

In compliance with a recent court judgement (see HM CJ 188366-14/08/05) obtained by a subject of the book, this publication can exist only as a single edition that must remain in the possession of the editor Howard Hagen.

Others' Eyes

Edited by
Howard Hagen

**Rufus Eisenbud
Steven Pearl
Guinever Doy**

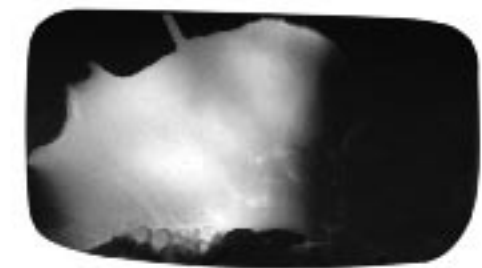
Camera

Remission

Rufus Eisenbud



‘Mouth Photographs’ courtesy of Jule Eisenbud
collection.













on film inside sealed cameras using the power of his mind

Remission

Rufus Eisenbud

From Serios to Seers? It's hard not to think that Lindsay Seers was the ideal surrogate for my father's fascination with the psychic performer, Ted Serios. Of course, there was no suggestion that the strange photographs produced by Seers, no matter how unusual, had anything of the paranormal about them, but I think my father genuinely believed that her images would prove every bit as effective in revealing the mysteries of the unconscious.

My father was Dr Jule Eisenbud, a Denver-based psychoanalyst interested in paranormal phenomena. His most famous case concerned a former Chicago bell-hop called Ted Serios, who claimed to be able to make photographic images appear on film inside sealed cameras using the power of his mind. Ted was the subject of my father's book *The World of Ted Serios*, published in April 1967.



Ted's schtick involved the use of Polaroid cameras. Using a small device called a gizmo, which was basically a tube of black paper about an inch across, Ted would 'focus his thought' through the gizmo pressed against the front of the camera and tell the operator to press the shutter. By projecting his thoughts he appeared to be able to make mysterious images appear on the film, which became known as thoughtographs.

Ted came to live at our Denver home in the early Sixties, when he was a middle aged alcoholic. It's hard to know what was true about Ted Serios - we know he had been in a correctional institution as a young man and later served in the merchant marines. He was working in a Chicago hotel when he agreed to be hypnotised by a man called George Johannes - Ted's psychic powers supposedly date from that experience. Ted developed a talent for 'clairvoyant viewing' of hidden or far off objects, and he and George Johannes immediately put the gift to work looking for hidden treasure. It was George who first gave Ted one of the new Polaroid cameras and asked him if he could get the images from his head on to photographic film. That's how the thoughtographs started.



an anarchic magician



Ted Serios came to my father's attention through Curtis Fuller of the Illinois Society for Psychic Research, who insisted that my father investigate the phenomenon. This he began to do, with all the scientific rigour of which he was capable. However, Ted was the antithesis of the calm scientific approach! Unfortunately, Ted's powers seemed only to work when he was intoxicated, so he had to be plied with beers throughout the whole experiment. These sessions could go on for 5, 6, 7 hours at a time, as rolls and rolls of film were fed into the cameras. Try to imagine this loud, foul-mouthed drunk, who had actually moved into our family home by that time, careening around our living room, waving his arms, often stripping off his shirt, shouting obscenities, then suddenly pressing his head against a Polaroid camera held by my father or some other researcher and yelling for them to press the shutter. It was pure theatre! More often than not, nothing would appear on the film. Sometimes the film would emerge exposed pure black or pure white, which my father, strangely, considered a success.



But on a few occasions something truly remarkable would show up on the film: views of strange people and mysterious places, often weird pictures of recognisable buildings. Sometimes Ted would try to create a thoughtograph of a well-known landmark, like the local opera house, and instead get a 'near miss', a view of an adjacent building for instance. Sometimes the images would be odd composites of two recognisable buildings, exhibiting the merged architectural features of both. My father was never able to catch Ted out in any deception and could offer no explanation for these events other than psychic abilities. To us kids, Ted was the ultimate entertainment, some sort of anarchic magician. When he disappeared after 6 years of being part of our lives, we were distraught, my father especially so.



With hindsight, it's easy to dismiss all this as naive. The experiments with Ted Serios were about as far away from 'controlled' as you could get. Ted's reliance on the mysterious gizmo, and the sheer hucksterism of the performance, look to us, post-David Blaine, like the classic misdirection of an illusionist. But you have to remember that the Sixties was a time when society was more or less convinced that the human mind had untapped potential, not just the counter-culture but the scientific community as well. Even the military, both in the West and the Soviet Union, was conducting serious research into the possibility of paranormal phenomena such as psychokinetic abilities and clairvoyant viewing.

the black sack was a portable darkroom



So there was a definite sense of déjà vu, twenty years later, to go home to Denver to visit my folks and find Lindsay Seers' weird photographs all over the place and the artist herself drifting around the house like a ghost. Of course, there was nothing paranormal in the way Seers made her photographs, but the parallels with the other-worldly images that emerged from Ted's Polaroids were striking. I also learned that Seers had also used hypnotism in her work, though this wasn't the trigger for her interest in photography but merely a way to tap into the unconscious. Perhaps this is what interested my psychoanalyst father.



My father met Seers in Amsterdam in the mid-Eighties. He was attending a colloquium in the city and Seers had gone there to research the discovery of the island of Mauritius, her birthplace, by Dutch explorers in the late 17th century. My father told us how he was walking along the Zwanenburgwal on his way to the Rembrandthuis museum when he suddenly noticed a tiny piece of exposed photographic film on the canal path. Although distorted and in negative, the image was quite recognisable as the view along the canal by which he was walking.

squeezing her body through a tight iris-like opening



Photograph courtesy of Frank Weston collection

The echoes of Ted's thoughtographs were still in his mind as he approached Rembrandt's house and suddenly discovered the source of the image. Standing opposite the famous landmark, just emerging from a heavy black cloth sack, with tiny bits of photographic film strewn around her feet, was Lindsay Seers. She was in the act of making 'mouth photographs' - by placing a strip of film in the back of her mouth and holding a small brass aperture in her lips to admit light, Seers was able to make negative images as if her body had become a pinhole camera. The black sack was a portable dark room in which to prepare pieces of unexposed film and later to fix the image on the film. I witnessed something similar in Denver the first weekend I met Seers, though by then the black sack had evolved into a light-tight black tent out of which Seers would emerge by squeezing her body through a tight iris-like opening. You didn't have to be a trained psychoanalyst to see the primal associations.







the image was quite recognisable as the view along the canal by which he was walking



what emerged was a childhood on the island of Mauritius

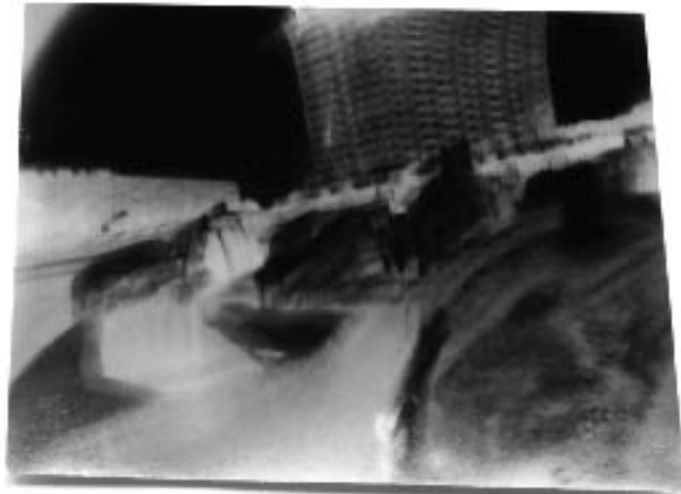
Seers was an itinerant recluse, a drifter with little time for anything except her own peculiar obsessions, and didn't form relationships easily. But my father's mix of professional curiosity and the connection with Serios, whose history fascinated Seers, seemed to draw her out. Suddenly, my father found himself listening to her bizarre personal history. What emerged was a childhood on the island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean but one spent entirely unable to speak: Seers was a mute, apparently due to some undiscovered early trauma. She also possessed an eidetic memory, the ability to recall events with perfect accuracy. Later there had been the encounter with photography, which seemed to coincide with the belated onset of language at the age of eight. There's some suggestion that the onset of language coincided with a falling off in her powers of total recall; hence the compulsive need to make photographs to record her memories. After various forays into conventional photographic techniques, this culminated in the attempt to make her own body into a camera, and hence the mouth photographs.

Seers had been travelling aimlessly through Europe and there were images of Berlin, London, Dublin



full of echoes of momentous political changes





My father left Amsterdam a few days later with the beginnings of a collection of images Seers had made in her own body. Some the artist gave to him, some he continued to find littering the streets of the city. Not all were of Amsterdam - Seers had been travelling aimlessly through Europe and there were images of Berlin, London, Dublin. There was reportedly a whole series of Paris which had gone missing in strange circumstances upon which Seers would not elaborate. The images fascinated him - a weird travelogue of well-known landmarks and nameless buildings; evidence of sea crossings on boats and ferries; odd photos of trees. In exchange, he left Seers with an open invitation to visit Denver.

Back in Colorado, my father began to study the images in more depth, aided by erratic dispatches of more images from Lindsay Seers bearing postmarks from towns and cities from Europe to Asia. There would never be a return address. He became increasingly fascinated by the idea of the images Seers created as being unmediated expressions of her psychic landscape. Whatever the apparent subject matter of the picture, there was a very strong sense that the images were somehow revealing her inner mental states.



A series of pictures of Berlin were full of echoes of momentous political changes, yet marked by absences, negations and a sense of coming late to the scene of an event which one has just missed. There is an overwhelming sense of solitude in the heart of even the busiest cities and psychological isolation in the architectural wasteland of the traveller's hotels and eateries.

