

The city of Perth has a relatively short history in terms of other cities around the world; it has also undergone a number of transformations and changes through its time. The constant changing of Perth city has turned the city into a space of which habitual routine is carried out and many other important spaces, and objects of the city have become over looked and mundane. These spaces and objects are part of systems that support urban living, such as; lighting, electricity and plumbing, these systems show engineering marvel, allowing us to live in a fabricated environment yet they have become so commonplace and part of our everyday that they are overlooked and forgotten. Perth has become a place of disengagement. It is through a practice of walking and photography that I tackle this issue of disengagement with Perth. I photograph the objects and spaces that make up the support systems of the city, to show the wonder and aesthetics that are present within them. The use of photography is thus employed as a method of re-engagement, it present the objects truthfully, yet at the same time makes apparent aesthetics inherent within the space. The inherent aesthetics can change the reading of an object, through the simple act of framing through the camera lens allowing a re-presentation of these objects in a way that can shift perception, and change dominant pre-conceptions about these objects and spaces. From the photographs we can begin to appreciate a city which has become mundane and overlooked, starting a new aesthetic engagement with Perth.

The city is a site for daily routine, it is a fabricated environment made up of a number of systems. It is through the daily routine and constant re-building and change that the engineering marvel of the city has become absorbed into the mundanity of the everyday, as such Perth city tends to not be engaged with. This can be due to the constant re-building that occurs within Perth. Through the 1960's Perth had a boom in economy, which brought about a major re-building and expansion of the city itself (MacCallum, personal communication July 30, 2012). The 1980's brought about another significant period of change and renewal of the city with many building being pulled down and rebuilt, then in recent times 2000 onwards Perth has had flourished due to another economic boom (MacCallum, personal communication July 30, 2012). The re-building process of Perth has produced buildings that are purpose built; they support daily routine and functionality.

The production of buildings and an environment that facilitates daily activities, results in a space that is used, as opposed to an environment in which is engage with. Perth is a space

for daily activities to occur; these daily activities can consume how we engage with a space, to the point where disengagement occurs. Aesthetics engage our visual sense, and it could be said the aesthetics of Perth city are hidden behind the excitement or need for daily routine. It is through the camera, a device of framing, that a new appreciation for the inherent aesthetics of the city can be appreciated.

Photography is seen to be the method of the most truthful capture. Photography gives validity to what we experience and as a result give us an indication of what we should look at and consider. Susan Sontag states: 'photographs alter and enlarge our notions of what is worth looking at and what we have a right to observe' (1977, p.3). Sontag speaks here of the ability photos have to inform and give us an experience, she touches on the power that is contained within the ability to capture an image, a moment, a representation. 'To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge – and, therefore, like power' (Sontag, 1977, p.3). The photograph captures and appropriates something that has existed in the world at a given time (Sontag, 1977) yet holds an inherent style and bias of the photographer.

When using the camera, there a number of decisions to make; from the composition of the subject to the background, the lighting, the contrast and brightness, shutter speed, iso, etc: but how are these decisions made? 'Even when photographers are most concerned with mirroring reality, they are still haunted by tacit imperatives of taste and conscience' (Sontag, 1977, p.6). Our decisions are made by a learnt knowledge, as well as a mimicking of images viewed, as such photographs are not entirely a capture of reality but more a representation of the subject being photographed. 'In deciding how a picture should look, in preferring one exposure to another, photographers are always imposing standards on their subjects. Although there is a sense in which the camera does indeed capture reality, not just interpret it, photographs are as much an interpretation of the world as paintings and drawings are' (Sontag, 1977, p.6). Sontag shows us that the act of taking a photograph is by no real means capturing reality; we are merely capturing a mediated version of reality. It is however this mediation that photography allows that can be used to facilitate a feeling of wonder with the subject captured.

Through capturing with a camera we are making a conscious engagement with the subject. 'Photography has become one of the principle devices for experiencing something, for giving an appearance of participation' (Sontag, 1977, p.10). What a photograph then hopes to achieve is to share this connection with others to let them see and more importantly feel what the photographer captured in this moment and why. The photograph is an effort to connect the photographer with the viewer. The photographer is a lone wolf scavenging daily life, looking for the moment of wonder, the moment when a picture of great visual charge or intrigue appears to them and they can see it rendered in the photographic frame (Cotton, 2004). 'Attention is paid here to the degree to which the focus has been *preconceived* by the photographer, a strategy designed not only to alter the way we think about our physical and social world but also to take that world into extraordinary dimensions' (Cotton, 2004, p.8). From this strategy we can see the role that photography has, not only within an arts context but also in its use for presenting new ways of perceiving everyday life - and aspects of it.

