

Empty Gallery
3 Yue Fung Street
18th & 19th Floor
Tin Wan, Hong Kong

Reoccurring Afterlife

Diane Severin Nguyen

December 15, 2019 – February 1, 2020

Empty Gallery is pleased to present *Reoccurring Afterlife*, Diane Severin Nguyen's first solo exhibition in Hong Kong. While photography as discipline has historically been fixated on the reification, segregation, and classification of life, Nguyen's practice attempts to circumvent and destabilize this history — proposing a speculative mode of photographic engagement in which the naturalized distinctions between subject/object, viewer/viewed, and camera/photographer are temporarily suspended within the slippery multiplicity of a pre-linguistic reality.

Nguyen's photographs often depart from arrangements of found materials, both natural and synthetic, which she manipulates in the studio. These promiscuous assemblages are vitalized by elemental forces such as fire, moisture, and air as well as the transformative alchemy of lens and sensor. Nguyen attempts to capture the precarity and irreversibility of these corporeal fusions, encapsulating the perpetual oscillation between material states within the space of the photograph. However, this is a pursuit which can only provoke an awareness of loss. For Nguyen, the sovereignty of the subject is nothing more than a pragmatic fiction, one which may allow us to effectively manipulate reality, but at the cost of severing ourselves from a multitude of potential worlds. This originary loss fuels a sense of trauma, which photography compulsively reenacts in its quest to render the concrete moment in an eternal form.

Created over the course of a two-month residency in Hong Kong, the works on view in *Reoccurring Afterlife* obliquely reflect the spatial, material, and psychological tensions which traverse the body of the city, whilst also avoiding generic notions of site-specificity. These photographs reference the everyday hues, textures, and sensations which comprise the collective experience of the city; functioning simultaneously as intimate windows into the affective fabric of the island and as self-recursive meditations on the nature of the medium.

Manifesting a violent and unresolved hybridity, the works in *Reoccurring Afterlife* often seem to depict unstable perforations, meshes, or openings. They are collectively animated not so much by a fragile balance as by a finely wrought tension between stasis and movement; a sense of lurking entropy or imminent collapse. However, this chance of collapse itself bears witness to the necessity of alternate modes of perception — the existence of speculative utopias which Nguyen sees as immanent to both the technology of image-making and the structure of human perception. Her photographs can thus be seen as punctures within the assumed harmony of the everyday; unstable portals deforming the airless spaces of logocentrism.

About Diane Severin Nguyen

Diane Severin Nguyen is an artist who lives and works between Los Angeles and New York. Most recently, Nguyen exhibited a solo show in Los Angeles at Bad Reputation, and was part of two-person exhibitions at Bureau, New York, and Exo Exo, Paris. She completed her MFA at Bard College in 2019.