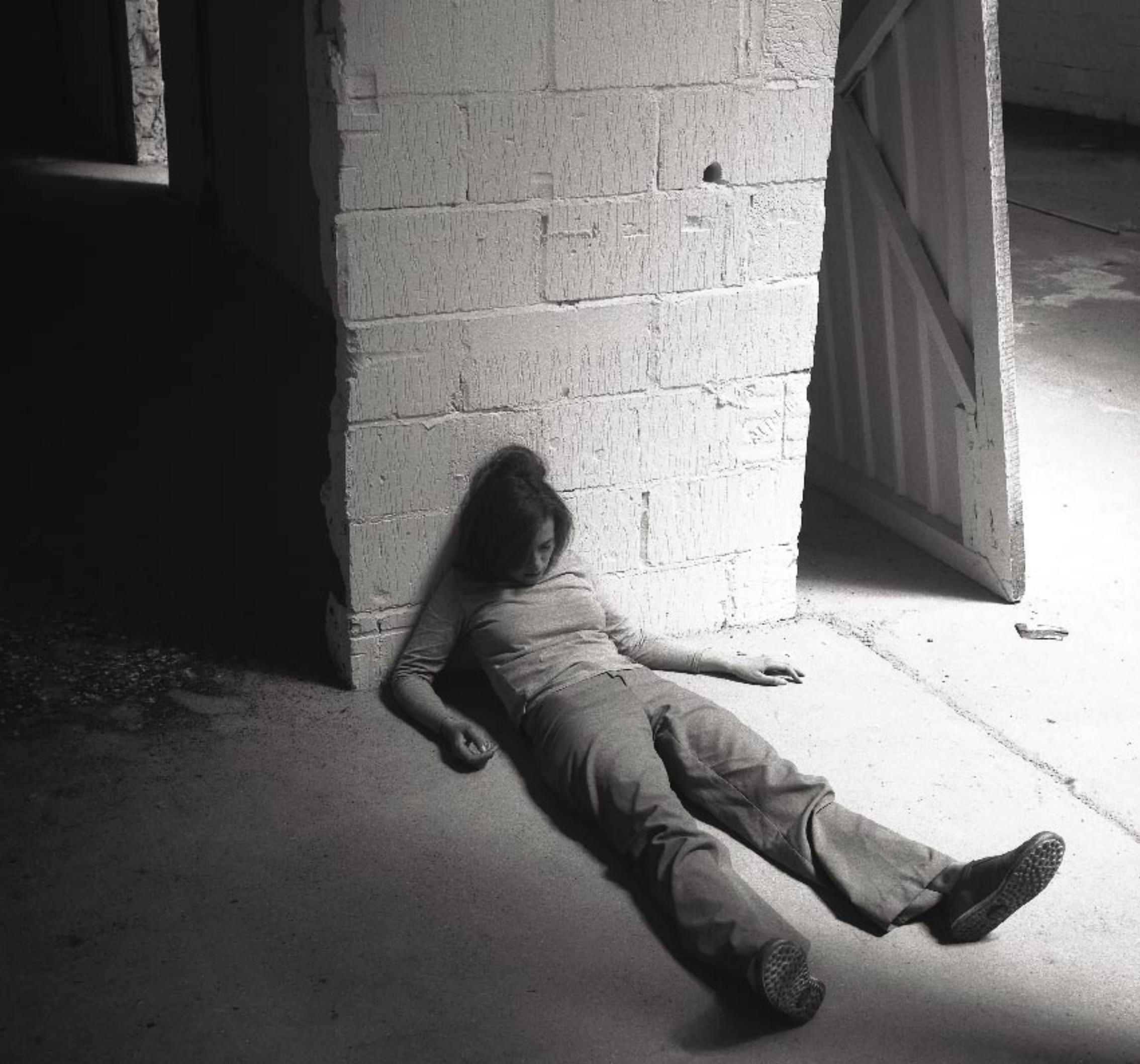
About this time, the imagery changed. I think she had been gripped by melancholy, a morbidity apparently induced by the constant use of the shroud-like black sacks. Matched pairs of images were being created: one a third-person view of Seers as victim of some unknown crime of violence, the other the blood-red mouth photo looking back from the victim's viewpoint.

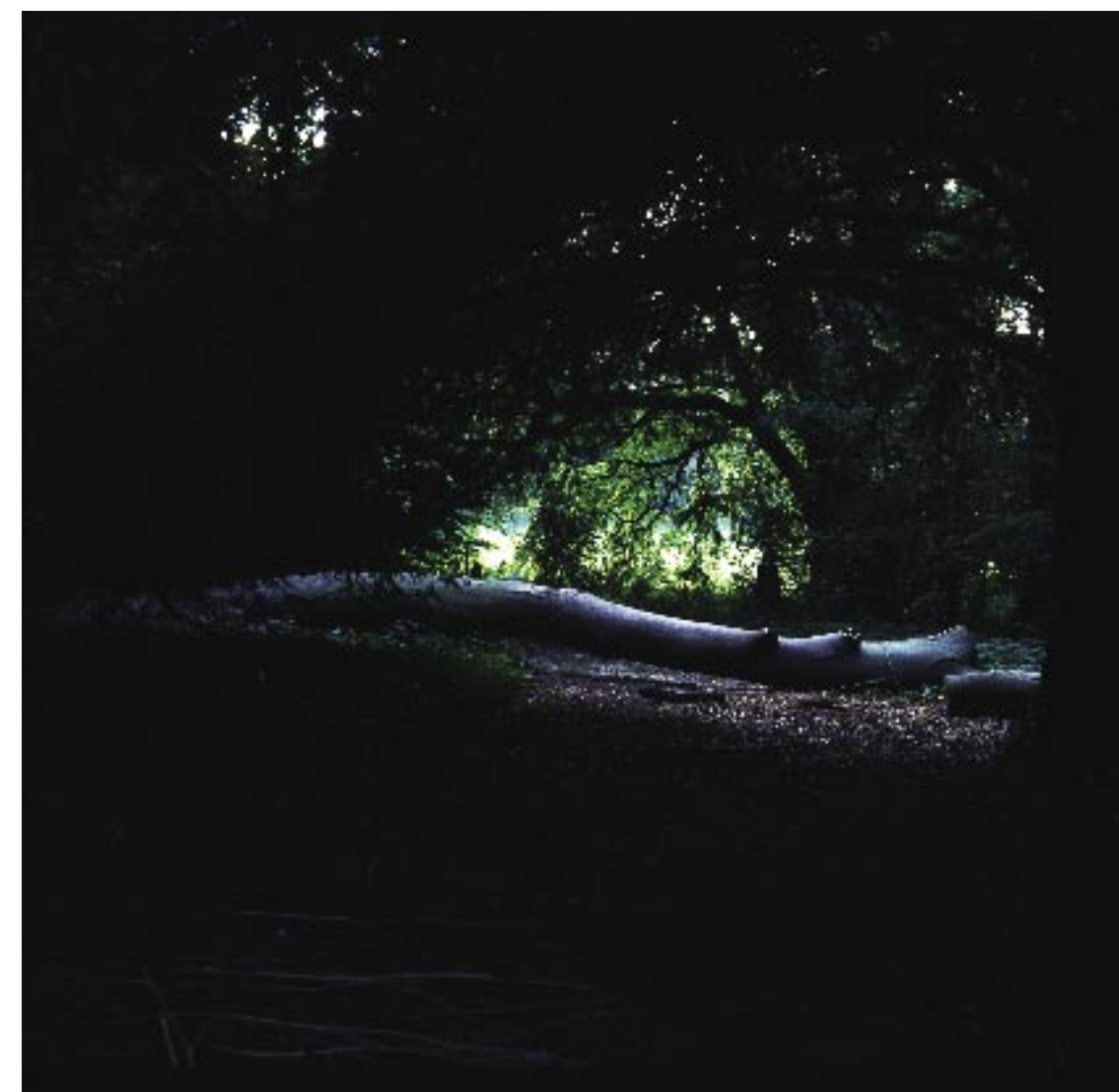
This work grew out of a fascination with macabre true crimes, especially those of Jack the Ripper in Victorian London. There was a popular myth at that time that a victim of murder could retain a retinal image of his or her assailant, burned into the back of the eye as it were. Victorian forensic scientists made attempts to photograph such images, which became known as optograms.



marked by absences, negations and a sense of coming late to the scene of an event which one has just missed