Through the use of the photographic lens, my practice aims capture the everyday of Perth city, for aesthetic reconsideration, in order to facilitate a re-engagement with the city from ordinary aspects of daily life that are captured in an unexpected way. These unobserved aspects that are captured by the lens, (a controlled way of framing the world), are then re-presented so that they are viewed in a way that elevates them from their ordinary perception when encountered in the world. They are captured through a filter of other mediums aesthetics. Their specific locational indicators and function, is removed to facilitate a re-appreciation of them on an aesthetic and experiential level. I photograph objects that are essential to living, in an effort to bring about heightened aesthetic awareness to them, and to show the sense of wonder they can contain when framed in a particular way. Removing these objects from their original setting or framing them in a new way brings, about a new awareness to them, while still displaying the wonder that can be found within the city of Perth.

The use of the camera for this practice is as a paint brush is to a painter, it is a tool for framing, creating compositions, capturing textures, while also abstracting and representing that which is found in the everyday. Although the camera captures an interpretation of the real object, the photograph still captures as much truthfulness as possible. The idea of capturing with truthfulness, in terms of this practice, is that the only editing that can be done

is through the camera itself, in the moment the photograph is taken. The practice follows this idea of the truthful capture by creating photos that are physically captured through the camera on location, the scene and objects within it cannot be altered, and neither can the photo post shooting, this gives an authenticity to the image. 'In another version of its utility, the camera record justifies. A photograph passes for incontrovertible proof that a given thing happened. The picture may distort; but there is always a presumption that something exists, or did exist, which is like what's in the picture' (Sontag, 1977, p.6), it is from this idea that the removal of post-production, and pre-production editing becomes key, despite Sontag arguing that the image may distort I feel that removing intended distortions, such as; Photoshop or studio lighting further solidifies that the object and scene within the photograph does exist somewhere in urban Perth.

The practice primarily deals with capturing with truthfulness; however, there is still an amount of distortion that occurs with the photographs produced. The photographs lend their aesthetics from other mediums, making the viewer have to re-look and reconsider if what they are looking at is a photograph or something else. The primary aesthetics borrowed are the painterly and the cinematic with a third set of aesthetics being utilitarian, that is they act almost as a photographic 'ready-made'. The first medium aesthetic used is the painterly. The painterly aesthetic is present in images that display high amounts of texture, subtle colour gradient and soft lighting (Figure 1). The composition of these photos resembles that of abstract paintings, further showing the use of the painterly aesthetic. The elements of these photos that place it within a painterly aesthetic are all present in the environment in which it was taken. There is no post-production editing to the images to enhance any element; these objects and elements can be seen in Perth, if the viewer takes the time to engage with their surroundings. This is the first of three medium aesthetics that is used within this practice as a method of re-engagement.

The cinematic has mainly been depicted through the use of dramatic lighting, which is a major factor in creating the aesthetic of a cinematic photo (Figure 2). With the practice being grounded in an idea of the truthful capture it is key to find areas of dynamic lighting, be it from the sun or a light source already present (no additional stage lighting, again this is important to the authenticity of the image and what is being portrayed) this dramatic lighting creates a filmic or cinematic quality to the photographs. By putting a number of images

together, the cinematic aesthetic is further implemented through a narrative reading of images that are exhibited alongside each other (Figure 3). As cinema is strictly speaking a narrative based medium, by putting a number of images together that use cinematic aesthetics, a narrative is constructed about the relationship between these objects and spaces. Through careful composition choices as well as formal element choices the images taken tend to take on an aesthetic of other mediums or in some cases purely presenting the composition thus creating a further experiential and re-presented view of these banal objects of the everyday city.

The utilitarian approach for image production is slightly different to that of the previous two methods. This method aims not to present the objects through another aesthetic but instead presents the object itself first and foremost (Figure 4). By photographing the object in such a way that it is obvious from a first glance, gives this method of image creation a requirement that the viewer stops and appreciate the subtleties that are present within the space and object. When these images are presented alongside the images that use other mediums aesthetics, the intrigue of what these particular images are presenting beyond that of the object itself becomes the space of intrigue and wonder, while still drawing the viewer's attention to an object and space that is overlooked within the city of Perth.

