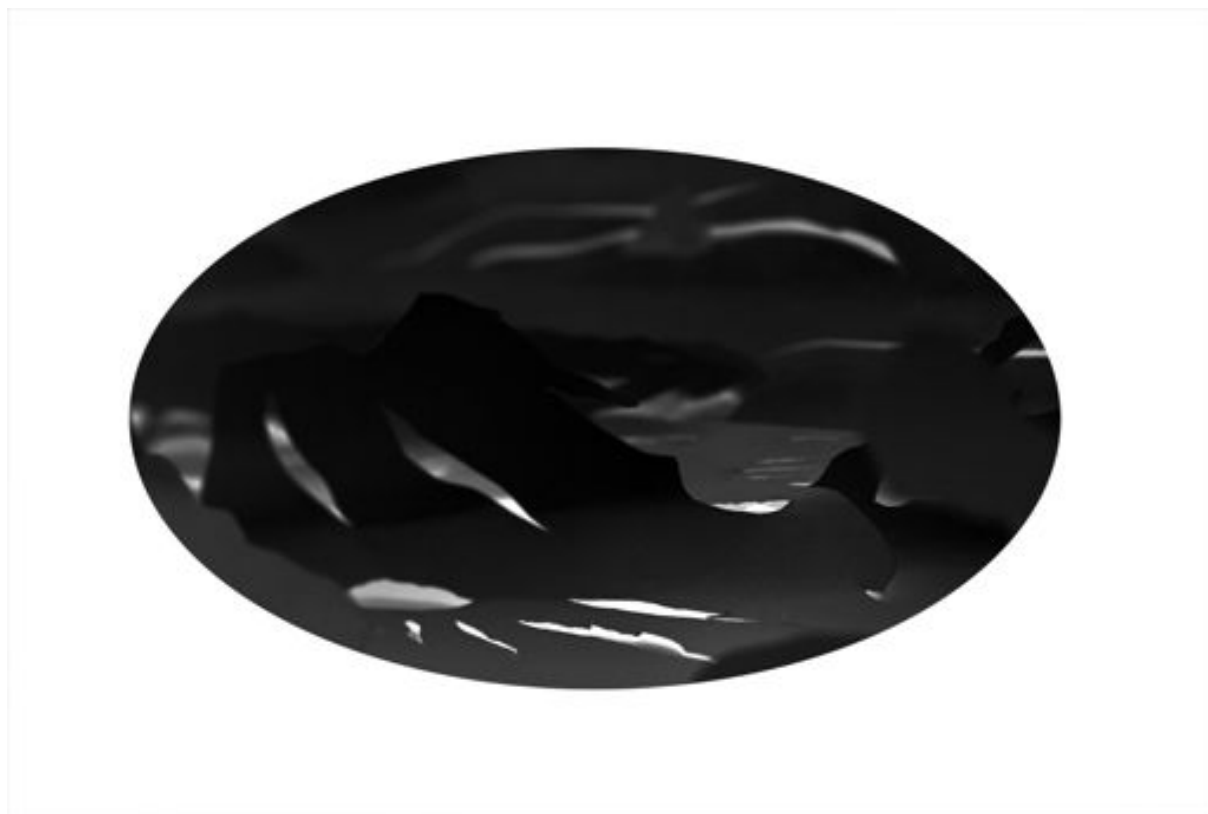
Nevertheless, Gayle Chong Kwan does not invite us to a journey into space, but to focus on the most intimate spheres instead, as if first and foremost it were in ourselves where we may find the moon that seems so far away. This introspection happens through the senses: she uses techniques that allow photographic images to be printed in three dimensional relief, through which it is possible to discover the image through touching and not only with vision. Our hands 'see' in place of the eyes: they feel the shape of the scenery; they caress the troughs and summits. Gayle Chong Kwan has used the motif of stalactites and stalagmites, those phenomena of petrification and crystallisation that appear in caves. Just like she has done before with respect to taste and smell in installations and dinner-performances, Gayle Chong Kwan invents new possibilities to discover an artwork. White forms painted enamel on tactile and photographic relief-like, prints, ascend from the floor and descend from the ceiling, they oblige to physical and sensorial experimentation. "Installed on the ceiling and the floor, the stalactites and stalagmites can be touched, or at least they evoke the tactile sense: I perceive them more as sculptures than as photographs", explains the artist.