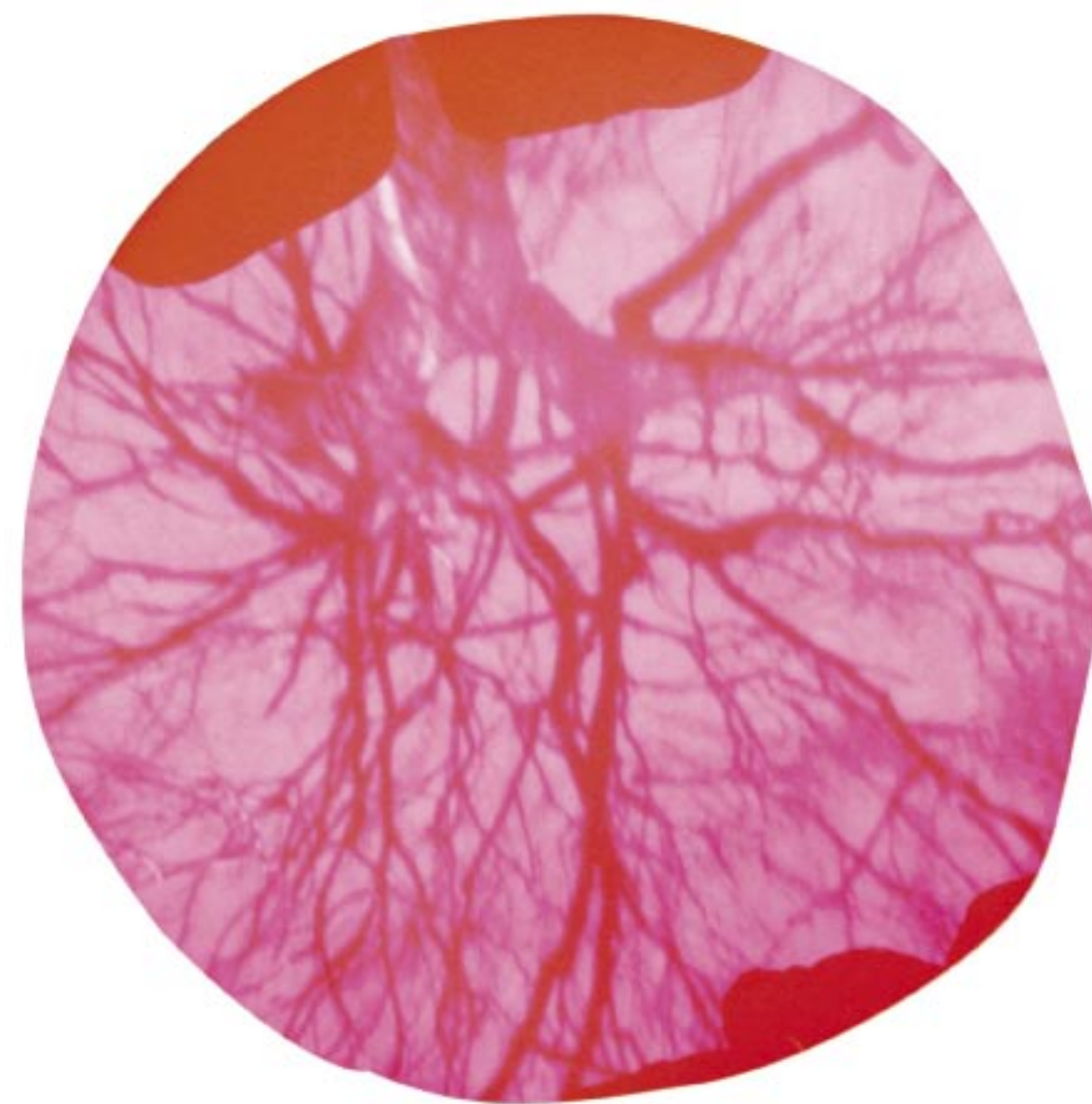
that a victim of murder could retain a retinal image



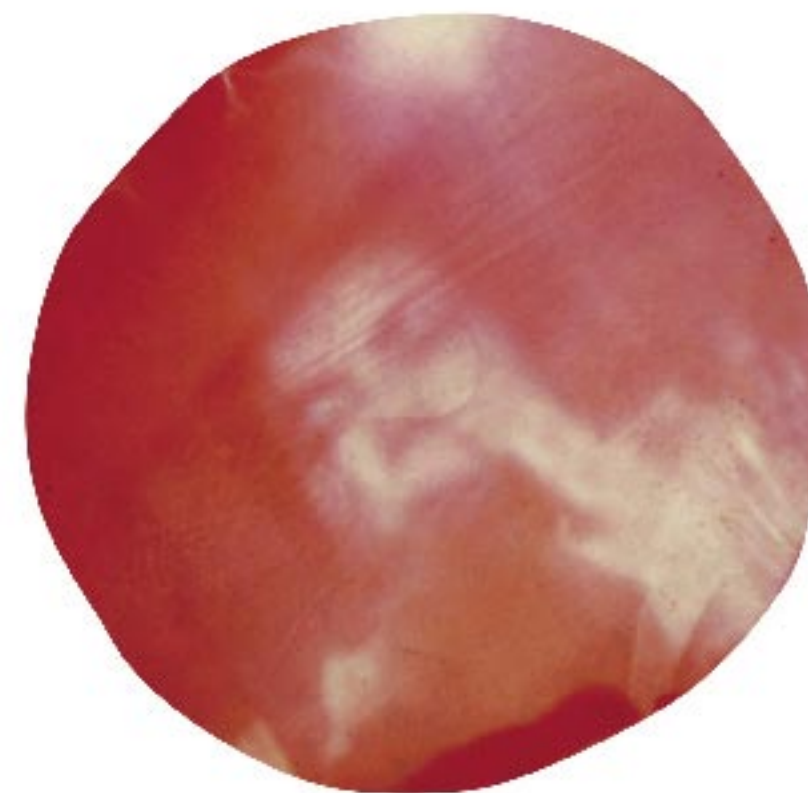
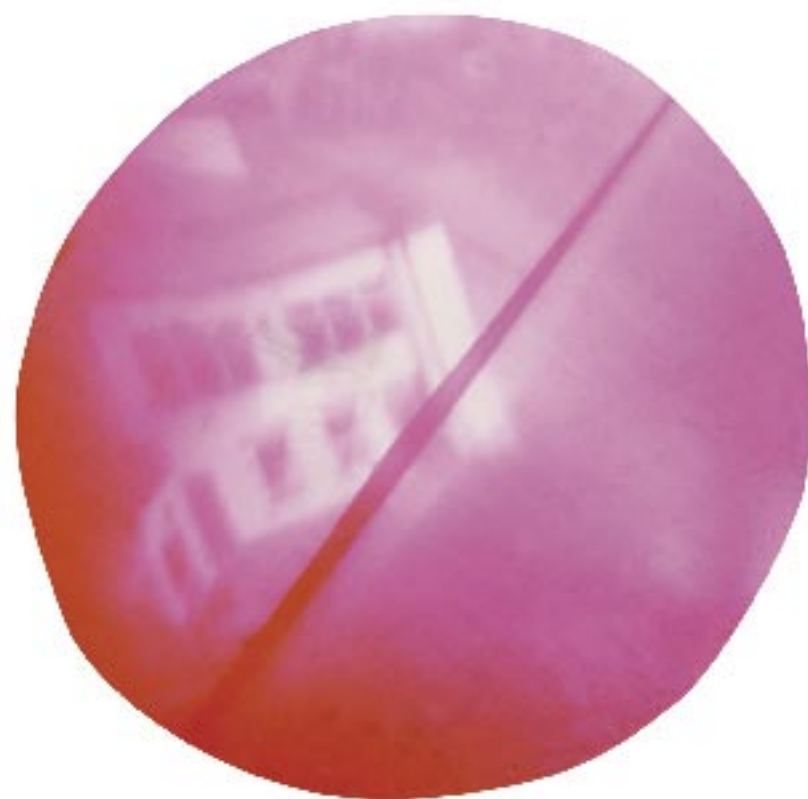




the other the blood red mouth photo looking back from the victim's viewpoint



the blood-red colouration of the photos taken in the mouth



which naturally made one ruminate on the cause - haemoglobin

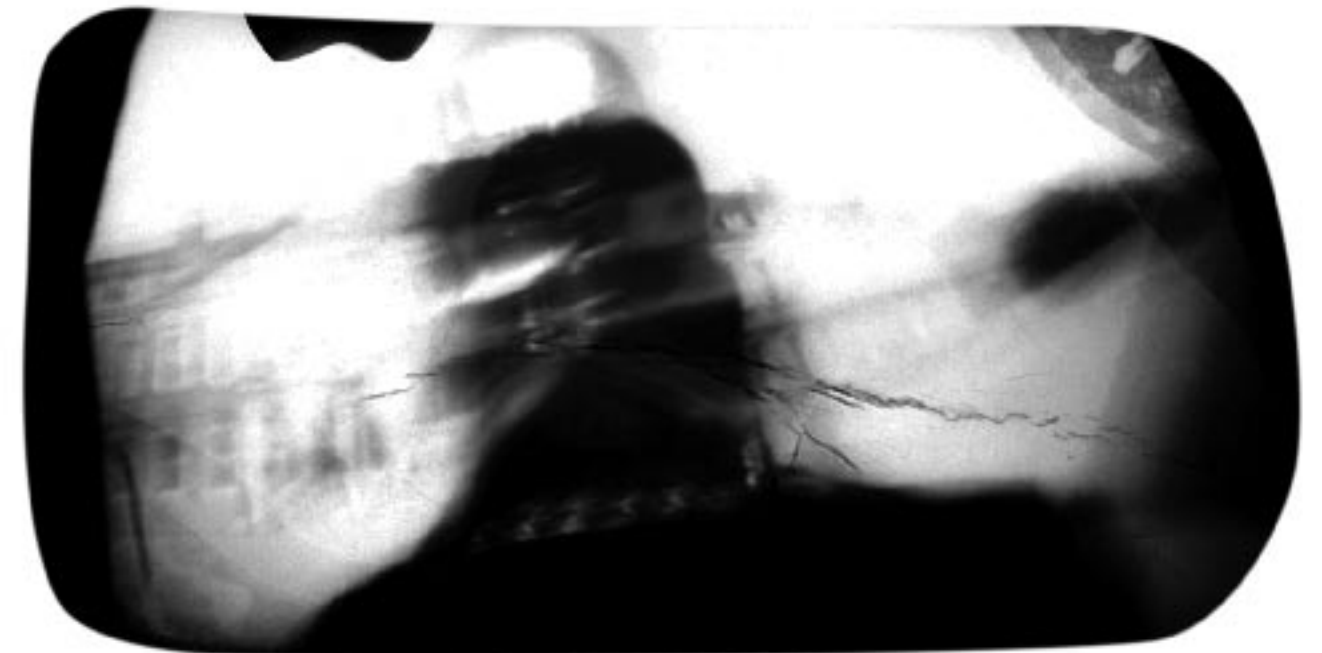


I remember my father telling me the letters had become increasingly tortured, to the point where he started to worry about Seers' well-being. Seers sought respite from her dark moods by moving to a restful English commune in the Chilterns, residing in a strawberry-gothic mansion and taking long walks in the surrounding woods. But her musings on the strange sanguinary nature of the mouth photos seem to have invoked a full-blown shift of personality. There was something in the blood-red colouration of the photos taken in the mouth which naturally made one ruminate on the cause - haemoglobin. She began talking about the photographs 'lingering on beyond the death of the event' and carrying her into the 'half-life of the undead'. Seers' letters refer for the first time to a vampiric element in photography 'sucking the essence out of life' through 'the devouring lens'. The images themselves were now a little more conventional, obviously the mouth photography technique had been discarded. They tended to show Seers adopting a Gothic persona, often sporting vampire fangs, often showing Seers gazing at her own reflection in an antique hand mirror as if observing her own transformation into a vampire.





