



Clare Rae
light weight

Suspension

by Stephen Palmer

Clare Rae's exhibition *Light Weight*, at Beam Contemporary, plays on the quality of suspension in the photographic image. The show consists principally of two large light boxes, depicting life-sized images of Rae in mid-air. Rae is suspended in flight, and the viewer is likewise suspended between these two fragments of the body in motion. Rather than attempting to place these images in the progression of Rae's practice, or some other thematic narrative, I wish to address here the significance of this moment of suspension. This aspect of the work intentionally postpones any discursive encoding, forcing us instead to consider the possibility of an unguarded photographic encounter.

What strikes me initially is the stillness of the image. It appears as if the shutter has fallen at the apex of her leap, capturing the point between muscular lift and gravitational decline. A minuscule point of suspension, a fleeting moment of inertia. Rae is caught in a blissful heartbeat of weightlessness; lingering for a split second against the vengeful pull of the Earth. The interruption of movement is the *modus operandi* of the photograph. We are used to its penchant for plucking out a moment in time, leaving it hanging in the air before us in a perfectly unnatural way. On the other hand Rae's standstill is a logical phenomenon, a point that we know must exist but would usually be imperceptible to the eye. It is as if Rae is performing this stillness for the camera, however fleetingly, enacting a momentary cancellation of opposing forces. Paradoxically, it is through a vigorous movement that she achieves this equilibrium. Rae's series of leaps and aerial manoeuvres indicate that the work is not simply about creating a scene, but concerns the dynamic of an interception between performance and photography. Rae performs the stasis that photography extracts from the world, through an encounter between her body and the medium which it inhabits.

Rae's image is arresting in both senses of the word. She is caught in a moment, perhaps even a swoon. But I am also caught, struck, frozen. The bright sunlight into which Rae jumps is doubled and emanates towards the viewer via the illuminated image, demanding attention. The spotlight figure, and strong shadows, emphasise a frozen narrative. Likewise, the stillness of the photograph does not simply deny narrative, but instead intensifies its urgency through fragmentation. Is she ascending? Falling? Being blown back? It could be a still from a film, the portrayal of some unknown character. The suspension of narrative is almost uncomfortable. We must face the stubborn strangeness of the image, forgoing the possibility of its resolution. The wooden frame of the photograph operates in an analogous way to that of quotation marks. The image is cut out, divided from the temporality in which it occurred, and literally transported into another time and place. The solidity of the light box speaks of this performative construction: converting a transient moment into monumental portrait. The various significances of the words "light" and "weight" are played off against each other in this way.



Untitled #2 (detail) from *Light Weight* 2011

The suspension of the image is not positioned here as a shortcoming of the photographic medium. Instead Rae employs this photographic tension to intensify its potential significance. There is a relay set up in this work between the clarity of the finished image, and its origin in movement. The work therefore does not award a priority to either of these moments, but instead provokes a consideration of what passes between the two.

Stephen Palmer is an artist based in Melbourne. www.stephenpalmer.com.au

Light Weight

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