

Conversation Piece

Claire Seidl: Photographs

John McDevitt King: Drawings

Conversation Piece

Claire Seidl: Photographs

John McDevitt King: Drawings

Essay by Fran Kaufman

This book is published in conjunction with Kaufman Vardy Projects
and Dorset Road Books New York, 2015
© 2015 by Claire Seidl and John McDevitt King.
Essay: Copyright 2015, Fran Kaufman

Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird

Stanza V

I do not know which to prefer,
The beauty of inflections
Or the beauty of innuendoes,
The blackbird whistling
Or just after.

Wallace Stevens



Conversation Piece

I've known and worked with both Claire Seidl and John King for nearly two decades, watching their work evolve and coalesce. Over that time, they have each developed a clarity, confidence and level of nuance that only comes from single-minded pursuit where the endgame is unknown.

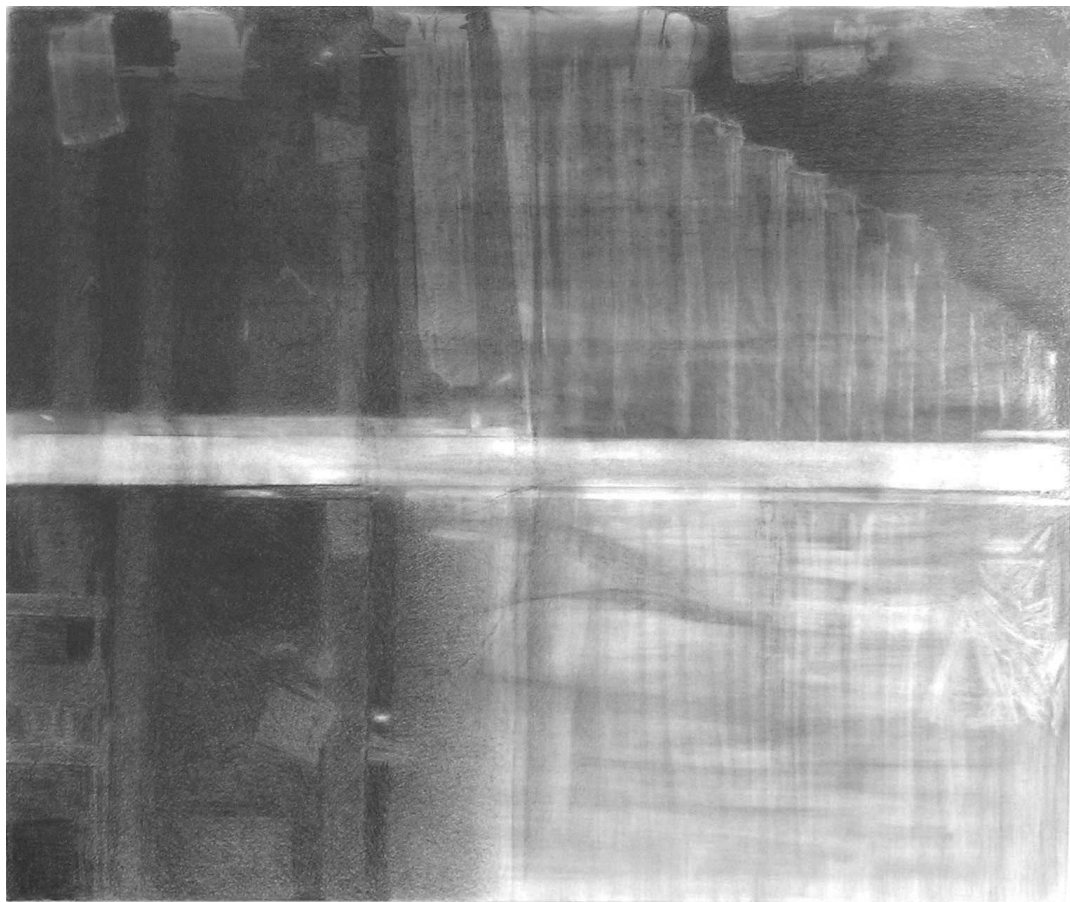
Perhaps the singular relationship of John's drawings and Claire's photographs comes in part from the fact that, while comfortable with the possibilities and potential of each other's medium, they each challenge themselves to make new discoveries in their own. Choosing to work within a restricted palette – primarily black, white and endless shades of gray – only heightens the depth of exploration. In both artist's work we are given clues about real world sources, but those are subsumed by their use of a formal visual language and the allusion to an alternate reality.