But sometimes, photos would arrive which seemed to show a much lighter side to Seers personality. Some featured Seers in Darth Vader helmet. Was this tongue in cheek? Later discussions with my father pointed instead towards ever increasing alienation. Seers had retreated behind the opaque Vader mask in flight from her frail transparency, as revealed in the translucent mouth photos, which she now abandoned. Walking around towns and cities in the mask, she announced to all her journey to 'the dark side', garbed in the ultimate 'character armour'. Then Lindsay Seers arrived unexpectedly in Denver. A few days before Seers's turned up at my father's house, unannounced, he received a disturbing visit from a man identifying himself as Frank Weston. Weston's claims to know Seers were backed up by his own collection of Seers photographs, which he showed my father.



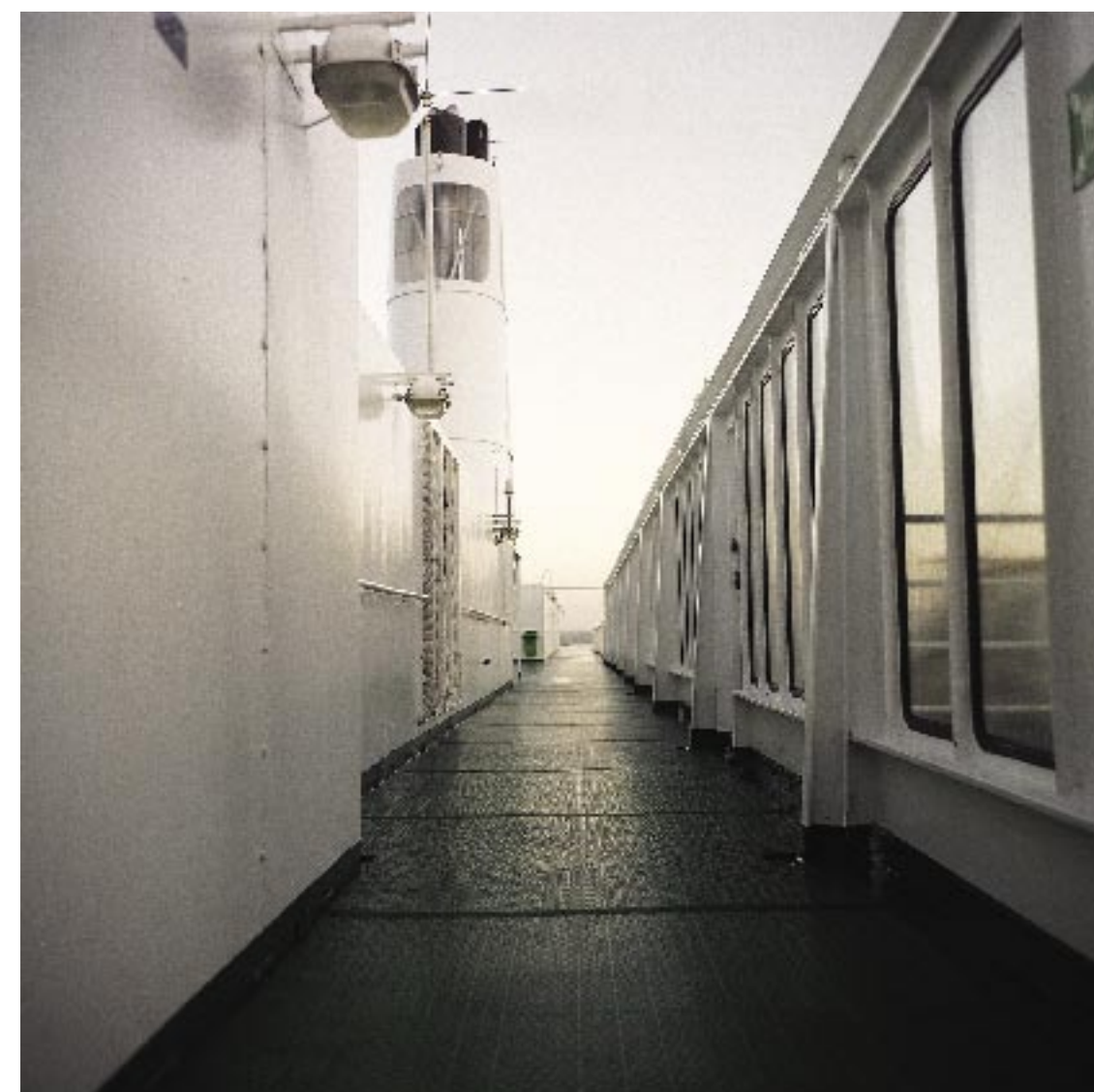


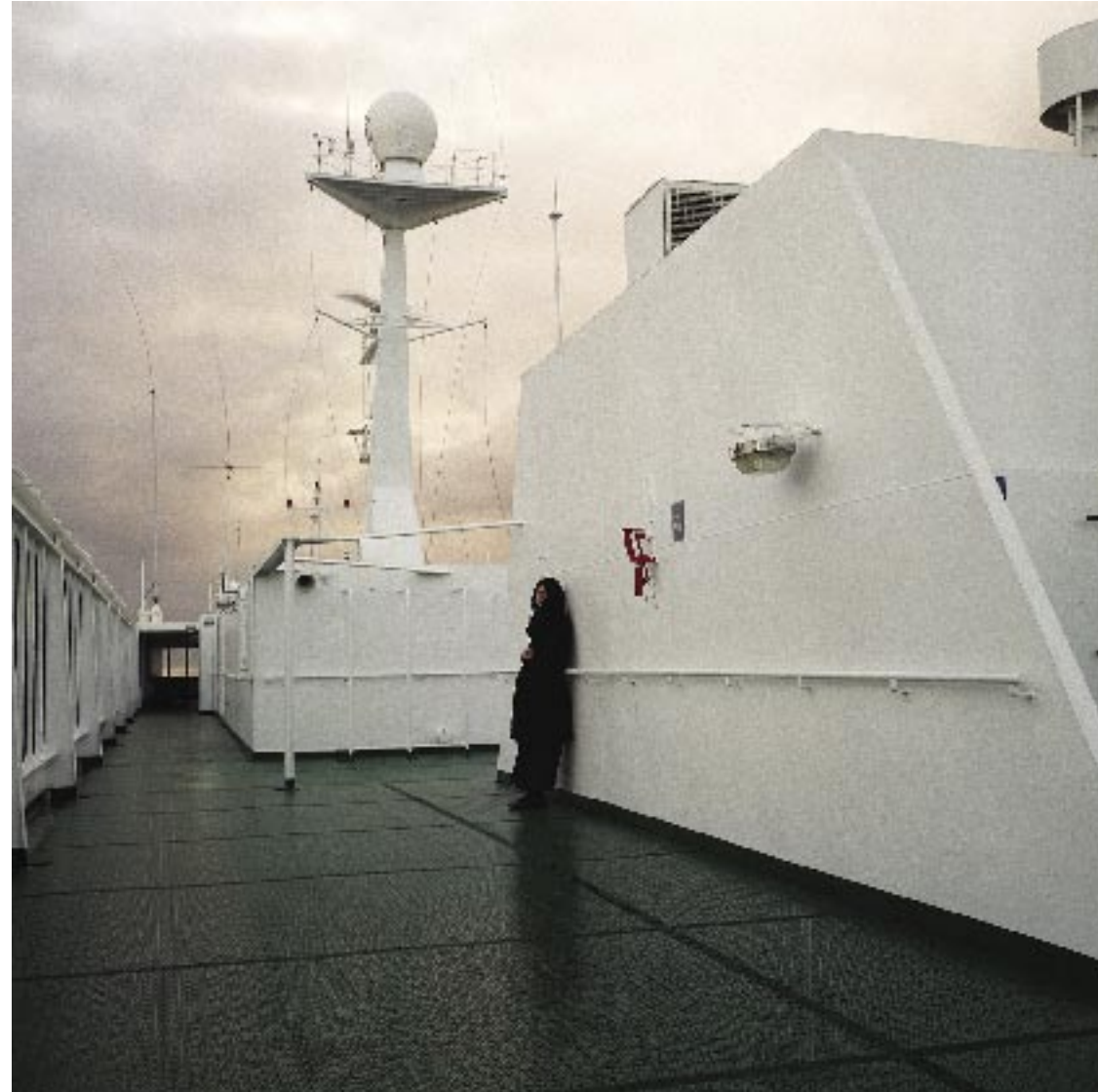
had retreated behind the opaque Vader mask



He claimed he would follow Seers on her travels and collect discarded photographs from city streets, trains and planes, hotel rooms, restaurants, anywhere Seers might drop them. He had brought a small suitcase full of this material, which he said was just a small proportion, 'for personal use', of the whole archive.

However, it quickly became obvious that Weston was himself a photographer and filmmaker but with only one subject, Lindsay Seers. He showed my father pictures and snippets of videos of Seers in various public places in the act of her strange photographic ritual. But some of the images were disturbingly voyeuristic, such as Seers glimpsed through half-open hotel room doors. How did Weston come by these pictures? Was he some sort of quasi-official documentary maker or what we would now call a stalker? My father decided to withhold judgement because Weston had brought the astonishing news that Seers was in Denver and would almost certainly pay my father a visit. He would ask her about Weston himself.





