

FLASH!

Flash: Sharon Lockhart

March 28–June 20, 2015

The rock is covered in barnacles: primordial abstraction. All surface, all texture. Meanwhile the bottom half of the image is overtaken by a woman, knee-deep in water and absorbed in momentary activity. Subtle concentric ripples spread from her arm's point of entry into the water.

Alongside the literal bifurcation of the composition,

this untitled photograph by Sharon Lockhart conjures the visible and the invisible. The visible, or the tangible, is quite straightforward. There is a buzzing contrast between the vulnerability of this contemporary person's body, skin, and pink shorts, and the otherwise Weston-esque scene of the sharp and unforgiving natural seaside landscape.¹ However, the invisible, or intangible, qualities of this photograph are not as



Untitled, 2014

Courtesy of the artist and Blum & Poe, Los Angeles; Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels; and neugerriemschneider, Berlin

apparent. Questions, rather than assertions, come to mind: Who is this person? What is the temperature of the water? Is the subject intentionally reaching into the water, or catching a fall, having lost her balance on the slippery floor of the tide pool? Are we witnessing leisure, or is it work?

The photograph harkens back to Lockhart's film *Double Tide* (2009), set in Maine. The film portrays a woman digging for clams as the sun rises, then again as it sets. Wearing high boots, she trudges through muddy waters, repeatedly plunging one arm beneath the surface and drawing it out, collecting her catches in a bucket. Aside from being incredibly gorgeous and experientially meditative, *Double Tide* is a portrait of romanticized labor. However, the photograph in discussion here is more ambivalent in its depiction of labor (or leisure). Still, the primal and tactile action is similar in both works. The women in *Double Tide* and *Untitled* are engaged in a bodily activity of using one's sense of touch in order to see—or indeed, to know.

The act depicted appears to be one of a person searching (rumor has it for abalone). The surrounding scenery could have looked the same many thousands of years ago as it did the day the photograph was made. Despite the contemporary clothing, the activity depicted appears quite primal, and from an ancient perspective perhaps universal. Lockhart is quite astute at making these kinds of observations throughout her body of work. Her films *Pine Flat* (2005) and *Podwórka* (2009) consist of several ten-minute vignettes, entirely anthropological in structure.² The films observe children in their natural contexts: green forests and concrete urban landscapes, respectively. When watching these films, and the children interacting with their immediate surroundings in the present moment, one cannot help but relate their activities to those of our ancestors, our primate cousins, and much of the animal kingdom.

In both the photograph *Untitled* and the film *Double Tide*, the identities of Lockhart's subjects are obscured.³ As with the artist's past untitled works in which a person is the primary subject, this vagueness is no accident. Here the artist employs an unusual, nearly bird's-eye view of the subject so that the viewer is only privy to parts of the woman's outfit, back, and hair, but

is not granted the sense of a particular person. This strategy opens the possibility for the viewer to identify *as* the subject, or *with* the subject, or potentially both.

Much of Lockhart's work begs existential questions about being. *Untitled* is a singular photograph, not part of any series, and is presented alone in this gallery. Therefore we might also interpret it as allegory: the person in the photograph is not just looking for abalone. She is looking for meaning.

—Amir Zaki

Notes

1. Edward Weston (1886-1958) is widely regarded for his photographs of the rocks and ocean at Point Lobos, California.
2. She employs a steady camera shot, set at a distance.
3. *Double Tide* uses distance from the subject to achieve obscurity.

Sharon Lockhart (born 1964 in Norwood, Massachusetts) is a Los Angeles-based artist and filmmaker. Her work has been featured in solo exhibitions at Los Angeles County Museum of Art; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and Kunstverein Hamburg, among elsewhere. The artist has participated in group exhibitions internationally, including at MOMA PS1, Museum of Modern Art, and Whitney Museum of American Art, all in New York; Minsheng Art Museum, Shanghai; Museum Moderner Kunst, Vienna; and Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Her work is held in many public collections, including at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Museum of Contemporary Art, all in Los Angeles; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Whitney Museum of American Art, all in New York; Art Institute of Chicago; and Tate Modern, London. She earned her BFA at the San Francisco Art Institute in 1991, and her MFA at Art Center College of Design in 1993.

Amir Zaki (born 1974 in Beaumont, California) is an artist who lives and works in Southern California. He has an ongoing interest in the rhetoric of authenticity as it relates to photography as an indexical medium. His work was featured in the *Flash!* contemporary art series in 2013, and has been included in exhibitions at the Orange County Museum of Art, Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, and New Museum of Contemporary Art, among elsewhere. Zaki is an Associate Professor in the Department of Art at UCR. He earned his BA at UCR in 1996, and his MFA at UCLA in 1999.

Flash! contemporary art series features single works made within the last year. The series is organized by Joanna Szupinska-Myers, CMP Curator of Exhibitions, at the California Museum of Photography at UCR ARTSblock.