When I first met Claire her practice focused on beautiful paintings and drawings – in oil paint, watercolor, pastel – often influenced by the physical world around her, both in the city and in Maine where she spends nearly half the year. Her painter's language – abstract, with a colorist's eye – made inescapable references to landscape and to the play of light on the land. Her black and white photographs, when she started exploring that medium some years later, were in many ways like distillations of her painting. Structurally, formally, they explored the same concerns – it was almost startling to see them side-by-side in the early days. Now Claire works with equal energy on two independent bodies of work. And while they both reveal her hand and eye, the photographs are a more personal record of people and place, an intimate glimpse at how she experiences the world, especially the passage of time. In *Porch Dinner* (p. 4) we are presented with the remnants of a happy dinner party: the room and objects remain intact and solid, but the lively interplay of the diners is blurred and ghostlike. The image remains unchanged, mimicking memory, yet our actual recall will inevitably lose clarity over the passing weeks, months, and years. *Dock* (p. 19) possesses the same ephemeral quality; a presence at the end of the long wooden pier repeats an act, a hesitation that has happened countless times before, merging into a single variable memory.

John has made drawing a primary mode of expression, creating a particular visual universe. His imagery draws on a common thread of collective memory, yet at the same time remains resolutely personal, an uncommon combination. Loosely working from old photographs or direct observation of everyday objects that reveal the inherent strangeness of the ordinary, he translates them into meticulous drawings, his figures sometimes integrated with, sometimes floating on, a fully worked graphite ground. The imagery may be decipherable or familiar – a flower, a board, a string of pearls – but the context is deliberately ambiguous and provocative. These objects both advance and recede in equal measure. In *Eternally Arriving* (p.13) we are confronted with a highlighted shape, a sense of movement, a deep impenetrable black background. Its great strength is that we remain unsure of exactly what we are looking at; we are convinced that we know it, searching our memory for context, seduced by its haunting familiarity. Yet it offers no certainty, just a searching and questioning for something that contains no fixed answer.