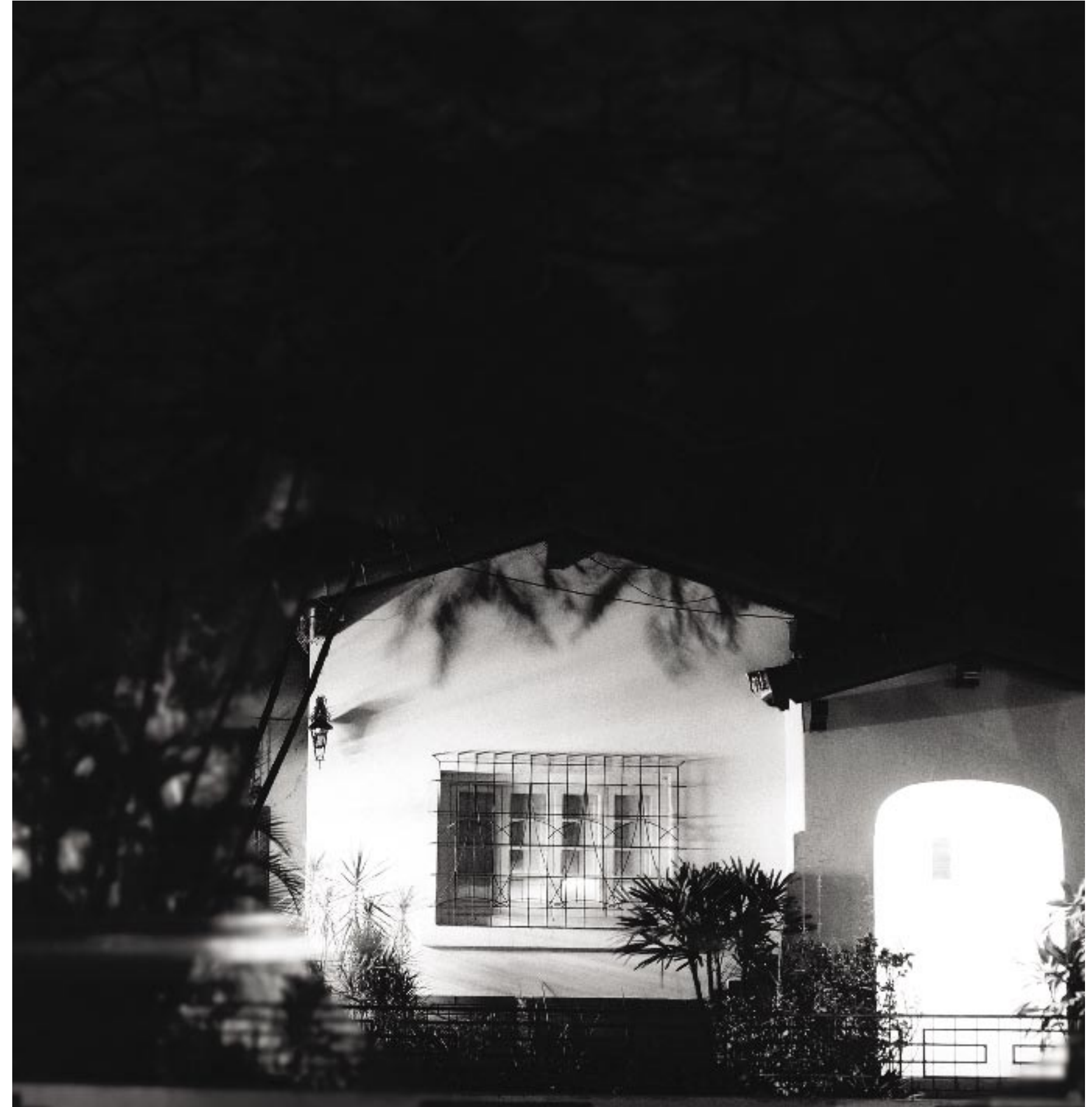
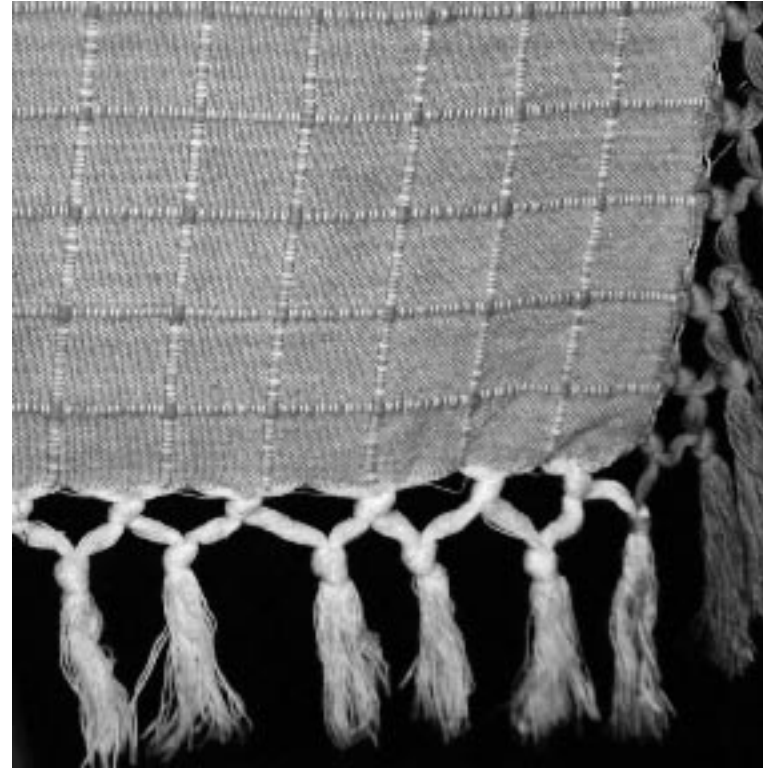
some sort of quasi-official documentary maker or what we would now call a stalker



When Seers turned up on my father's doorstep that first time, some six or seven years after their first meeting, she exhibited, according to my father, signs of 'post traumatic shock'. Days passed before she was able to speak, which she spent compulsively making photographs. But she was unable to talk about what had caused her distress.

It was then that my father learned more fully about Seers' mute childhood, in which the compensations of her extraordinarily rich eidetic memory, her power of total recall, had simply rendered language irrelevant. It was if her inner life was so replete that communication with others was superfluous. She described the experience of eidetic recall as 'a stupefying overabundance of detail in visual images' exploding in the memory. She likened her silence before the intensity of this almost hallucinogenic replay of any given moment to that of a movie goer transfixed by the overwhelming spectacle - 'imagine being in the most fully immersive IMAX theatre ever,' she told my father, 'and then multiply that by a thousand'. The obsessive taking of photographs began here.

Seers reported that the imagery was utterly mundane; nothing which you would think a subject worthy of photography, just endless shots of everyday items as if trying to catalogue the entire inventory of every building she entered. When my father strayed onto the subject of Frank Weston, Seers became severely agitated. She was obviously aware of Weston's constant presence in her life, dogging her footsteps and intruding into her most private activities. She seemed to hold the kind of beliefs associated with primitive societies as far as photographs of her taken by other people were concerned - that the image stole or trapped the soul. Most strangely of all, for the longest time Seers never managed to capture Weston on film during his own voyeuristic acts; then eventually he begins to appear in the images, menacing and omnipresent.









I think Seers' visit became as much a consultation as a conversation with my father. Even if no formal therapy took place, Seers may have benefited from my father's ability to accept her on her own terms. When I recall my own meeting with her, I remember someone even more intensely strange than Ted Serios, but with the same aura of someone possessed of a mysterious gift, barely understood. Her odd wanderings about the house and the obsessive making of images seemed to have its own logic. Although it was practically impossible to have a normal conversation with her, the images left about the house during her visit were, in fact, quite communicative - if gaining an insight into what it must be like to live inside the other person's skin is the aim of 'communication'.





The last images she made during that visit to our Denver home, which are still in my father's possession, are of inconsequential household objects and scenes, all shot from a low angle - obviously by someone lying on the floor. Then she was gone, without a word of farewell. The last news my father had of Seers was a call from an old friend who lived in Nevada - he had seen a flyer advertising a ventriloquism act in a small Las Vegas theatre house. My father flew there to try to catch the act, but when he arrived the last performances had been cancelled and Seers had disappeared.





Ventriloquist

Intermission

Steven Pearl

there must have been an element of truth in it

MOVE MY LIPS



PLEASANCE THEATRE

"devastatingly funny..nothing short of astounding"
The Scotsman

21-30 JULY

Thurs 21st - Sat 30th July, Mon - Fri 7.30pm,
Sat- 3pm & 7pm : £9/7.50



Intermission

Steven Pearl

I first came across Lindsay Seers in the 1980s. I was an artist involved in performance too. I was directing a bold new production of Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot' - with puppets. I was trying to destabilise the meaning of the text and authorial power by a kind of double-alienation: not only were the characters, as written, trapped in an impasse of inaction because of the failure of the big Other to appear, in my version they were patently the victims of manipulation but lacked the meta-perspective to see it. Nevertheless, there's a certain dignity in puppets, so mine were the crudest puppets it was possible to make; in some cases, barely more than sticks. This kind of refusal to court the audience's suspension of disbelief is all the rage now - just think of the poor animation and crap celebrity voices on South Park - but back then it was quite revolutionary.

But I was also working as a theatre director and it was in this context that I encountered Seers, one season in Blackpool. I was directing a piece there and she was working the season as a ventriloquist in the Tower. She was a very quiet person generally, some sort of hangover from her childhood when I think she didn't speak at all until she was seven or eight years old. She seemed pretty odd; I think she struck most people that way. But as soon as she had that dummy on her lap it was like she was another person. Maybe two other persons?



