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Tuesday - Saturday 12-6pm

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Light-Likeness-Inachus
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Of art it may be claimed that it transforms each shape at all points of the visible surface into an eye.
— Hegel, *Lectures on Aesthetics*

In its glass display case the specimen is visible from all sides; the eye, or the camera, chooses from a spread of available vantage points a sequence of perspectives framed by the transparent box and its wooden supports. The specimen is called Kallima inachus, or the orange oakleaf, or Indian oakleaf, or dead leaf. The wings are closed, revealing their cryptic undersides, a perfect imitation of a dead oak leaf — the kind of oaks found in the East, in places like India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, China, Thailand, Laos, Taiwan, Vietnam. Even the blemishes caused by wind, weather, the occasional nibble, are faithfully recorded on the surface of the dissembling wing. The insect looks like a closed book, a map, a papyrus. If it were to open its wings, we would see iridescent blues and orange, black at the apex, and on each wing two white oculi staring back. But the wings are closed.

Viewed from above we see Kallima inachus grouped with other mimetic arthropods, a loose grid of sweepings from the forest floor, the game given away by the occasional antennae or segmented leg. The butterfly that was like a leaf is now like the insect that is like a twig. We are encouraged to compare and contrast, to find the precise slot for each specimen in the system of nature. In fact, the whole thing is like a diagram, a page out of a book. With their orchestrated rigidity and extended antennae, we might be tempted to say these are dead creatures imitating live ones. But they do not flutter, and it would be more accurate to say that they imitate a representation. In being made image-like, the insect is withdrawn from the organic processes of growth and decay, of wet and dry seasons, drawn instead into the glacial stillness, the cold confusion, of the museum display, to be placed alongside like.

The human eye has many defenses against the light which seeks to dazzle it. The lid may close, the pupil contract. The light that pools around the ocular bowl is gathered into an image focused on the retinal surface. Pictures, especially those that take their cue from the lens, pick up from here, schematizing space. Perspectival views dramatize the distance between the eye and what it sees. Contact with light is tamed through the separation of the “I” who sees and the “It” that is seen. But, the more singular and focused the line of sight, the more persistent the prickling on the back of the neck; the more inevitable the sensation that the seer is themselves the object of an unknown, and unknowable, gaze. Just as the object is both the tamed target of vision and an unknowable diffuse other, so the subject is split between the position of seer and seen. These are the rules of desire: the subject cannot make direct contact with its object. Every encounter is a missed encounter. The direct touch, so feared, so ably defended against, is also the object of intense longing. Only in the play of

oblique glances can this dialectic of desire unfold.

Despite its resemblance to a filmed scene, the display case, with its reflective glass and carefully labelled arthropods, appears as image by virtue of a rendering equation, not a camera. This imaging technique captures light through an algorithm that simulates photons passing through a defined space and scattering off various types of surfaces. In a technical sense, it is the light, and not the object, that is mimicked. Nearby, we see slices of this rendering, transferred to slide film and projected on to a wall. The scorching light of the projector bulb pools below the slide carriage, spilling through cracks in its casing. Light and image appear together.