

Autonomie

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Gabie Strong, *Still Life (C-IED training center, Twentynine Palms Marine Base, Twentynine Palms, California)*, 2010-2011. Digital pigment print.

Gabie Strong: The Exegesis of Entropy

Gabie Strong's work has a breadth and range that is hard to summarize in a few short sentences. Over the course of the last decade she has produced a large body of photographic works that challenge the unconscious acceptance of military motifs as a naturalized part of the American landscape, she has been engaged in rethinking critical issues around architecture and architecture education, and she has expanded the boundaries of radical performance/sound art with the collective Lady Noise. However, in her most recent body of photographs Strong has achieved something that is unique even within her own oeuvre, she has managed to make the post-urban landscape into a image of socio-psychological necessity. Her treatment of the everyday, the banal and even the abstract, have come to stand in for what Slavoj Žižek sees as the crisis of western culture — an inability to properly mourn the west as an Empire in decline. Strong's subtle cartographies of texture and place, image and imagination, mythos and materiality, all contribute to creating a sense of psychological unease around zones of trespass and operational congress. But what is especially uncanny about her imagery is how such places can be made to seem inviting, natural, or even quite accessible.

By courting a kind of productive ambiguity, her discrete topologies of the denatured landscape work to dismantle the binaries of urban/rural, realism/abstraction and poetic/documentary forms. Playing with a sense of contradictory fictions and real simulations,

Strong's investment in place can only be described as a complex topology of tropes that resist easy identification. Her specific brand of iconography resonates with the speculative fictions of Octavia Butler and Philip K. Dick while picking up different theoretical concerns from Henri Lefebvre, de Certeau and Foucault. Everywhere in Strong's work, we can see intangible allusions to the psychodynamics of power and space; conflict and place; action and trace.

Her overture is a kind of exploration of limited places of access that are supposed to safeguard cultural traditions, constitutional promises and the security of the nation state. And yet, in Strong's work, they produce a palpable sense of melancholia, a tinge of regret and loss, and even a moment of thoughtful repose that issues from the failures of American exceptionalism. While Strong's work always presents us with a series of furtive pictures of the present, it is much more likely that we are looking back on pictures that are 'about' the past set in the present tense — images birthed ex nihilo from the futurity of a world gone awry. This kind of recursive gesture mirrors the writings of the French philosopher Paul Virilio and the retro-futurism of texts like *Pure War* — where destruction by automation and the drive toward automaton consciousness are envisioned as the final destination of instrumental rationality.

Strong's work is perhaps the first step in helping us toward understanding the conflicted and interlocking crisis's we face today — a photographic Kubler-Ross method of negotiating the de-militarized landscape and its various forms of capture and conscription. The question is whether or not we will have the wear-with-all to work through the implications of Strong's pictures — to confront the five stages of mourning that are so intimately tied to a military-industrial-complex driven by means rather than ends. This is perhaps what is captured by the title, the Exegesis of Entropy — our common need to resist the forms of social control all around us that have gotten out of control — the endemic acceleration of perpetual catastrophe: economic, militaristic, social, geopolitical, etc. Such a project highlights the conflicted status of the contemporary moment as well as providing a critical model for understanding the power of documentary fictions.

Bio: Gabie Strong received her B.A. in Art from UCLA in 1993, and completed graduate work in both architecture and studio art, earning an M. Arch from SCI-Arc in 2006 and an M.F.A. in Studio Art from UC Irvine in 2008. She has received commissions for sound pieces and visual art from the University of California Institute for Research in the Arts, the Barbara and Art Culver Center for the Arts, and is a 2011 CCI ARC grant award recipient. Strong's work has been exhibited at Pitzer Art Galleries, University Art Gallery at UC Irvine, LA><Art, Acuna Hanson, Gallery Five Thirty Three, and the Torrance Art Museum. She has performed at venues including the UCR Barbara and Art Culver Center of the Arts, Human Resources, LACE, 2011 Art Los Angeles Contemporary Fair, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Las Cienegas Projects, and the MAK Center for Art and Architecture.

Grant Vetter, Director
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