...it seemed totally obsessive and isolating





Her vent act involved an autobiographical story about her ‘life as a camera’, delivered totally deadpan but so barmy you felt it had to be made up. I wouldn’t call it theatre or entertainment, as such, but it definitely had a cult appeal like some of the more bizarre acts you get off the Edinburgh Fringe. The time she spoke of in the performance - the period when she enacted being a camera - was an amazing period in her life, lasting around 12 years, when she was basically using her own body as a primitive camera, using film held in the back of her own mouth and letting light in through her lips to make an image. Like I said, it all sounded pretty incredible but there really were thousands of these pictures around, so there must have been an element of truth in it. I shudder to think of all the nasty chemicals she must have swallowed doing this!

From what she told me about her life in that time of being a camera it seemed totally obsessive and isolating. She spent most of her time on this process; it was quite ritualistic and involved a lot of preparing of photo papers and processing images. It was a difficult thing to do too, that often bore no results; pretty hit and miss. It looked quite peculiar if you ever stumbled across her enacting that ritual - using this black sack to cover herself from head to toe to keep out unwanted light whilst she inserted or removed the paper, then popping out to take her snap, with her lips pursed in this odd way to make an aperture. Maybe it was the isolation of that process that probably brought on the interest in creating ventriloquist dummies - she probably didn’t get out to meet people much and took the idea of ‘making new friends’ a bit literally.

She told me the story of one love affair from this 12 year period - this was possibly the only friendship she struck up during that whole period of her life. This being Lindsay, of course, it wasn’t your common or garden romance. She had always felt this ‘mouth camera thing’ had all kinds of cannibalistic overtones and was also a vampirish act - a way of consuming a person and integrating them corporeally into herself; eating the image of things/people.



When you saw the colour of many of these pictures, pink or red from the light passing through the skin of her cheeks and colouring the film, thoughts of blood were never far from your mind. Or maybe that was just me? But she seemed to soften a bit when she met this guy - something less macabre emerged. She started to think of the act of taking pictures in her mouth more like a kind of kiss. The thing about the kiss for her was that when she puckered up for a kiss the lips made an almost identical shape as when she was forming an aperture for the mouth photos, so an ‘image’ of the person one’s face is near to is literally falling upside down on one’s throat. Whether you make that into a photographic image or not, the image of that person is hanging upside down on your tonsils and it is as if you are about to swallow them. I’m not sure what this boyfriend of hers made of this - he was just an ordinary bloke who worked in a shop in the high street. From what she said I got the impression she never actually even kissed him - she just photographed him with her mouth and I think she roped him into this process and got him doing this as well! It didn’t last long ... well, sublimating the sex drive into the creative process - it’s alright if you’re the one doing the creating, isn’t it?



think of the act of taking pictures in her mouth like a kind of kiss



The end of this rather disastrous relationship coincided with an equally traumatic event in Ireland. It must have been a decade and a half later that Lindsay came backstage after one of my performances at the Fringe. My act involved a macabre stage magician spoof - sort of Paul Daniels meets Torquemada - which started with a skit on the drawing and quartering scene from Braveheart. Sort of a social history of the spectacle of public torture and excruciation that still lingers on in the clichéd stage tropes of sawing a woman in half and that kind of thing. Lot's of fake blood, 'geysers of blood forming crimson arcs above the stage' as one critic put it, most of it spraying over the front rows: I was always one for audience participation. The blood was just raspberry ripple sauce and cornflour, but it was the devil to wash out! Anyway, Seers came backstage with this blue ventriloquist's dummy who later introduced herself as Candy. The odd thing was, I could have sworn it was Bill in drag, except the voice and the personality were totally different. Seers had had a recurring dream, which she first mentioned to me in the 80's, and which she kept having over a fifteen year period.

it was the isolation of that process that probably brought on the interest in creating ventriloquist dummies



In the dream she is an artist and has made a large sculpture, a really bizarre and original thing - the best work that she has ever made. Later in the dream she goes to a gallery, and there in the gallery is an identical sculpture by another artist - a famous artist at that. The feeling of despair she would feel in the dream was absolutely overwhelming - she'd wake up in a cold sweat. This turned out to be portentous.

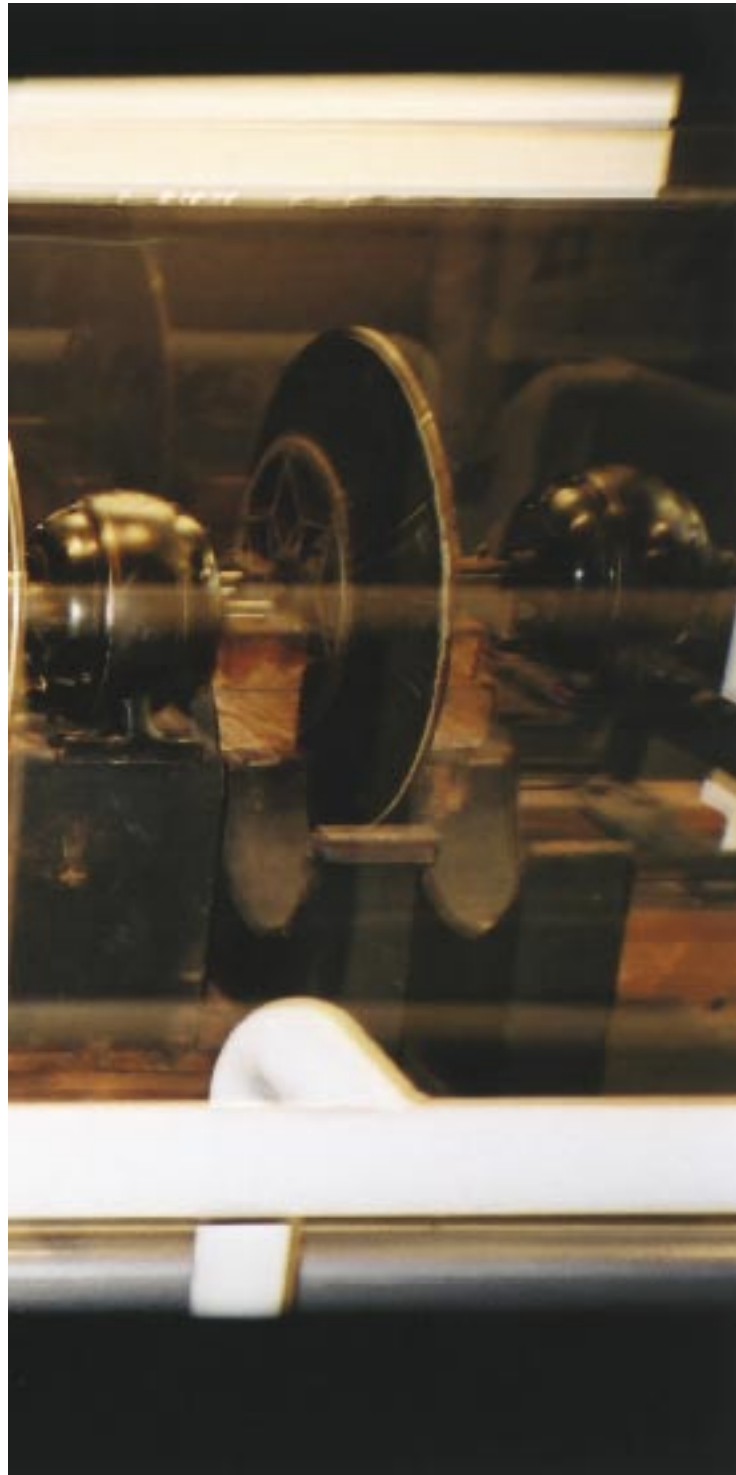
Suddenly, Seers started sobbing uncontrollably so Candy took over the telling of the story. When Seers was in Ireland she went back to visit a building in Dublin where she had developed the mouth camera idea - there are hundreds of photographs she made there, a lot of which are self-portraits holding a round hand mirror. So, on her return to Dublin she visited the building that had been so significant to her, full of nostalgic feelings, and there on the wall was a small work by an American artist called Anne Hamilton. This work was pretty much identical to the work that Seers had made ten years earlier - but which had been completely unrecognised critically at the time. The similarity was really quite incredible given the originality and oddness of the work: Hamilton had done exactly the same thing right down to the use of a round hand mirror. I think the fact that it was hanging there in a place very close to her heart which really compounded the problem. At first she believed this was plagiarism. I'm not sure what she thinks now; perhaps a remarkable coincidence?



Mere professional rivalry can't explain the depth of Seers' psychological trauma. It shows as well as anything that questions of aesthetics or performance skill don't really enter into the equation where Seers is concerned: to her it's not art, it's life. Her identification with the process of making the mouth photographs as her only means of expression was absolute. The Hamilton incident was like identity theft, but on a massive scale. It was like discovering that a doppelganger had been secretly living your life. It was a terrible blow to her; she gave up being a camera and it was only after a long period of depression that she began to try to find ways to create again. Then came the move to ventriloquism. Maybe she deliberately picked the one thing she could be pretty sure that Anne Hamilton wouldn't take up next?

She hadn't been sure what to do with her life, so while she recovered from the depression she got a job working in a café in London's Soho in a joint called 'Bar Italia'. She claims that she found 'Bill' in the attic of Bar Italia. This is highly unlikely, but she is absolutely insistent that she just found him there. There's something so compelling about the way she tells these stories that if she said he'd bought her a cappuccino and one thing led to another, you'd probably believe her. Bill is a ventriloquist's dummy, by the way.





The name 'Bill' turns out to be very significant. According to Seers, the first ever TV image was of a vent's dummy called Stookie Bill. The chap who invented TV, Logie Baird, used the dummy because the lights he used were so intense they would incinerate a human being. Seers claimed that Baird carried out his first demonstration of television in this very Soho building where she was working... what are the odds? Whatever the truth, the dummy appeared on the scene and her life changed. They were inseparable and travelled everywhere together.