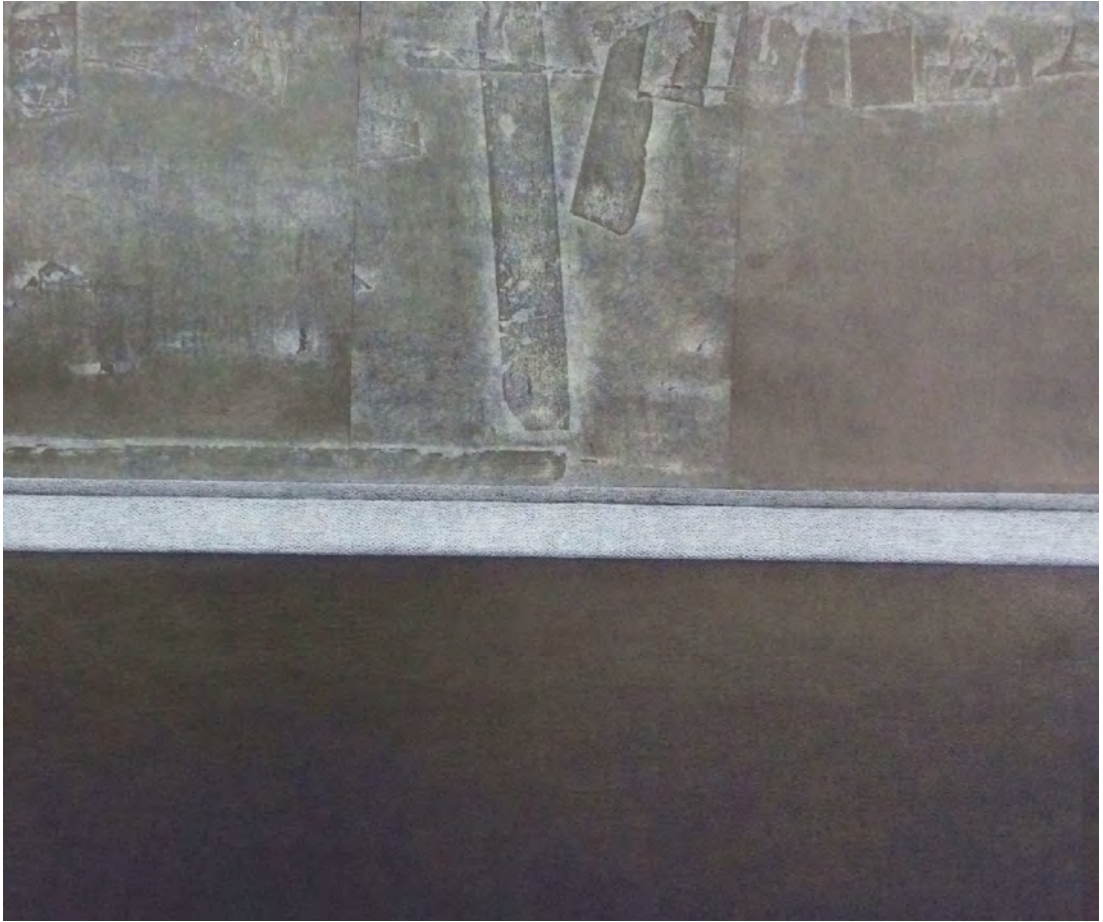
The richness and rigor so evident in these 14 works is much of what joins them in ongoing dialogue. Both artists share the faith that careful looking, transmuted through a complex calculus of mind, memory and hand, has the ability to quietly transform.

