

## Zoe Leonard

### Galerie Gisela Capitain

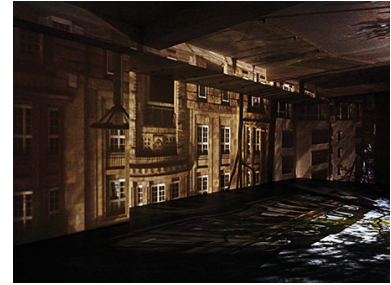
For her most recent solo exhibition at Galerie Gisela Capitain, entitled 'Available Light', Zoe Leonard transformed the front room of the gallery into a camera obscura. In the remaining spaces, she displayed black and white analogue photographs taken of the sun, produced without the aid of retouching. Together, these works presented not only a rumination on the medium of photography but also on the nature of perception in general – concerns that have long been at the core of Leonard's practice. Rather than highlighting a divide between the world and its image, Leonard uses a quasi-journalistic approach to attempt to reveal the complexities of such distinctions in the first place.

Located in one of the more picturesque areas of Cologne, the gallery was well suited to Leonard's camera obscura, which reflected the tree-lined street and an early 20th-century courthouse building over the road. Resembling a video installation that required no actual projector, the upside-down image in the darkened space was generated by means of a small hole fitted with a lens. While the tonal range of the projected image changed slightly depending on the weather, its effect was ethereal and otherworldly. The aesthetic qualities of Leonard's work brought to mind Darren Almond's 'Fullmoon' series (1998–ongoing), comprising natural landscapes captured with long exposure times under the light of the full moon. But whereas Almond's body of work only alludes to photography's reliance on natural light, Leonard's accompanying series of photographs of the sun directly confronted it, drawing attention to light as an abstract subject. Monochromatic but for a glowing spot in the centre of each frame, the works could be easily mistaken for flash bulb reflections in foggy mirrors. Titled according to the days on which they were taken, the scorched quality of photographs such as *April 4* and *June 3* (both 2011) provided a striking contrast to the subtle treatment of light necessitated by the camera obscura. The use of serial imagery here was consistent with Leonard's conceptual approach to previous projects, which have often revolved around the language of archival photography and the construction of genres such as scientific documentation, aerial photography

## About this review

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By *Wes Hill*



Zoe Leonard 'Available Light', 2011, Installation view

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and museum display.

Given the widespread expectation that critical examinations of photography will emphasize the medium's superficial relationship to reality, Leonard's promotion of reciprocity between photographic representation and reality was a welcome surprise. The camera obscura revealed a direct correspondence between the aesthetic experience inside the gallery and the reality outside of it. While Phillip K. Dick's 1977 masterwork *A Scanner Darkly*, which exploits the symbolism of the photographic process to warn of the dangers in confusing mediated imagery for reality, may epitomize the Postmodern approach to this issue, in contrast, 'Available Light' showed how photography should be understood as a process of distillation rather than distortion.

Fascinated by what is overlooked by cultures under the spell of progress, Leonard and a number of contemporary artists working in film and photography over the last 15 years have sought to endow analogue technologies with greater import. Employing the ancient phenomenon of the camera obscura, Leonard reminds us that analogue photography is essentially a natural process, which, in its qualitative conversion of light, does not rely on the transformation into numerical code that is essential for digital media. As with her earlier series 'Analogue' (1998–2007), which focused on soon-to-be obsolete shopfronts in New York and other parts of the world, 'Available Light' drew upon the poetic aesthetics of analogue media to invoke their broader appreciation.

**Wes Hill**

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**Frieze**

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