Seers was haunted by this image she had in her mind's eye of the way Bill, her Bill, was made use of in Baird's first television experiment. It is important to stress here that there was some confusion, to say the least, in Seers' mind about the status of this doll. To her it was alive and fully autonomous and there was a sense of multiple personalities that were projected onto it from her and from it onto her. She explained that in the first television experiment Bill had caught fire. She hinted that Bill was extremely reluctant to allow anyone to see him without his clothes on because of the horrible scars he still bore from the fire. In that first moment of television then, Bill had seen an image of himself animated across the room and seen himself on fire at the same time - Seers believed that this had had far reaching affects on him, and so on her.

she got a job working in a café in London's Soho



Photograph courtesy of Frank Weston collection.



They certainly both had a very peculiar relationship to television - she had five or six TVs on at any one time, at least one tuned into any kind of vampire flick she could find and the others endlessly channel hopping. I got the strong impression she was expecting to flip to a random channel one day and find herself and Bill, and the room they were in, live on TV. She also started to collect dummies. Company for Bill; who knows?



they certainly both had a very peculiar relationship to television



he would become various different characters depending on what he was watching





he was ventriloquised by TV

Later Bill suddenly appeared with two heads - this was supposedly, or so she claimed, a consequence of the trauma of his first television appearance. In ventriloquism there is often confusion between the dummy and the operator as to who is controlling whom. Popular films, like *Magic* or *Dead of Night*, always examine this from the point of view of the disastrous effect on the human operator, but no one had ever given any thought to what effect this had on the dummy. Until Lindsay Seers, that is. With two heads Bill could attempt to close down the external system of manipulation and be both ventriloquist and dummy - this need had emerged at that the moment of traumatic psychological splitting that the fiery first television picture caused in him.

This doubling of Bill's came and went - it wasn't a permanent feature. Bill was not a fixed entity; he was constantly transforming. In some ways he was ventriloquised by TV. He would become various different characters depending on what he was watching. The most regular character to emerge was called Candy Cannibal. She was blue, in the cosmetic sense, primarily, but the associations with melancholy were obvious. I never thought to ask whether Bill's gender swap was complete, or whether he was just cross dressing. Whatever floats your boat, I say.





I think it was when Seers painted herself blue that I realised that this was the equivalent for skin colour in photographic negative - pink becomes blue. She staged a series of photographs about the blueness that emerges as skin colour in photography. This seemed to be about death and transmogrification, but also about the social alienation that comes with being 'differently pigmented'. However, in her typically maximal way, this soon turned into photographs of blue alien creatures. She made puppets for this work, but a lot groovier than mine.



in photographic negative - pink becomes blue

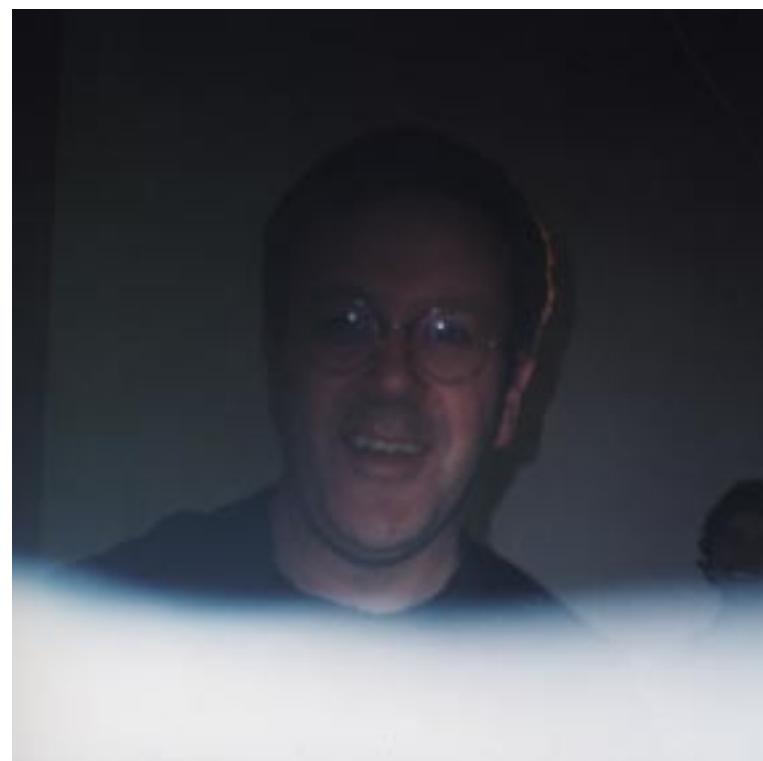


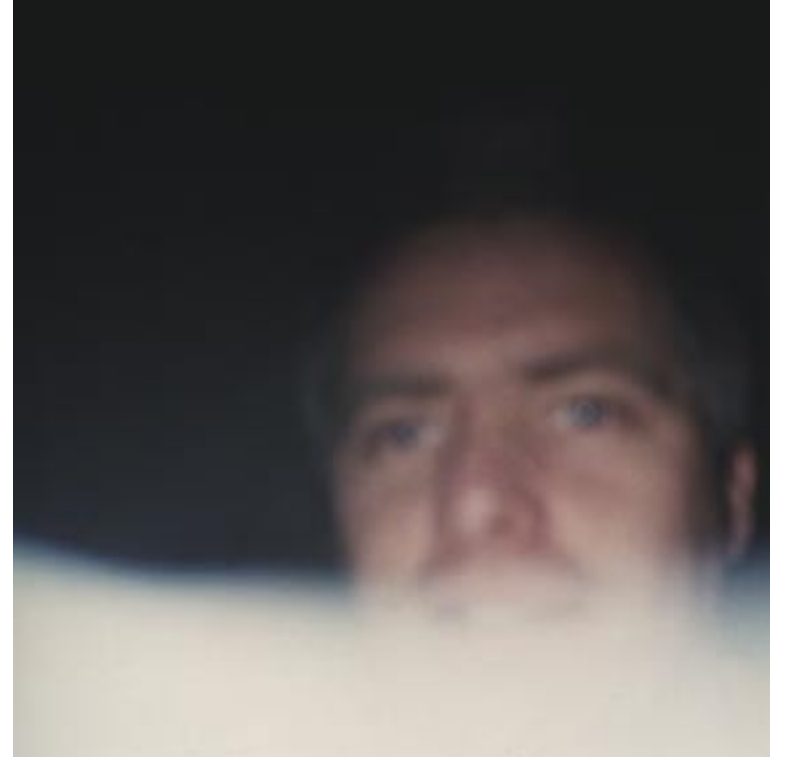
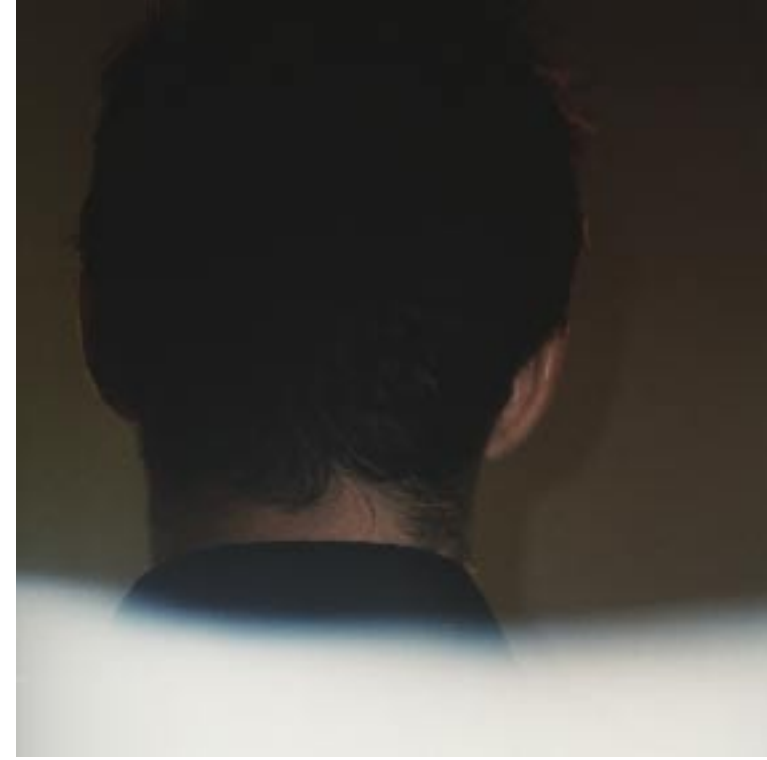






Although Bill was involved in the invention of television and he had a lot of television-derived personas, Candy was his specifically photographic persona. For this he developed a camera in his mouth, like Seers; although this was an actual camera and was not using the mouth cavity for the film, as with Seers. He, or rather she, would just sit in a place and suddenly fire off the shutter when someone stood in front of her. The photos she made like this were quite funny - people weren't expecting to be photographed by this dumb object and it could come as a shock to them. Smile, you're on Candy camera! Often they would come back to her and try to stage a more demure photo or at least one where they had prepared a face for the picture.



