

Suzanne Moxhay produces unsettling photographic work that occupies a middle ground between the staged picture, the tableau vivant, the dream like unreality of a film still and the hyper reality of reportage. This tension between a highly controlled artistic process and an end result that leaves the viewer with a narrative urge to understand and interpret the image they are confronted with is a trait shared with much contemporary art photography. From the mock realism of British photographer Hannah Starkey to the highly elaborate filmic work of American Gregory Crewdson, a manipulated 'reality' plays with the audience's expectations. Moxhay's work is often rooted in an imaginative, dream landscape where civilisation is at once present but simultaneously absent from the work. They call to mind the visionary writing of J. G. Ballard or genre films, like the western or horror movie, parallel worlds with their own rules and conventions. These constructed landscapes seem to exist outside of a specific history yet offer ambivalent and very knowing versions of the apocalyptic. In a sense they have a link to a Ballardian sense of science fiction: a fantastic story that speaks in the present tense to make the most of its closeness to the folk tale and parable, providing a bridge between the private psyche and the public world.

Moxhay has made work by building miniature "flats", similar to early film sets, which are then incorporated as layers through various processes of digital manipulation. The resulting photos blend illusory and real space, leaving the viewer uncertain about scale or depth, which she says "appear to hover between the miniature and the epic". By using archaic source material from her vast archive of images collected from travel brochures and adverts as well as the National Geographic Magazine and photographic journals the work has a familiar yet destabilising relationship to the present. Often from the 1950s to 1970s, their obsolete colour palette adds artificiality while the quality of the printing, without contemporary sharpness, gives a sense of temporal distance. Moxhay started out on her art career as a painter at Chelsea School of Art, whilst her current work developed whilst at the Royal Academy Schools and in residency at the Florence Trust, retains a strong painterly quality.

It is perhaps inevitable for an artist whose work is so filmic, that the artist has started experimenting with moving images. However, even here the movement has a strange recurring dream like quality. Aeroplanes swarm across the desert sky, more biblical plague of locusts than precision military strike. An endless tracking shot through a totally fictitious forest feels like a queasily foreboding sleepwalk to nowhere.

The work exists in a world of its own though the links to current conflicts and apocalyptic visions of the future are not hard to find. What gives the work its real power is its ability to sidestep reductive readings and persist in the memory. These are less about real spaces much more about the psychological landscapes we all inhabit.

Paul Bayley
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