

Will Nolan – Catalogue Essay

'Photography is a secret about a secret. The more it tells you the less you know.'

– Diane Arbus

Photography cannot be doubted for its great power in documenting and redefining the way we see ourselves. From fine art and commercial photography to snapshots taken with mobile cameras, the proliferation of photography as a way of coming to terms with the world around us is an undeniable part of the modern conscience. For Will Nolan, however, the boundaries between portraiture, fine art and social documentation begin to converge and disappear, with truths laying waste to untruths, and explorations of humanity and human waste taking viewers on an entirely new course of representation.

In *To Be of Use*, Nolan removes the traditional constructs of the portrait photograph, leaving only the detritus of human existence, a symbolic gesture of our own scars and cracks, and the very elements that make up a human life. Photographs of bottle tops become suggestions of a human presence and a celebration of imperfection. Remnants of text and dirt combine in abstract patterns of story telling, biography and mass manufacture. There remains, however, a sense of familiarity amongst the repetitive forms; they are intimate, vibrating with vivid colours and delicate details.

Nolan challenges viewers to step away from the documentary view of photography, inviting a reading more associated with philosophy, aesthetics, beauty and ugliness. His photographs speak of Duchamp's readymades, Warhol's Marylins and Eggleston's celebration of the everyday. Like their painterly predecessors, these objects remain enigmatic, resonating with a sense of mystery, hidden thoughts and unknown histories. What they do retain are the traces of daily life, the remnants of fading scars and the detritus of dirt and decay. Despite the fractures and traces of corrosion, however, the objects remain almost iridescent, with bold colours laying testament to a kind of plastic beauty that continues to exist within the forms. Through these overlooked objects, Nolan allows viewers to reconsider the way we see the world around us, finding a sacredness in the broken, the banal and the abandoned.

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