

*Obscura*  
by  
Angela Snieder

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts  
in  
Printmaking

Department of Art and Design  
University of Alberta

© Angela Snieder, 2017

## OBSCURA

Angela Snieder | Artist Statement

How can we think about the relationship between physical and psychological spaces? *Obscura* explores the possibility that the intersection of the two can foster deeply contemplative experiences, and enable attentive and empathetic consideration of our relationship with the world. The works in the exhibition propose that illusion and artifice contribute to both our experiences of space and their conceptualization.

Since their invention, photographic impressions have possessed an evidentiary power due to their indexical relationship with the physical world. Based in various photographic forms, *Obscura* prompts a negotiation of reality and its representations that calls into question the truthfulness of photography. The prints and camera obscura installation in the exhibition make use of the mimetic relationship inherent to photography, with the hope of drawing attention not only to the photograph's capacity for deception, but also to the elusiveness of perception and memory. I ask viewers what it means to discern reality from illusion and to consider the liminal space where these seemingly disparate notions overlap.

Throughout the works, photographic textures and surfaces of natural materials offer a sense of familiarity, recalling physical spaces such as mineshafts, caves, undergrowth or mountains. In the series of photopolymer prints, recurrent areas of darkness conceal vast portions of images, rendering access impossible. Incongruities in scale and subject matter unsettle the scenes and allude to their artifice. The represented spaces reference built structures but exist in a state of transformation, reclaimed by natural materials and processes. Enclosed and potentially claustrophobic, the images suggest a sense of solitude and of silent, individual encounter with things. These dream-like scenes serve to explore an 'in-betweenness'; spaces of both protection and entrapment, of natural and built, of fascination and fear. They are settings in which something is on the verge of taking place.

The camera obscura installation portrays illuminated spaces projected through small apertures onto the walls of a darkened room. The projections follow the same laws of optics that are the foundation of the fixed photograph. Whereas historically the camera obscura projected an image of the external world (reversed and inverted), the devices in the exhibition reveal fabricated spaces.

I am interested in the role of illusion in the printed and projected scenes. What is happening in the shifting moment when the eye catches on to the trick; and how does the knowledge of this conspiracy alter the experience of the image and of the illusion? Material clues such as corrugation will eventually lead to some understanding of the works' construction, but the feeling of certainty comes in and out of focus, as sand pours through a ceiling or an illuminated fog floats in a snow filled room. This fluctuation invites heightened attention and opportunities for curiosity and surprise, prompting an examination of the nature of perception and our relationship with physical space.

## Bibliography

- Castle, Terry. "Phantasmagoria: Spectral Technology and the Metaphorics of Modern Reverie." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1988, pp. 26–61. [www.jstor.org/stable/1343603](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343603).
- Kimmerer, Robin. "The Intelligence in All Kinds of Life." Audio blog post. On Being. 25 Feb. 2016.
- Koch, Philip J. "Solitude." *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, vol. 4, no. 3, 1990, pp. 181–210. [www.jstor.org/stable/25669958](http://www.jstor.org/stable/25669958).
- Leach, Neil. "Walter Benjamin, Mimesis and the Dreamworld of Photography." *Intersections: Architectural Histories and Critical Theories*. Ed. Iain Borden and Jane Rendell. London: Psychology Press, 2000. pp. 27-38.
- Lefèvre, Wolfgang. *Inside the Camera Obscura – Optics and Art under the Spell of the Projected Image*. Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, 2007.
- Lilburn, Tim. *Going Home*. House of Ansansi Press, 2008.
- Lilburn, Tim. *Living In The World As If It Were Home: Essays*. Cormorant Books, 1999.
- MacFarlane, Robert. *The Old Ways: A Journey On Foot*. Penguin Books, 2013.
- Malpas, Jeff. *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- McCaslin, Susan. "Facing the Environmental Crisis with Contemplative Attention: The Eco-poetics of Don McKay, Tim Lilburn, and Russell Thornton." *The University of the Fraser Valley Research Review*, vol. 3: issue 1, pp. 64-82. [www.journals.ucfv.ca/rr/RR31/article-PDFs/7-mccaslin.pdf](http://www.journals.ucfv.ca/rr/RR31/article-PDFs/7-mccaslin.pdf).
- McKay, Don. "Ediacaran and Anthropocene: Poetry as a Reader of Deep Time." *Prairie Fire* 29.4. Winter 2008-2009. pp. 4-15.
- Petric, Vlada. "Tarkovsky's Dream Imagery." *Film Quarterly*, vol. 43, no. 2, 1989, pp. 28–34. [www.jstor.org/stable/1212806](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1212806)
- Shaw, Philip. *The Sublime*. Routledge, 2006.
- Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. Picador, 2001.
- Totaro, Donato. "Time and the Film Aesthetics of Andrei Tarkovsky." *Revue Canadienne d'Études Cinématographiques / Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1992, pp. 21–30. [www.jstor.org/stable/24402079](http://www.jstor.org/stable/24402079).
- Tousley, Nancy. "Dream Scenes." *Canadian Art*, Spring 2009, pp. 72-80. [www.canadianart.ca/features/dream-scenes](http://www.canadianart.ca/features/dream-scenes).

