

# BALANCING ACT

Text by Louise Morrison, 2012

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Christopher Young is a Perth-based artist who works exclusively in the medium of photography. He produces discrete bodies of work that contain the extensive results of his explorations based on a single idea, each eventually becoming a named series of images.

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These series take years to produce and work on one is often suspended or undertaken concurrently with the production of another. Nonetheless, when considered collectively, his investigations have followed a logical, progressive line of enquiry into the nature of the exchange between an artwork and a viewer that results in the making of meaning.

Early works involved installations of images and text, and occasionally sound, that presented a cacophony of possible meanings to any viewer. *Kommando Konrad Zuse* (2001) was a work in which visitors were encouraged to rearrange a myriad of A4 sized papers on which images and words were printed, allowing an unlimited combination of elements, and therefore meanings, to be constructed.

However, by 2006, Young had become interested in the capacity of images to suggest a multitude of meanings without the support of any extraneous elements. The images in *drei* (2006-2008) were presented in 13 pairs at the Breadbox Gallery in Perth in 2008. In most pairings, Young coupled an image of a disused space with a stark, black and white portrait of an anonymous face. A few consisted of two images of disused spaces whilst one pair was made up of two self-portraits. Of key interest to Young were the imagined connections between the paired images that were unavoidably generated in the minds of the viewers.

By logical extension, Young has become interested in the ability of a single image to achieve the same outcome. The images in *Five* (2008-2012) stand alone and all of them present an interior view of a disused space. Young quotes Stephen Shore as a significant influence and his images of these spaces reveal the same sort of disintegration and accretion as do Shore's images of the architecture and landscapes he encountered on his American and Canadian "road trips" in the 1970s. And, like Shore, whilst many of the images in *Five* contain chairs or signage, Young's series are not typological. *Five* is not a series of portraits of certain types of objects and nor is it a series of disused spaces per se.

Young presents the spaces as he finds them and he is utterly genuine in his methodology. He identifies empty buildings, gains formal access and then spends time in the space, consciously sensing the dim, quiet interior. Slowly, he develops a personal understanding of the nature or character of the space. He then

seeks out compositions of found objects and architectural elements that enable him to articulate his experience of the space. But his goal is not to simply portray this experience, it is to present us with an image that evokes our own memories or associations of similar spaces or objects. The composition must result in an ambiguity that disallows the image a documentary role and, instead, makes our own experiences play a dominant part in our understanding of the image.

To achieve this, there must be a perfect balance between anonymity and familiarity in the spaces and the objects that Young presents. He does not wish us to identify the space or to be able to immediately understand it and thereby simply observe it. Instead he wants us to find that our own associations are actually his subject matter. He hopes that a chair in an image will become "a Chair with a capital C", one upon which we immediately scribe our own thoughts.

Young's use of found compositions is, in some ways, akin to the use of found objects in sculptural assemblage. These materials are pre-loaded with their histories and meanings and, unless their role in a work is documentary, the artist usually seeks to facilitate the objects' transcendence beyond their original function so that they may elicit other thoughts.

Young is keen to avoid the elements and objects in his photographs being so dominant that the formal qualities of the photograph are overlooked. The ordinariness of the elements enables the "rightness" of considered proportions, geometric shape, balance and colour to be noticed. Whilst highly detailed, he deliberately avoids the seductiveness of spectacle and endeavours to permit the photograph itself to be experienced. His large prints enable the viewer to be enveloped by the work and to experience it viscerally as well as visually without being overwhelmed by its size or detail.

It seems that Young's practice is characterised by exacting balance. Not only does he strive to achieve an equilibrium between us observing the elements within the image and experiencing the photograph, he seeks to find the perfect balance between the image providing and eliciting information and therefore the roles played by it and ourselves in the production of meaning.