

STUDIO WALL FRAGMENTS 2013

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Trudi called. She had rented a studio space in Victoria's Chinatown, 562 Fisgard, 3rd floor. I visited. It was then I re-encountered the studio space I had inhabited twenty-five years ago. My gaze turned to the long wall on which I had worked; layers of white paint, the mahogany plywood that I had nailed over the wall of narrow vertical pine boards. This in turn had been covered with newspaper long before I arrived. The pine boards were painted brown and covered a brick structure behind; a rooming house for migrant Chinese workers, a shrine room, a school? With many gallons of paint, I had made all of this white and proceeded to build work on the studio wall.

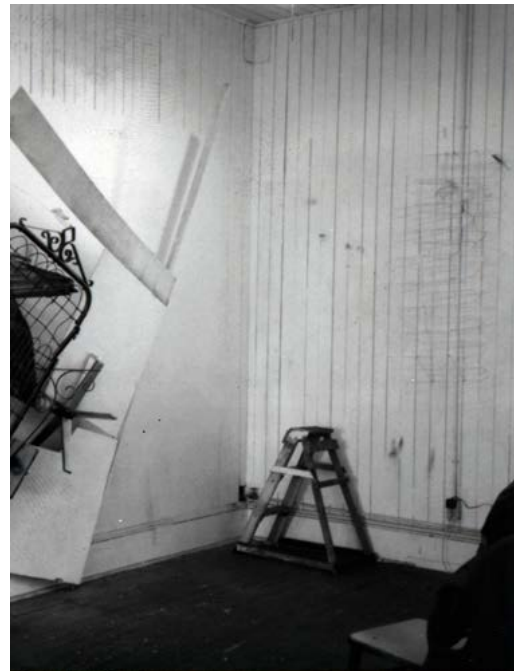
However, the paint did not actually cover nor did it neutralize the architecture. The previous history seeped through and intermingled with the work I was making in a rather unsettling way. Confused and yet curious, in an attempt to understand, I photographed the small assemblage works on the wall. On reflection, in these small Polaroids, I saw the architectural space, the wall texture, the light fixtures, the baseboards as well as the sculptural assemblages that I had built. In the photographs they existed simultaneously. Unlike documentation of individual art works there was no hierarchy, everything was of equal significance. I was curious about the difference between encountering the assemblages in the studio versus seeing them in the photograph. When viewing the art works in the actual physical space of the studio one immediately creates a hierarchy where the art piece is clearly of the most significant order. In looking at this *Studio Picture* however, the art appears as just one more thing amongst many. A series of over 100 Polaroid photographs was titled *Studio Picture: 1983- 1989*.

This curiosity, particularly regarding the relationship of the artwork to the site (and their relative hierarchies) as well as the experience of looking at an object photographed versus our experience of objects in actual space has sustained my practice.... differences between how we come to understand a thing we share space with, the physical experience of an object – versus a mediated encounter with something depicted in a photograph.

In addition my interest has gravitated to ideas around the studio and studio practice, theorized extensively since the 1980's. The studio as site of post-industrial architecture, its layered history and lack of fixed meaning, blurred boundaries between domestic and work space and aspects of gender regarding the studio have all played out in my work.



Studio Picture 1983-1989



Studio Picture 1983-1989

These many years later I am back in this same space and Trudi and I are excavating backwards, peeling and removing. A large swirling circular gesture in pencil is revealed, a drawing that I had made directly on the wall in the 1980's. This trace resonates the past and present. Trudi, an artist/anthropologist is documenting this process and is making a video. Together we are working on a two volume book, Volume 1 mine, Volume II hers. Separately I am working on the *Studio Wall Pictures* and *Studio Fragments*. Our ongoing writing and conversations about 562 Fisgard, photography and place have become essential to both our individual and collective works.

I try to come to some understanding of this wall. It has an enduring presence and yet it is faltering and fragmentary. It has a singular objectness and yet it is many layered. It has a changing and yet unchanging history. I think it represents a declining order of studio practice itself or at least of the large warehouse studio.

My art-making style is intuitive. I always begin with photographs and find what I am making as I work with them; in the darkroom watching images emerge on the photographic film and paper to digital scanning and printing and enlarging. Later, cutting, mounting, juxtaposing, I look for meaning and relationships, abstract, pictorial and physical. As I work with the photographs the remove offered by the reproduction offers a space of contemplation. As I handle the photographs their physical qualities become palpable.

Using a 4" X 5" camera and sheet film I re-photograph the studio, this time focusing on this wall. As I mount these photographs, now enlarged, on layers of foam core and then stack them a kind of archive develops. One on top of another against the gallery wall, layers of relationships reveal themselves. Rather like an archeological reconstruction, I select pieces

of wall 'fragments' from the stack. These are then pieced together, arranged, rearranged and placed in the gallery leaning against the wall. Transitory, contingent wholeness finds itself and that *Studio Fragment* is then complete for its time and place.

Although interested in the cultural meanings the wall carries, I am also interested in the moments when these photographic objects drift from those meanings and exist as physical encounters with smudgy blackness, pearly and velvety surfaces and thick layers of foam core... just objects leaning against the wall. I am always curious about the tension between the physical properties of a photograph and its attempt to create a picture. It is a document and yet in these works their objectness exists as a real scale wall in itself. Although each photograph is taken in a single moment in time the layering of photographs undermines time and history. Time and history now move backwards and forwards questioning the notion of the documentary and truth telling of the photograph itself.

Each *Studio Wall Fragment* exists only for its time in a particular exhibition. After exhibition, pieces return to the larger and ever expanding archive ready to be re-assembled in a new situation, another arrangement of fragments and as Moyra Davey so aptly states "representing my failure to produce something lasting and my general lack of desire to do so". Repeating and revisiting various 'pasts', I consider the photographic pieces each time anew, creating another look, hypothesis and consideration of this studio wall.