Gayle Chong Kwan's *Blind Vistas* is a paradoxical journey, at the same time an enforced blindness and an invention of new approaches: flawless whiteness and cavernous darkness; imprisonment in blindness; and the opening of unknown perspectives. As if the eye could touch the moon.

Léa Bismuth is an art critic (a member of AICA, she regularly writes in *artpress*) and curator (notably *Bruissements / Nouvelles Vagues* at Palais de Tokyo, 2013). She has widely published in exhibition catalogues, worked as a researcher at the Centre Pompidou Metz, and is a member of a number of institutional committees and art school juries.

* Translation by Christian Hain

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Gayle Chong Kwan

Born in 1974 in Edimburg, UK
Lives and works in London

Solo Exhibitions / Commissions

2013

Blind Vistas, solo show, galerie Alberta Pane, Paris, France
Public Realm Photographic Commission, Bloomberg Place, London, UK
The Obsidian Isle, Solo Exhibition, *An Lannair*, Stornoway, Isle of Lewis, Scotland
Commission Residency, Kai Tak River Project, 5 Elements Partnership, Hong Kong
The Obsidian Isle, *Backdoor Gallery*, Clydebank, Scotland
Mountains in the Warehouse, *Sensory Round Table*, Cinnamon Kitchen, London, UK

2012

Wastescape, Festival of the World, Southbank Centre, London, UK
The Golden Tide, Our Mutual Friends, Film and Video Umbrella, London, UK
Double Vision, Peckham Space, London, UK
The Obsidian Isle, Peacock Visual Arts, Aberdeen
Memory Trace, Windows Commission, The Wellcome Trust, London, UK
The Obsidian Isle, Galleria Uno + Uno, Milan, Italy
Fancy a Cuppa, Participatory Installation, National Maritime Museum, London, UK
Artist in Residence, Mottisfont Abbey, National Trust, UK

2011

The Obsidian Isle, Street Level Photoworks, Glasgow (with publication)
Sensory Banquet, Artist in Residence, Samphire Hoe, Kent Cultural Baton/Eurotunnel, UK
Giphantie, Solo exhibition, Galerie Alberta Pane, Paris, France
Invisible Twinning, Haus de Kulturen de Welt, Berlin (with publication), Germany
Solo exhibition, Galeria Ines Barrenechea, Madrid, Spain
Pas de Piqueur, Etat d'un Lieu, Pépinières Domaine National de Saint-Cloud, Paris, France

2010

Save the Last Dance for Me, Whose Map is it? InIVA, London, UK
Sensorial Universe, Uno + Uno, Milan, Italy
The Obsidian Isle, Glasgow Project Space, Trongate 103, Glasgow, UK
Panoramica, Gallery Oldham, Oldham, UK

2009

The eyes see more than the heart knows, Peckham Space, London, UK
Moravia Memoryscape, El Centro cultural de Moravia, Medellin, Colombia
Terroir and the Pathetic Fallacy, *The Grand Tour*, Art, Artsway, New Forest, UK
The Grand Tour, solo show, Galerie Alberta Pane, Paris, France
Senscape Scotland, Vauxhall Collective Award, UK

2008

Folliescape, La Villette, Paris, France
Stellar Dentrite, Tatton Park Biennial, Manchester, UK
Sensus Shoreditch, inIVA, London, UK
The Land of Peach Blossom, Graves Gallery, Sheffield, UK
Atlantis, The Grand Tour, Arts Co, London, UK
Glocal Panorama, *The Grand Tour*, Cittadellarte - Fondazione Pistoletto, Biella, Italy
Veduta Romantica, *The Grand Tour*, Midlands Art Centre, Birmingham, UK

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Journey to the Centre of the Earth and Cockaigne, Art on the Underground, London, UK
Different Worlds, National Portrait Gallery, London, UK

