

Still Here Lydia Goldblatt

Lydia Goldblatt's most recent body of work *Still Here* inhabits spaces of abstraction and explores metaphysical questions pertaining to the human situation as well as ones relating to the meaning of life. It also represents a further exploration for Goldblatt into the concept of identity, this time from a highly personal perspective. "With *Still Here*, certainly, it's a way of dealing with my own history, amongst other things," Goldblatt says. "If I look back at my earlier work *Keeping Time*, it was partly related to my own adolescence, then in *And the Word was God* I looked at religious structures, and later, when I worked with an elderly Jewish community in London, I looked at aging. Then I was thinking about what it means to live with an identity for a lifetime; what becomes important, the transition towards mortality and the end of life, and how people tell their own life stories. In its own way, this project was a way of starting to deal with what was happening, and what I've been living with in my own family for a very long time."

With *Still Here*, Goldblatt reflects on inner motivations and sensory perceptions. The emotional and psychological articulation of identity that she has investigated in different ways since graduating with a Masters in Photography in 2006, resurface, but this time in a familial context. Goldblatt's father, who died last year, was 24 years older than her 70 year-old mother and the processes of growth and development, degeneration and decay are woven into the

fabric of her endeavour. She started taking photographs for the project in 2010 and says that this allowed her to examine this aspect in her life "without looking at it directly". The title is apt — as well as relating to notions of time and stillness, it carries the suggestion of a precarious presence; the idea that someone or something is still living, still here.

"This process of interpreting one's experience, which is essentially what you do with photography and what I am doing here, comes from my parents' teaching. It's not just about personal experience but experience, per se," Goldblatt reveals. Her father was a psychoanalyst and the analytical method of enquiry is present in Goldblatt's work but it remains in the shadows; the place where Goldblatt also appears. Moments of suspension and stillness are intuited and Goldblatt hones in on quiet details that are often intimate and always sensitively observed — macro views of the surface of her father's skin and wisps of hair play with scale to become immersive human landscapes. Her mother is photographed from the waist down sitting at the foot of a bed covered with a tequila-sunrise coloured bedspread — her legs are crossed and she's wearing red shoes. A dead bee, its backlit body curled, is sculptural. At times Goldblatt pairs images to form diptychs, which allows for a comparison to be made between states of being — the raindrops patterning the surface of a puddle are transient markers of both beauty and time, while "the cyclical nature



Untitled, from the series 'Still Here', 2013 © Lydia Goldblatt

of existence" is ever present and encompasses both the personal and the universal.

When thinking about the totality of *Still Here*, it is questionable as to whether the term narrative is an appropriate one to use. Goldblatt uses the term narrative because she says that she hasn't "found a better word", adding that she's not sure that it is even the right one. In fact, visual artists and experimental prose writers, qualify and extend the term — as in "collapsed narratives", or "collapsing narratives" — to describe fluid, non-linear trajectories of time, and it is one that seems wholly appropriate for *Still Here*, which in book form includes prose poetry written by Goldblatt. "What I am doing is not dissimilar to what I am doing with my visual language in the photographs, except that it's written language and is its own version. It adds layers of depth, richness and sensory experience to the work. We're sensory beings and I want to do something to make you experience time; slowness, stillness. I didn't want the writing to explain the work, I wanted it to add further voice to what I'm exploring. The process of making the work is a sensory, visual, emotional, and an analytical process."

Some photographers wrestle with personal issues via photographic bodies of work, and though it is not therapy, per se, it could be seen as the visual equivalent of the analyst's couch. However, *Still Here* is animated by a strong

sense of respect for her parents and Goldblatt contemplates not only personal histories, but also the human situation in general. These meditations are conveyed with an overarching sense of love and tenderness and invite us to contemplate questions of universal relevance about existence and mortality. So whose story is it? "Ultimately, it's mine," Goldblatt replies. "I'm not hiding that I'm very implicated in the work. You can see that in the images of myself as a shadow and also in the proximity within which I photograph, as well as the marks that I make; the tissue images are ones that I, and my father, unconsciously made. It's a conversation between my father, my mother, and myself, and my questions about humanity and how we experience it."

Miranda Gavin

Still Here was selected by Hotshoe's Editor-in-chief, Melissa DeWitt, for The Center for Fine Art Photography's Portfolio Showcase, which includes an exhibition and publication in *Portfolio Showcase Volume 6*.