

# MAP

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**Destroy the Destroyer**  
Ken Okiishi and Nick Mauss  
on Zoe Leonard's  
*Sun Photographs*



A black dot appears on the surface of the eye, circling the traces of the sun on film, through the lens of the camera projected back to the surface of the paper – as if immediately, a transparent process of accumulation of light. We know that the black dot appears as a memory in the synaptic mesh of the mind. “Don’t look at the sun” – and you peek anyway, after-images forever circling inside that prohibition, that sudden burst of light, like a hollow space in the centre of vision.

But the black dot also appears to form, like particles attracted to a magnet, on the surface of the photograph, spinning around the centre of what must be the sun – you know it must be that – but cannot see it, as a blisteringly white dot in the centre of endless variations of gray becomes increasingly abstract in the mind – increasingly overwhelming.

How do you compose a picture of not understanding? A picture that is urgency and persistence? It has never been seen this way before and can only be seen this way now. Leonard has a way of picturing the inherent slash through the image. Atget, too, photographs like an alien. I project a bitter dignity into these images, the early light, the ‘missing’ subject. All other images are cleared away, deliberately shed.

Not pinned, but nailed to the white walls, these photographs throb with an oversensitivity that verges on high-pitched pain. It is their starkness, their inescapability, that cracks the foil of subjectivity. I flinch at the first encounter, actually contort my body in the gallery, a kind of atavism. The alarm of words beyond me triggering synaptic rewiring. Stunned, I fall into the picture, travel with my eye around and through a meshed zone not of chains of associations, but of senses, observations, and intuitive measurements blooming with blinded acculturations, loosening and unmaking. The delicacy of the silver halides exposed across the full range of their capacity, suspended in the emulsion coating the paper fibers, against the nails that hold them to the white paint, the plaster beneath, the concrete floor, the ceiling, hurl the mind through inner space to the terminus of nerve endings. The thought of bodies slamming into these walls.

Wavelengths of infinite gray make hints at where the locus of the sun might be – as you look, the lighter spot begins to disappear – the sun that you are not supposed to look at hides – the prohibition blanking out the image into a flat, gray, hovering rectangle. It shimmers in the mind, as knowledge gives way to visual interdiction. As the camera searches for what to photograph – what possibly could there be to look at anymore? Zoe looks up.

This is an industrial sun in the post-Ford age. The sky around it is desolate: cloudless, birdless, colourless, held still by this radiation. The naked sun. The sun of an economy of permanent war. I can't see it, but I know that what I can see I perceive through the invisible tumult of digital clouds, where images and information now live – as if immaterial, as if floating above us. As if information, itself, were stored in the sun, completely opaque and visible at the same time.

The image reaches its generic state, as if the brain itself has become a camera, recording the thought of looking away. These are the images we yearn for when we don't want identifying strictures anymore – a gap where our particularities can remain as such: particles, appearing here, in this impossible encounter.



Words by Ken Okiishi and Nick Mauss  
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Zoe Leonard, *Sun Photographs*, 2011–12, gelatin silver prints, various dimensions  
Images courtesy of the artist and Murray Guy, New York