2006-2007

Cockaigne/Journey to the Centre of the Earth, Platform for Art, London Underground, UK
MAC (Midlands Arts Centre), Birmingham, UK
Labyrinth, Teatro de los Sentidos / Creative Partnerships, UK and Spain
Cockaigne, Opera North, Leeds, UK
Atlantis, Permanent installation, Chinese Arts Centre, Manchester, UK
Conversations, Tate Britain, London, UK
Cockaigne, Focal Point Gallery, Southend-on-Sea, UK
Different Worlds, National Portrait Gallery, London, UK
Future Visioning, Commission, Inspire, South East Northumberland Public Art & Design, UK
Green Flash and Cockaigne, Great Eastern Hotel, London, UK
Cockaigne, Chinese Arts Centre, Manchester, UK

2004-2005

A Mushroom out of its Mycelium, San Salvario Mon Amour, Turin, Italy.
Cockaigne, Globe Gallery, Newcastle, UK.

Group Exhibitions

2013

Public Dinner Event, *Museum of Contemporary African Art 1997-2002*, Tate Modern, London, UK
Backwards Travels, Royal Scottish Academy Residency, Stills, Edinburgh, and Deveron Arts, Huntly, Scotland
Blueprint and Interlude, Couriers of Taste, Danson House, London, UK
FORMER WEST, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, Germany
Alter-Land, Zurich/London
The Golden Tide, Estuary, Museum of London, London, UK

2012

Intimate Revolution: Discourse on Disappointment, Various Venues, Shanghai/ Beijing, China
Galleria Uno + Uno, MIA, Milan Image Fair, Milan, Italy
Blueprint and Impressions of Inner Mongolia, SINOPTICON: Contemporary Chinoiserie in Contemporary Art, Plymouth Arts Centre and Plymouth City and Museum Art Gallery, UK
Galleria Ines Barrenechea, *Just Mad*, Art Fair, Madrid, Spain
Sport Your Food, IMAF, New York, Milan, London
Invisible Twinning, Cultivation Field, Reading, UK

2011

Vault Art Glasgow, Glasgow, UK
Savernake: *The Spirit of the Place, Monika Bobinska Projects at Jen Hills London*, London
Galleria Uno + Uno, *Berliner Liste*, Berlin
The Doubt of Beauty: Photographs from Collection Gibelli, Palazzo Te, Mantova, Italy
Vault Art Fair, Glasgow, UK
Manipulated Memory Tasting Booth, China Through a Looking Glass, V&A Museum, London, UK
MiArt, Milan, Italy

2010

Manipulated Memory Tasting Booth, Science Museum, London, UK
Eattopia, Taiwan International Video Art Exhibition, Taipei, Taiwan
Senscape Scotland, Vauxhall Collective Award, Idea Generation Gallery, London, UK
Sh Contemporary, Galerie Alberta Pane, Shanghai, China
Memory Tasting Unit, No Soul for Sale, Tate Modern, London, UK
Green Flash, Film/Video/Performance, Wimbledon Space, London, UK

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Save the Last Dance for Me, Whose Map is it?, Iniva, London, UK
Hotpot, Fife Contemporary, St Andrews, Scotland
Contemporary Chinese, Dazed and Confused, London, UK
SWAB, Barcelona, Spain
Volta, Basel, Swiss
Whose Map Is It, Institute of International Visual Art, London, UK
The Chinoiserie Project, V&A/National Trust/touring exhibition, UK
Contemporary Chinese, Dazed and Confused, China Town, London, UK

2009

500/1000, Artissima 09, Turin, Italy
SLICK, Le 104 Centre Quatre, Paris, France
Senscape Scotland, Vauxhall Collective Award, Idea Generation, London, UK
New London School, Galerie Schuster, Berlin, Germany
5x5 Castelló 09, Espai d'art contemporani de Castelló, Spain
Creative Mapping, Iniva, London, UK
Vilnius Art Fair, Vilnius, Lithuania
British Subjects: Identity and Self-Fashioning, 1966-2009, Neuberger Museum of Art, New York, USA
Green Flash, At Your Service, David Roberts Foundation, London, UK
Cockaigne and Manipulated Memory Tasting Booth, Pot Luck, Art Circuit Touring Exhibition,
New Art Gallery Walsall, Aberystwyth Art Centre, PM Gallery, Southampton City Art Gallery, UK
S x S dans R, La Générale en Manufacture Sèvres, Paris, France
The Peckham Experiment, Camberwell Space, London, UK
Finger Buffet, Travelling Gallery, Various, Scotland

