



Noi Fuhrer - a Flash at Midday

23 April - 4 June 2022

By Louisa Elderton

Memory is always incomplete, always imperfect, always falling into ruin; the ruins themselves, like other traces, are treasures: our links to what came before, our guide to situating ourselves in a landscape of time.

–Rebecca Solnit, *The Ruins of Memory* (2007)¹

Noi Fuhrer's images stay with us. Mark our retinas. Bury into our brains. This, in part, is because of their everydayness - seeming normality tinged with a sense of oddity or tension - and in part because of their narrative undertones. Her drawings speak to stylised modes of storytelling that have a black-and-white filmic quality, their scale sometimes even suggestive of the cinema screen. Take, for example, the long, horizontal format of *The Drive Back* (2022), within which a rear-view mirror in the centre of the composition meets the viewer at eye level. A person is reflected at more or less the same size as us. We are at once voyeurs staring down the open road and participants in the image, pulled into its fold and directly implicated by this reflection. The effect is one of strange intimacy, the feeling of being allowed to see through someone else's eyes, of being simultaneously inside and outside of the subject.

The long drive home, her head slumped back, neck craned, not for a better viewpoint but to finally find some rest. In the rear-view mirror she looks peaceful, though it's hard to say if behind her closed eyelids she has drifted into sleep or just found a way to be somewhere else, to be alone. Outside, the weather speaks to the mood that lingers in here, a tense moment slicing through the landscape. The trees, the trees; the clouds, the clouds. White lines, broken, marking the road. Cat eyes studding the tarmac, reflecting the day's dimming light, blurred by the rain. He sits next to her, stiff, staring straight ahead. Yet I can see from the angle of his ear that he's simply poised in wait, ready for the next round, wherever that may lead us...

How to record a disappearing world? How to piece together the splinters of time's passing? How to capture the glitches of not quite recalling what, when, why - the white space surrounding recollection?

Photography is often Fuhrer's starting point. She tries to capture unexpected moments that strike her, although she immediately experiences an inherent failure in using photography as her tool: always a moment too late. The photos become guides to recreate a sense of what was. Re-framing the fragment. Injecting it with interpretation. Biting into the experience. In her book *On Photography*, Susan Sontag describes how, "A photograph is only a fragment, and with the passage of time its moorings come unstuck. It drifts away into a soft abstract pastness, open to any kind of reading..."² The nebulous shapes that constitute Fuhrer's fragments, hazy curves within which her images come to life, become windows into this soft abstract pastness, creating a border between realism and some kind of dreamscape; photography acting not as an inventory of time but a means of opening a space somewhere else, amidst memory and imagination (the imagined memory).

Summer, finally, despite this dense blanket of grey. The sun, I suppose, is somewhere else, still searching us out. Gazing at the barrenness through the curved aeroplane window, waiting to rise into the blue, I see some kind of strangeness. A scuffle. I'm squinting now, straining to see into the cockpit. Two raised arms. Black ties flowing like veins from their necks. All of a sudden light bursts through, abruptly blinding me as it glints off the plane's smooth white shell, which is still moving, now casting a thick shadow. By the time the slashes of sun bleaching fade from my eyes, we're already in the sky, everything else submerged beneath a membrane of clouds.

Interested in how we process and understand forms, Fuhrer engages with aspects of cognitive science that examine how the brain interprets forms as lines and contours, which essentially become markers of difference. Fuhrer's technique of applying charcoal to paper purposefully uses an alternative logic, avoiding outlines to depict forms through differently shaded *surfaces* instead. She says, "It's a more direct way of forming an image, it's all about light and shade,"³ continuing, "I'm creating an image of the world that is more mechanical than human."⁴ Rather than drawing outlines, she formulates an unabating system of repeatedly sketching lines in one direction onto the sheet, creating areas of variable light and shade that ultimately constitute an image. The effect brings its own texture: an almost veil-like mist or vapour behind which the image forms, or the frottage of a rough surface rubbing through from beneath. Either way, a boundary of sorts is suggested, a literal *drawing out* that creates a sense of inside and outside, interior and exterior, or perhaps even: past and present.

Considered in relation to film or photography, mediums that capture time, Fuhrer's mode of pictorial representation records a kind of a ghost-like unreality, or an experience of psychological unease perhaps. Simone Weil's assessment of time in *Gravity and Grace* comes to mind: "We are really bound by unreal chains. Time which is unreal casts over all things including ourselves a veil of unreality. ... We must get rid of the illusion of possessing time."⁵ Weil saw time as something to which we submitted, despite it only existing within the limits of the present. She said it is only our submission that really exists, creating within us a deceptive fog, submerging perception into imagination. Fuhrer's drawings offer us something similar, treading a borderline of oddity while attempting to delimit reality.

Sometimes she imagined herself stopping, solidifying, turning into stone. She: caryatid. How tired she was of holding everything, of bearing life's load. If she were up there with them, looking down, at least things might seem more godly. The sun, so close, warming her cold, hard skin. The world spread out before her as a stage. She would shout down to them, "dance!" and they would oblige, gracefully moving together, tracing circles in the earth with their feet.

Winking at Walter Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Fuhrer's methodical markings and interest in form speak to the idea of the "aura" of the work of art vs. the camera's ability to capture reality. Indeed, the title of this exhibition, *a Flash at Midday*, conjures the instant when the camera exposes the world to its abrupt light in a will to reproduce that moment. Benjamin says, "the eye perceives more swiftly than the hand can draw,"⁶ continuing: "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space."⁷ With her approach to drawing, Fuhrer is interested in precisely this question of time and space and in where (or if?) such "presence" really exists; how to shape it, hold it, *feel it* through the evocative power of charcoal.

In the same way that an artist such as Odilon Redon with his charcoal drawing *Eye-Balloon* (1878) – a work that Fuhrer cites as having influenced her⁸ – describes floating above the physical world to consider what lies beyond, so Fuhrer's own drawings make evident what Redon called "the logic of the visible at the service of the invisible."⁹ The atmosphere of Fuhrer's works is what really stays with us, the ominous nebulosity of her forms linking materiality with a certain mood, a strangeness that can only be felt; for what may or may not have *actually* happened lies somewhere else, beyond view, in another landscape of time.

Louisa Elderton is a writer and editor living in Berlin.

1 Rebecca Solnit, "The Ruins of Memory," in *Ruins*, ed. Brian Dillon (London and Cambridge, MA: Whitechapel Gallery/The MIT Press, 2011), p. 151.

2 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 71.

3 Author interviewing the artist at her studio in Kreuzberg, Berlin, April 9, 2022.

4 Email correspondence between the author and artist, April 20, 2022.

5 Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2002), pp. 52-54.

6 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969): <https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/benjamin.pdf> (accessed April 18, 2022), pp. 2-3.

7 Ibid.

8 Interview (see note 3).

9 "Odilon Redon, *Eye-Balloon* (*Œil-ballon*), 1878," MoMA (website), <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/33013> (accessed April 19, 2022).

Noi Fuhrer (born 1987 in Tel Aviv) lives in Berlin.

Fuhrer studied at Goldsmiths University, London, and Hochschule für Bildende Künste, Hamburg, with Andreas Slominski.

Her works have been shown in exhibitions at Dzialdov, Berlin, Art and Talking, Berlin, The Artists' Studios, Tel Aviv, and Rosenfeld Gallery, Tel Aviv.

Galerie Thomas Fischer

Mulackstr. 14

10119 Berlin +49 30 74 78 03 85

mail@galeriethomasfischer.de