The city of Perth is a space of constant change, and re-newel. The city facilitates our daily activities but this creates a lack of engagement within the city towards the city environment. It is however through photography, a method of framing, as well as a method of revaluing that a re-engagement with a forgotten city can create. When photography is used to mimic other artistic mediums, such as; painting and film, the photograph is at the will of the artist's vision and hand, as such it can be used to evoke or draw attention to objects and emotions we would not normally associate with certain objects or places. It is from this space of photography as art that photography has its ability to re-present as a means for re-engaging with the unnoticed components of Perth.

## Figures

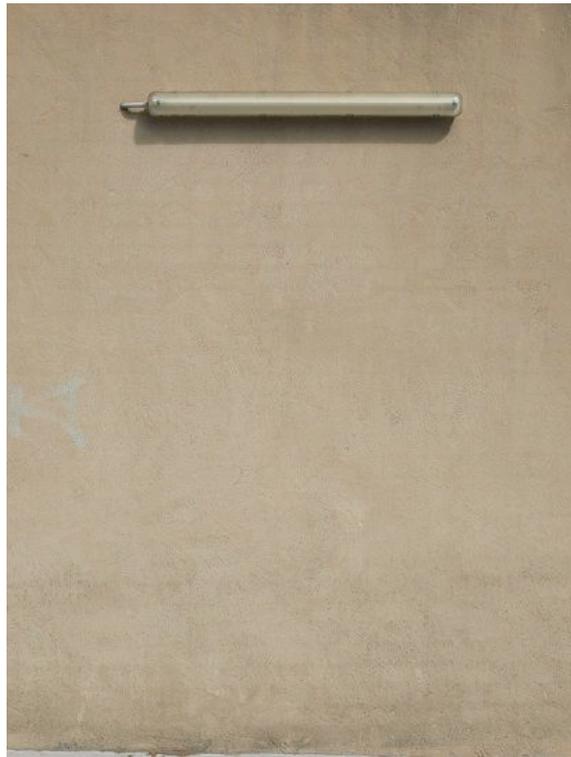


Figure 1: *Untitled (fluorescent light)*, 2011, digital print on rag paper, 1200x1050mm.

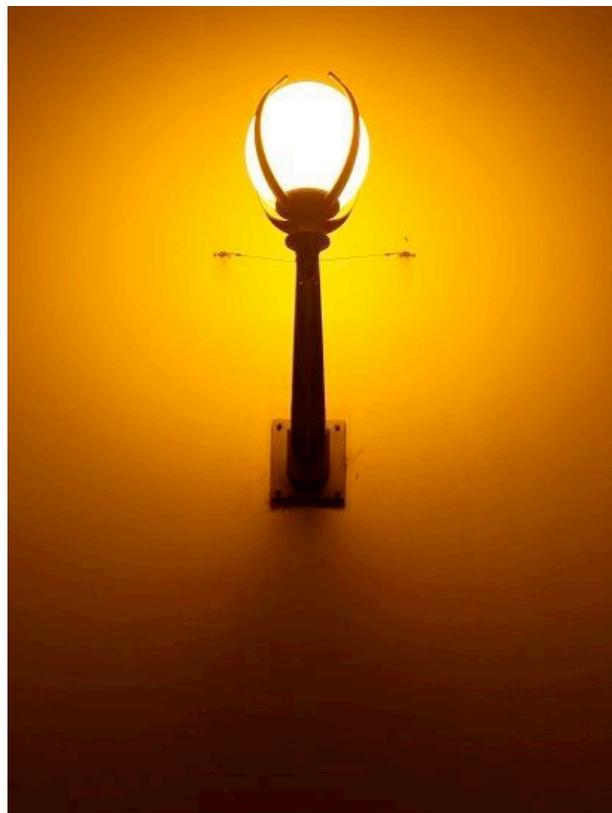


Figure 2: *Untitled*, 2012, digital print on rag paper, 1200x1050mm.



Figure 3: *Untitled (green series)*, 2011, digital prints on rag paper, installation shot.



Figure 4: *Untitled*, 2011, digital print on rag paper, 1200x1050mm.

## **Bibliography**

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