

Galerie Gisela Capitain is delighted to present its seventh exhibition with the american artist Zoe Leonard. In the presented group of works from 2016, themes of dislocation, statelessness and alienation are explored as both personal experiences and social conditions.

1952 or 1953 is the first work the viewer encounters in Zoe Leonard's exhibition *Misia, Postwar*. It is a photograph of a photograph that shows a hesitantly smiling young woman in front of a map of Europe. Leonard photographed the black-and-white portrait from—as the title says—1952 or 1953 with a disproportionately wide, gray border, which lends a lost appearance to the likeness of the elegant, melancholic-looking woman.

1952 or 1953 serves as an introduction to the themes of Leonard's new series of works, which features family snapshots of women in the postwar era who are in the transitory process of a years-long journey. The women are depicted traveling by ship on the water, or walking in urban or seemingly neorealist, undefined surroundings. The presumed destination of this journey, which began in Europe, is revealed in the works *New York Harbor I* and *New York Harbor II*, which are installed on the rear walls of the gallery's most spacious room. Both the subject matter of the snapshots and the way they are photographed by Zoe Leonard, with generous framing and indeterminate backgrounds, convey a state of a lack of place, dislocation, restlessness, loneliness, and uncertainty.

This room includes a sculpture entitled *How to Make Good Pictures*. The sculpture, consisting of stacks of books arranged in a row, is composed of a number of successive editions of a manual for amateur photographers which the artist collected, arranged by year. Starting with the years leading to World War II, the work continues through the postwar years and into the late 1990s. The sculpture forms a kind of timeline for the show, drawing a connection between the work on the walls and the rise of amateur photography. Thus, the sculpture tracks the development of a (self-)representation through photography, which continues into the present day with smartphone snapshots and their presentation on Instagram.

The expectations that—then as now—are aroused by these idealized portrayals contrast with reality. The snapshots that Zoe Leonard shows us seem like failed attempts to meet these expectations. The scenery in *New York Harbor I* and *II* is easily recognizable: the skyline of New York and the iconic Statue of Liberty, viewed from the water, are visible on the horizon. However, the person portrayed is shown as either a dark shadow against the light or standing awkwardly in the wind with eyes closed. Moreover, the women in the snapshots, do not exude confidence and joy; but rather, their body language suggests discomfort and uncertainty. With her works, Leonard draws attention to the

discrepancy between learned expectations and experienced reality. At the same time, she questions the portrayal of history, especially the representation of history in the form of photography and photography's claim of serving as historical evidence. While Leonard presents the photographs to the observer in their quality as objects, with creases, tears, reflections, and shadows, she draws attention to the medium itself and its possibilities of representing history. The woman shown in the four-part work *Misia, Postwar* is barely recognizable due to a reflection. Leonard photographed the same snapshot several times, each time from a slightly different perspective. Depending on the position of the viewer, parts of the image become visible or invisible. Leonard thus refers to our individual view of history and to photography as a complex subjective process rather than a simple exchange of information.

The source material for this body of work is the artists' own family photographs, which depict members of her family, displaced by World War II, as they travel from place to place as stateless people during the postwar years until they eventually emigrated to the United States. Leonard's exploration opens up an engagement with our current global political situation and on the urgent questions of dislocation, uprootment, nationality, belonging and identity.

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