

***Gazed and Confused***  
**An Exhibition in Two Parts**  
**Exhibition Text by Leila Peacock**

Chapter 1: 21.01.22 – 05.03.22

Opening: 21.01.22 from 18:00 – 21:00

Alvin Baltrop, John Berger, Samuel Haitz, Deborah Joyce Holman and Ursula Sulser

I to Eye: Some thoughts on looking.

"I hope you will consider what I arrange, but be skeptical of it". So ends the first episode of *Ways of Seeing*, the BBC's radical series on art first broadcast in 1972 and presented by a lustrous-haired young Berger in a rather questionable shirt. Radical because it sought to expose the hidden ideologies in visual imagery before Cultural Studies was even a real subject. Radical because it wanted to challenge the authoritative history of art with new terms and concepts, but also because it asked its viewers to rethink the very ways we look at looking.

*The boys watch the girls while the girls watch the boys who watch the girls go by.*

In the second episode Berger introduced the, then novel, idea of the 'male gaze' which he applies both to the history of Western painting and the popular image culture of the 70s. He identifies the dynamic whereby "men look at women and women watch themselves being looked at" and how this has invariably damaged female subjectivity to the point that a woman is "almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself". A dynamic that could be applied to any configuration of looker and looked-at. Now each of us has the opportunity to occupy both sides of this dynamic, as a culture we have become a confusing mix of both salacious and self-aware.

*Can't take my eyes off of you*

In the lexicon of looking 'the gaze' is a slippery verbal attempt to capture something both obvious and elusive, bringing together a messy mix of conscious intentions and unconscious desires but also unconscious intentions and conscious desires as is the way with anything that derives its impetus from those murky psycho-sexual waters of the erotic. It raises uncomfortable questions around complicity, whose enjoying what and why, in the attempt to disentangle the mess of desire and power and exploitation that divides the gazers and the gazed-upon and those not seen at all. The word 'gaze' is of obliquely ancient origin, it is a word that is pleasurable to speak aloud, it slips between teeth and tongue with a suggestive buzz. No doubt this is onomatopoeically indivisible from the lascivious pleasure it implies: the pleasure of looking (scopophilia), of gazing upon a gorgeous thing, while also perhaps enjoying, the subjugation of the gazed upon. The gazed upon also deriving an uneasy self-affirmation as the passive object of desire.

*Do you see what I see?*

There are many ways of seeing, and there have been many ways to look at looking. The eye is not an obvious organ. Lucretius laid out a theory of atom-thin and lightning-fast images that stream from the surfaces of solid objects and enter the eyes. In this sense it is the eye that is penetrated by what it looks upon. How different from this 'gaze' that Berger speaks of where the eye almost licks the looked-at with lecherous non-consensual pleasure. In the 17th century with the advent of the study optics and the refinement of perspective drawing seeing was re-conceived. Descartes understood that the eye collects 'sense data' but it is the brain that processes that information into the images we see. Seeing and knowing were understood to be part of the same act, you know a thing because you see it, but you see it because you know it, which affects what and how you see it. This in turn gave an identity to look-