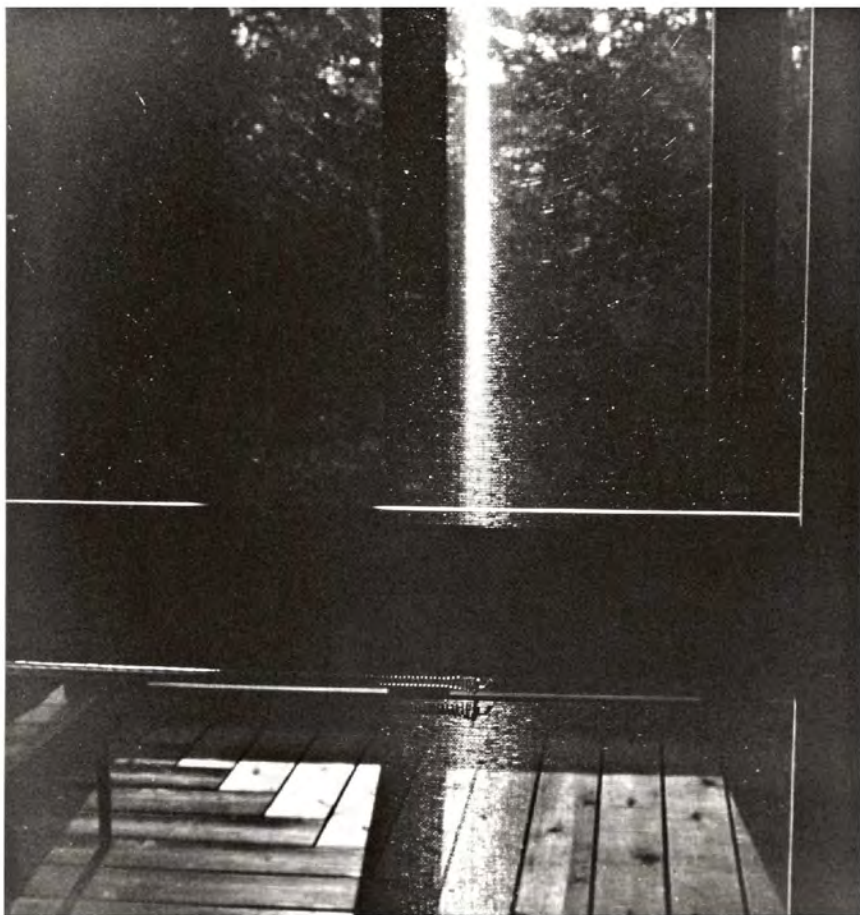
Fran Kaufman, NYC, January 2015



























List of Photographs and Drawings

- p. 4 Claire Seidl, *Porch Dinner*, 2014, silver gelatin photograph, 15" x 14"
- p. 7 John McDevitt King, *Draped*, 2014, graphite on paper, 23" x 27"
- p. 8 John McDevitt King, *Float*, 2014, graphite on paper, 23" x 27"
- p. 9 Claire Seidl, *Swimmers, Moonlight*, 2013, silver gelatin photograph, 14" x 14"
- p. 10 John McDevitt King, *Looking Glass*, 2014, graphite, white pencil, vellum on paper, 28" x 33"
- p. 11 Claire Seidl, *Screen Door, Moonlight*, 2013, silver gelatin photograph, 15" x 14"
- p. 13 John McDevitt King, *Eternally Arriving*, 2013, graphite, charcoal on paper, 22" x 30"
- p. 14 John McDevitt King, *Wrong Words Rhyme*, 2012, graphite on paper, 23" x 22"
- p. 15 Claire Seidl, *Girls (Superimposed)*, 2011, silver gelatin print, 15" x 14"
- p. 16 John McDevitt King, *Behind My Back*, 2014, graphite on paper, 22" x 30"
- p. 17 Claire Seidl, *Look Out*, 2013, silver gelatin print, 15" x 14"
- p. 19 Claire Seidl, *Dock*, 2013, silver gelatin print, 15" x 15"
- p. 20 Claire Seidl, *Cannonball*, 2013, silver gelatin print, 15" x 14"
- p. 21 John McDevitt King, *Diver*, 2012, graphite, colored pencil, lead stick on paper, 80 x 60 inches, private collection

Claire Seidl is best known as an abstract painter; she has also been making and showing photographs for the past fifteen years. She exhibits her work nationally and internationally, and has had 30 one-person shows. Her work is on view at the American Embassy in Qatar through 2016. Recent exhibitions include *What Was, Is* at the Center for Maine Contemporary Art; a twenty-five year survey of paintings at Icon Contemporary Art in Brunswick, Maine; and a one-person show of photographs at Red Filter Gallery in Lambertsville, New Jersey. Seidl's work is included in numerous museum, university and corporate collections and is currently on view at Bates College Museum of Art in *Photographs by Women: Recent Additions to the Permanent Collection*. Seidl lives and works in New York City and in Rangeley, Maine. (www.claireseidl.com)

John McDevitt King lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. He received his BFA from Wayne State University in Detroit, and his MFA from Hunter College, City University of New York. Mr King exhibits regularly and his work can be found in numerous public and private collections, notably the Brooklyn Museum, Yale University Art Gallery, Harvard University Art Museums, Zimmerli Art Museum and the Weatherspoon Art Gallery. He is the recipient of a Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant and a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship Grant. He collaborated with poet William Corbett on the artist's book *Return Receipt*. (www.johnmcdevittking.com)