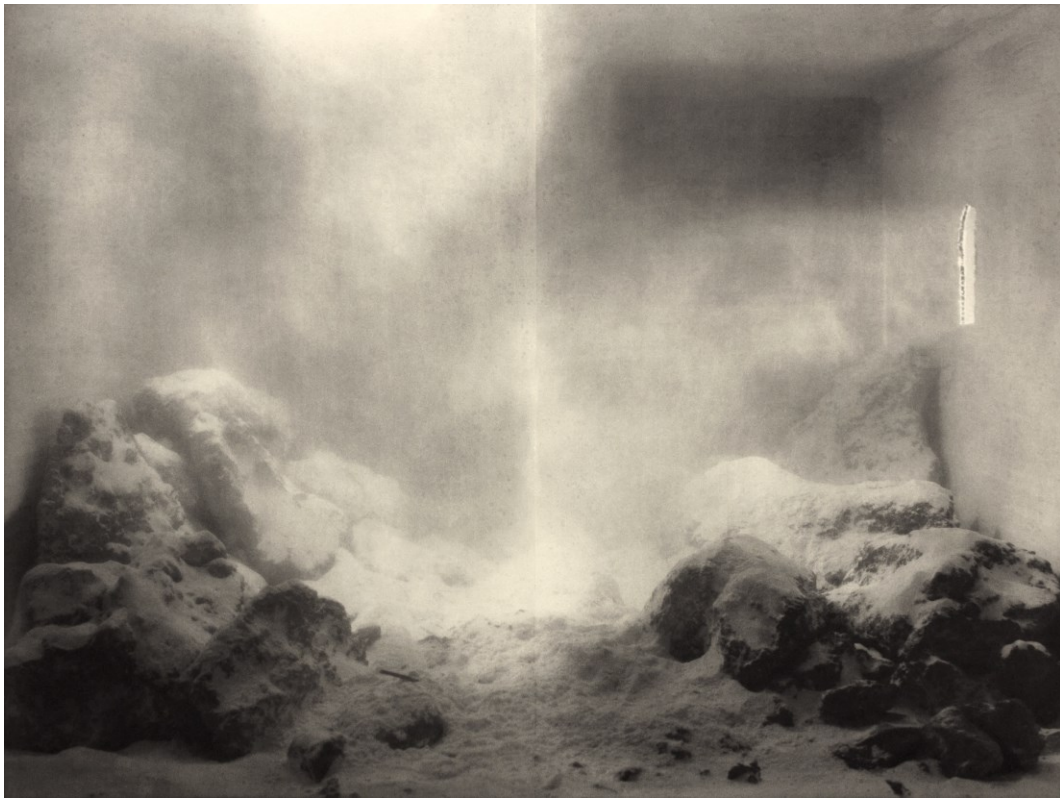
Trigg, Dylan. *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny*. Ohio University Press, 2012.

Whetter, Darryl. "Listening with courtesy: a conversation with Tim Lilburn." *Studies in Canadian Literature / Études en littérature canadienne*, vol. 22, no. 1, 1997, pp. 135-144. [www.journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/scl/article/view/8262/9324](http://www.journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/scl/article/view/8262/9324).

Yau, John. "Time Halted: The Photographs of Hiroshi Sugimoto." *The American Poetry Review*, vol. 33, no. 5, 2004, pp. 11–16. [www.jstor.org/stable/20682669](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20682669).



