

GOING THROUGH THE ROOF

John Haber - 2007
New York City

CLAIRE SEIDL

Claire Seidl, also a painter, has her own architectural imaginings. Her photographs of a rural home have the strangeness of photograms, with intense light sources that produce shadows alternately brooding and crisp. I thought of other personal landscapes in black-and-white, by Eileen Brady Nelson. Seidl, though, accumulates human detail. Sunlight through the imperfections in worn windows traces a rainy night. Spheres of light hover as in the staged spirit world of nineteenth-century photography.

Those spheres turn out to be older family members and friends seated at dinner. The more one looks, the more they take on recognizable shapes and personalities. The artist says that they enjoyed recognizing themselves in her art. The coalescing blobs let ordinary viewers join, too, in the humor and animation. Heightening the realism, the course of a meal necessarily constrains and defines the long exposure. This is not metaphysics, but a party.

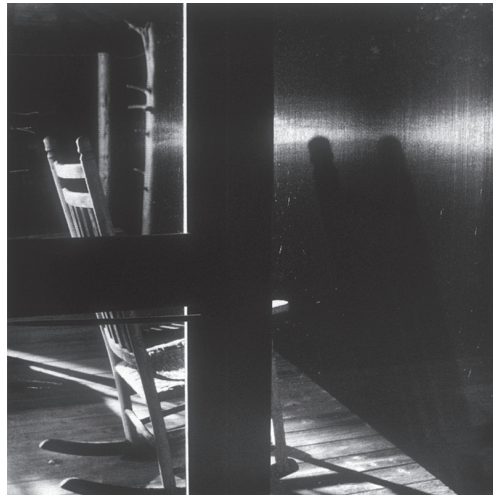
Seidl's photographs do not always play tricks. The most abstract do not rely on long exposures, not even

when they hint at multiple time scales and multiple points of view. None involve special processing later. The grayest emphasize layered rectangles of windows

and wood frame. Once abstraction both incorporated and rebelled against the idea of a picture as a window onto nature. Here one's gaze enters the encroaching darkness.

At the dinner table, the multiplicity becomes particularly explicit. One has the shot, the original scene, the gap between generations observing and observed, and the deep history of New England, as preserved in the aging wood of the ceiling. The five years of work in the

show, the endurance of a photograph, and the viewer's commitment all have scales of their own. The elderly move that much closer still to a longer view, perhaps the eternity of those glowing spheres. In another photograph, an empty chair faces the brightest glow of all, seemingly apart from the light source. There light must have reflected off something in the night sky, but even the artist had to wonder at its reality.



PORCH, SHADOW