Mirjam Kooiman, curator at Foam Museum
FOAM #49 «Back to the Future», 2018
Douglas Mandry

Unseen Sights

Prior to the invention of photography in 1839, the world had never been so realistically depicted in images. No other medium could render people, shapes and scenes in such exquisite detail. And yet it would fail to document the colors of reality, creating a world in black and white. In an attempt to create images seemingly more realistic, photographers and artists would hand-color monochrome photographs using substances ranging from water colors and oil to chalk and crayon.

About four years ago, photographer Douglas Mandry travelled through Turkey. He photographed several landscapes without a direct purpose - only about a year later did he return to his negatives. Mandry started to reconstruct the images of the places that he had visited. He colored and collaged his monochrome pictures on the basis of his own faded memories and by visually interpreting texts on these sites written by archaeologists. In the nineteenth century, the sites he had documented were subjected to archaeological research; now, their excavated histories have turned these places into touristic sites of consumption. Mandry however, avoids any sign of human presence in his images, as if returning to an Arcadian ideal of nature untouched by human mankind.

Interested in the gap between reality and representation, Mandry drew inspiration from orientalist picture postcards in old magazines of Oriental landscapes. The picture postcard became a popular way to communicate in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, mostly depicting monuments, landscapes, and native « Others ». It appeared at the emergence of mass tourism and was a great way to advertise a place. Landscape

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photographs would therefore often be enhanced by means of retouching and coloring to promote a place - the more exotic, the better. On the one hand, photographic depictions of the Orient gave people direct realistic impressios of the Middle East previously reserved for elitist salons where painters would present their Orientalist impressions to a very selective audience. On the other hand, the popularity of image colorization to heighten the photograph's realism also added a painterly layer - literally and figuratively speaking - that encouraged an artful effect over graphic documentation.

In his series Unseen Sights, Douglas Mandry does not so much as add reality to his landscape photographs by coloring them, but rather deconstructs it by emphasizing the process of creation. Mandry colors his landscapes and adds new layers to the picture plane on the basis of his memory, like a painter who deliberately turns his sketch of a place into a painting in his studio. Mandry's landscapes become otherworldly sites, in which the actual location where he made the initial photograph seems to be of no importance anymore. In a way, Mandry's « sights » could be related to Edward Said's notion of imagined geographies. Much of how we relate to time and space is poetic; our sense of self in relation to places and historical time is often based more on emotional associations than on rational sense. Looking at how we view a place, is ultimately about who is looking. Consequently, any meaning assigned to a landscape is essentially always a human interpretation. The landscapes processed by Mandry are rather documentations of his memory rather than a documentation of a place.

Mandry's practice, in a sense, is a direct response to the digitalization of photography and the technological accelerations

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that came along with it. Always shooting his initial images in analogue, all of Mandry's interventions in the image are done by hand, through the application of different historic photographic processes or by physically cutting and pasting. However dreamy the end result may be, the processing of the image is always made visible, perhaps in that sense creating a more truthful image than any other we encounter in this day and age of Photoshop.