Snieder\_001 **Diorama I**, 2016, photopolymer print, chine collé, 22 x 32'' (image), 30 x 44'' (paper)



Snieder\_002 **Diorama V**, 2016, photopolymer print, chine collé, 22 x 29'' (image), 30 x 44'' (paper)



Snieder\_003 **Diorama II**, 2016, photopolymer print, chine collé, 22 x 31 1/2" (image), 30 x 44" (paper)



Snieder\_004 **Diorama IV**, 2016, photopolymer print, chine collé, 22 x 32 1/2" (image), 30 x 44" (paper)



Snieder\_005 **Diorama III**, 2016, photopolymer print, chine collé, 22 x 33" (image), 30 x 44" (paper)



Snieder\_006 **Diorama series** (installation shot)





Snieder\_007 installation shot



Snieder\_008 **Storm I**, (installation shot) 2017, digital print pasted on wall, 4 x 9'



Snieder\_009 **Storm I**, 2017, digital print pasted on wall, 4 x 9'



Snieder\_010 **Storm II**, 2017, digital print pasted on wall, 6 x 9'



Snieder\_011 **The Dark Chamber**, 2017, [3 Camera Obscura Boxes: MDF, cardboard, papier-mâché, mud, LED lights, glass condenser lenses, projected light], 3 boxes (all same): 2 x 2 x 2'  
\*Note: Installation space in *The Dark Chamber* room was brightened for this photo



Snieder\_012 **The Dark Chamber**, (detail: Camera Obscura Box #1 with projection)  
\*Note: Installation space in *The Dark Chamber* room was brightened for this photo



Snieder\_013 **The Dark Chamber (detail: projection of box #1)**, 2017, projected light, approximately 2 ½ x 2 ½'



Snieder\_014 **The Dark Chamber (detail: projection of box #2)**, 2017, projected light, approximately 2 ½ x 4'



Snieder\_015 **The Dark Chamber** (detail: projection of box #3), 2017, projected light, approximately 3 x 3'

## Acknowledgements

Thank you firstly to my supervisor Sean Caulfield, for your kind and consistent support. Thank you for all the insightful questions and conversations throughout my time here and for helping me to develop and challenge my art practice. Your tireless commitment to art and the thoughtful mentorship you provide students and young artists has strongly impacted so many people in the art community.

Thank you Marilène Oliver for your supervision and mentorship. Although I haven't known you for long, I have been touched by your care and generosity. Your fierce love of art is contagious and your capacity to inspire confidence in young artists is immensely important. Thank you for helping me to expand the scope of my work and for the reassurance to be bold.

To our Printmaking technicians Steven Dixon and Marc Siegner, thank you not only for the thorough and invaluable knowledge you bring to the studio, but for the generous support and insight you have provided for myself and so many other students as we find (and often fumble) our way through the limitless intricacies of printmaking.

Blair Brennan, the one thing I heard about you before I arrived in Edmonton was that you were one of the kindest people I would meet. Thank you for making myself and others around you feel like members of a family here in Edmonton. Thank you for your generous help with all things gallery, and for your limitless A+ jokes. Also a huge thank you to the FAB install crew for helping me realize my exhibition to its fullest potential.

Thank you to Liz Ingram and Walter Jule for your time and insight, as well as all who taught, advised or had studio visits with me. Thank you Dawn McLean for always looking out for me and for being so kind and supportive. Thank you Lianne McTavish for going above and beyond to support the graduate students. To my defense committee members Steven Harris and Lee Livingstone, thank you for your sensitive and thoughtful questions and conversations. Thank you to Sue Colberg for your unwavering attention to detail and your beautiful design work for my exhibition.

David Armstrong, I am so fortunate to have met you and to have been your student in the beginning. The mentorship you offered in my undergraduate studies has continued to be an essential cornerstone for me as I navigate the early years of a committed art practice. Thank you for sharing with myself and others the value of the act of looking and the quiet vitality of the spaces in-between.

Thank you to my dear friends, who have been Edmonton's greatest gift. A special thank you to all the strong women who have been my mentors, peers and compassionate companions. Thank you to my family for your daily love and support in all things and in my decision to pursue an art career.

I am thankful for the generous financial support of the University of Alberta, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Alberta Foundation for the Arts.

Finally, to my partner Matt Tarini, thank you for everything. Your compassionate and gentle nature continue to enrich my life every day. I am so happy to be able to share with you the challenges and rewards of being an artist and I look forward to what will come next.