2008

Landscape, School of Landscape Versailles/La Villette, Paris, France
The Future Can Wait, Truman Brewery, London, UK
Love Difference Pastries, Love Difference, Cittadellarte - Fondazione Pistoletto, Italy
'Cockaigne', *Utopia*, Fundación Municipal de Cultura, Valladolid, Spain
Fantastic, Fake and Found, Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent
SLICK, 104, Paris, France
The Golden Record, Collective Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland
Group Exhibition, Moatti-Riviere House, Moscow, Russia
Thames Town, Contemporary Chinoiserie, Collyer Bristow Gallery, London, UK
Utopia, PhotoEspana, Museu Berardo, Centro Cultural do Belem, Lisbon, Portugal
Government Art Fund Exhibition, British Ambassador's Residence, Paris, France
Cantilever, Collyer Bristow Gallery, London Festival of Architecture, London, UK

2006-2007

Alma Mater, Its Just Bread, Alma Enterprises, London, UK
Peckham Pet-tastic, Space Station Sixty-Five, London, UK
Atlantis, Second Life, Portman Gallery, London, UK
ARTfutures, London, UK
Contemporary Art Projects, London, UK
Incorporate, A & B Headquarters, London, UK
Sensory Material, Bonhams Contemporary, London, UK
Pique Nique, FRED, Cumbria, UK
Blurring the Neatline, Embassy Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland
Alma Enterprises, London, UK
Adonia, The Mothership Collective, South London Gallery, London, UK
Climate Change, Globe Gallery, Newcastle, UK
Fantasy Landscapes, Asia House, London, UK

2005

Thy Neighbour's Ox, Space Station Sixty-Five, London, UK
The Third Paradise, Biennale de Venise, Venice, Italy
Sognidoro, Love Difference Festival, Biella, Italy

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La Cisterna dei Ricordi dell'Acqua, Love Difference Festival, Biella, Italy
Second Nature, Blythe Gallery, London, UK
Be Ready Heart, *For Parting*, *New Endeavour*, Great Eastern Hotel, London, UK

2004

After-dinner speech performance, Art and Food, Tate Modern, London, UK
Stuff Estrade, FEST, London, UK
Entente Cordiale, School of Fine Arts, Paris, France
Memory Tasting Unit, Bow Festival, London, UK
Vista, The Garden of Earthly Delights, Brockwell Park, London, UK
TAPE 291, 291 Gallery, London, UK
Sensus, Shift, Emerged, Leeds, UK

2003

Feast, VIA, Three Mills Island, London, UK
Ghaos, Reactor, NOW Festival, Nottingham, UK
Vegetate, *Accommodation 2*, Emerged, International Festival of Edinburgh, Scotland
Product of..., Flypitch, Brixton Market, London, UK
Gathering Momentum, Chinese Arts Centre, Manchester, UK
Pause, Gallery Los 29 Enchufes, Madrid, Spain
Guest Book, *It's a Wonderful Life*, Wasp Studios, Glasgow, UK
Hirsute, *Hair the Show*, Tablet Gallery, Tabernacle, London, UK

1999-2002

Hirsute, VAIN Live Art, Oxford, UK
Dambusters, *GPS Gaming Dam Square*, Netherlands New Media Institute, Amsterdam
Taranto, Queen of Hungary/Norwich Arts Centre
Chorus, *LXE9*, Installation Festival, Hackney Public Arts Trust, London, UK
Connecting Cultures, Hay Gallery, Colchester, UK
Seeing Through a Glass Darkly, Global Café, London, UK
Between Two Shores, Greenwich Citizens Gallery, London, UK
The Garden Party, Hampshire House, London, UK

Education

2012 -

Phd by Practice, Fine Art, Printmaking, Royal College of Art, London, UK

1997/2000

BA Hons Fine Art, Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, London, UK

1995

MSc Communications, Stirling University, Scotland

1991/4

BA Hons Politics and Modern History, Manchester University, Manchester, UK

Residencies

2014

Venice Printmaking Workshop, Venice, Italy