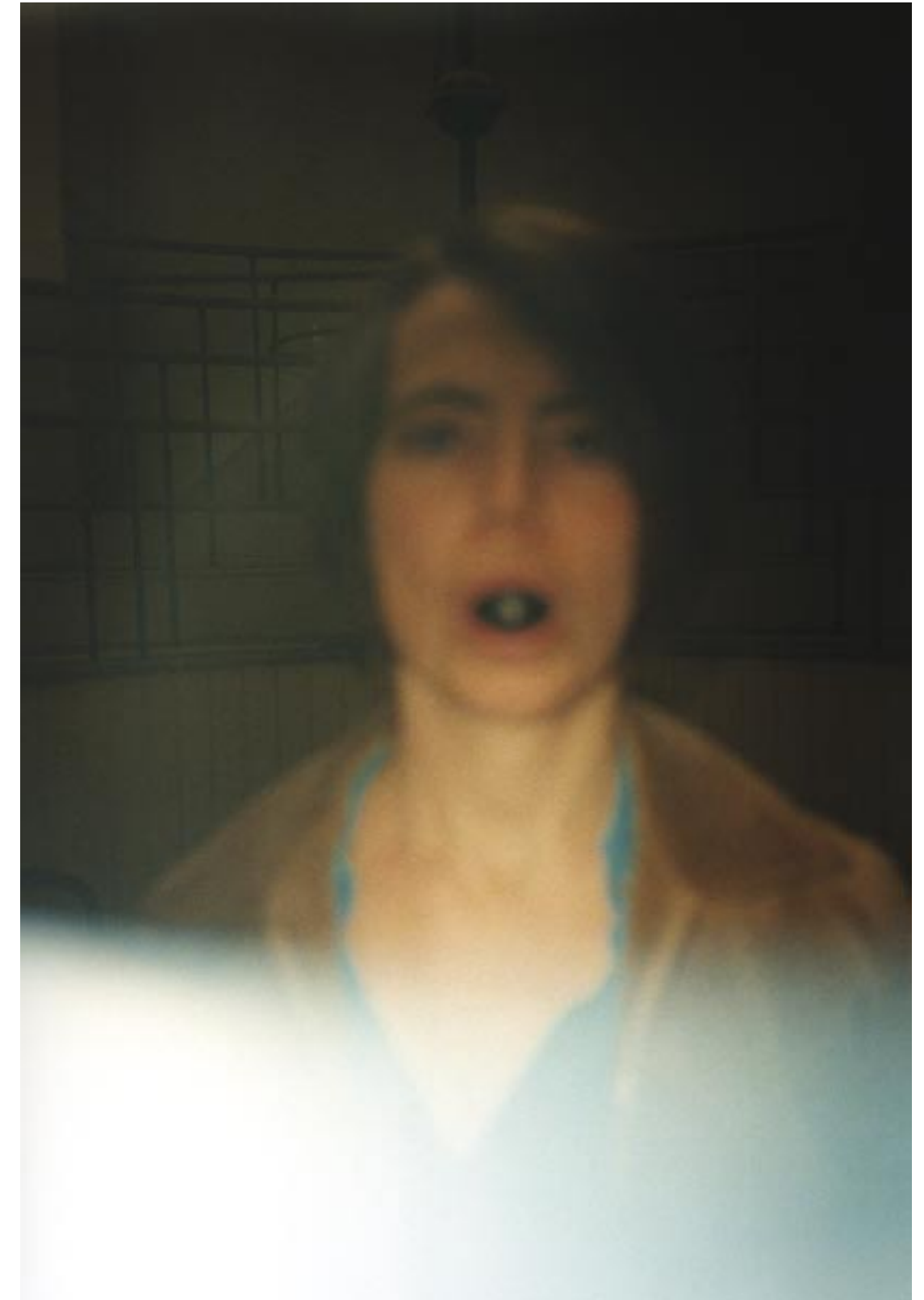


that they could just photograph one another each in their own way and this stood in for conversation



I said Seers didn't speak much. This was probably why this was such a good relationship for her - when Bill manifested as Candy it meant that they could just photograph one another each in their own way and this stood in for conversation. They also toured around performing with an act in which Bill was the ventriloquist and Seers was his dummy. That was around the time when I first met them.





Candy was his specifically photographic persona





Then the ventriloquism ended. Bill was stolen in a burglary at her flat in Clapton in London. She was completely devastated and spent a long time trying to track him down. Horrified that the ignorant thieves might leave Bill somewhere, she spent the nights searching every rubbish bin and skip she passed and the days combing the secondhand shops, but didn't find a single trace. My own theory? Maybe Bill fell in with his captors, like Patty Hearst.

The last thing I heard was that Seers had returned to the island of Mauritius, where she had been born. One of the last times she and Bill had been together they had been on a weekend break in Paris. Watching TV in the hotel room, Seers had caught the end of a repeat of a 1970s French TV series called 'Paul et Virginie', which had been partly filmed on Mauritius. There was one particular scene, set on the beach, which Seers suddenly recalled having witnessed being filmed in production when she was a child. She had entirely forgotten this event and was gripped by the need to revisit the island and discover that exact beach.

After she left for the Indian Ocean, I seldom heard news of her. These days, I try to keep tabs on what she is doing on the internet, but I'm never quite sure that any references I find to the name Lindsay Seers are about the same woman I knew. I suspect that there has been another radical transformation in her persona.



Projector

Extramission

Guinevere Doy





Extramission

Guinevere Doy

A child utters her first words at the age of eight. Her parents are overjoyed: years of anxiety regarding their daughter’s ‘handicap’ are swept away as the child finally joins the communicative circle. To the previously mute child, the transformation is calamitous: the onset of language shatters her immersion in the rich manifold of undifferentiated Being. Her entry into the propositional universe introduces the possibility of linear description, and hence Time. She is able, for the first time, to reflect on the past and anticipate the future. ‘I feel therefore I am’ is replaced abruptly by the cogito. Suddenly, she is aware of a difference between herself in-here and the world out-there. It is a kind of birth, with all the attendant trauma.

The mute child is Lindsay Seers, an undiagnosed autistic with ‘eidetic memory’, which manifests in the classic manner - from an early age Seers has a remarkable ability to draw in exquisite detail from memory visual images or scenes she has glimpsed, however briefly.



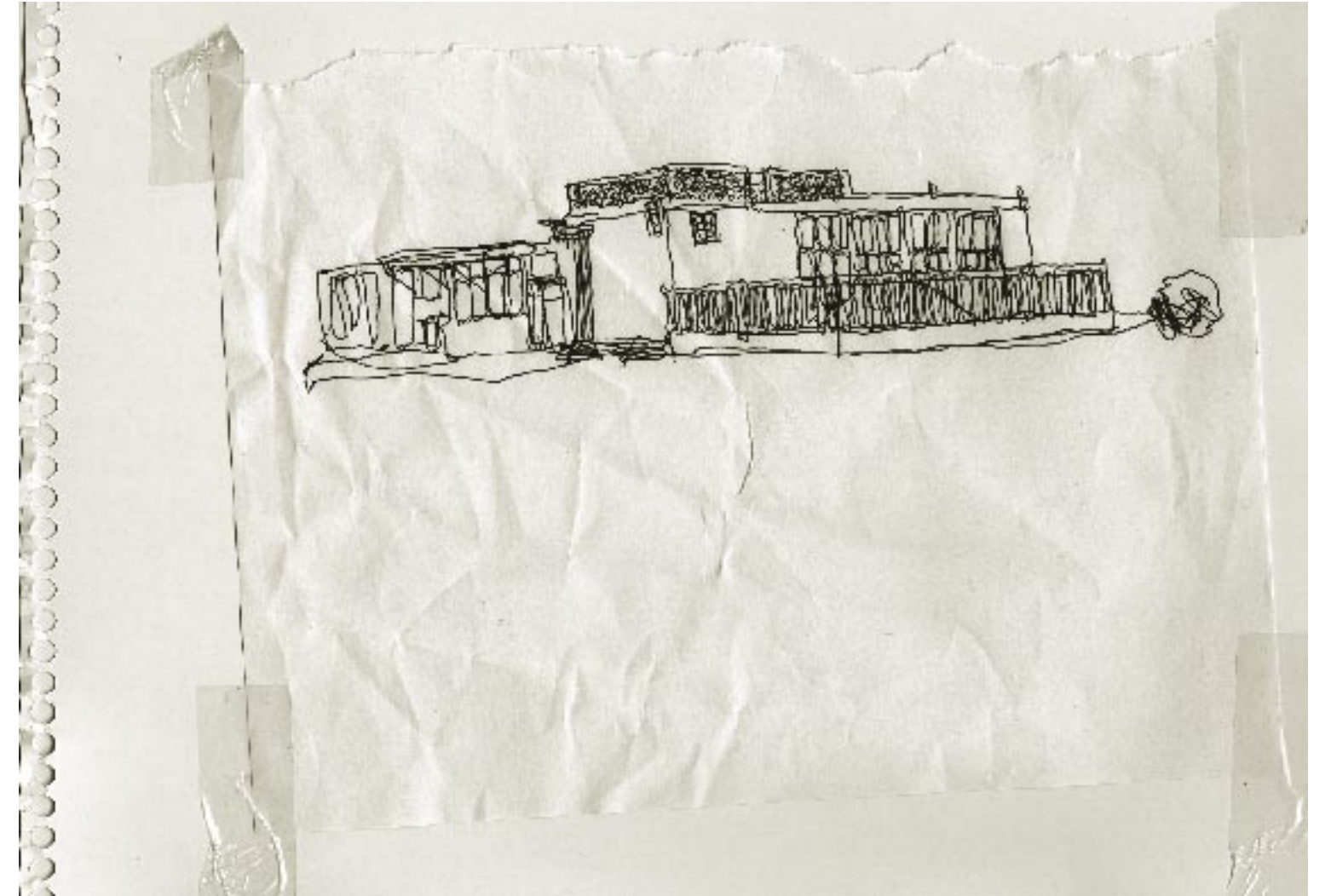
There is still no consensus amongst cognitive scientists whether eidetic, or 'photographic', memory is a special kind of recall. Typically, the subjects who are studied are presented with a visual image, which is then removed, and asked to recall the image, usually by drawing all details they can remember. Such experiments show a significant statistical variation between so-called eidetikers and control groups. Typically, the subject's eyes perform movements consistent with visual scanning patterns as they 'access' their memories of the removed image, as if they are re-viewing the image on an internal 'screen'.

Seers' exceptional memory went uninvestigated - it was merely accepted as a peculiarity amongst her peers - but not undocumented: there are literally hundreds of childhood drawings which survive. We have the testimony of those who were present to confirm that these were not sketches made from life in the conventional manner, but images conjured from the vast store of her young mind. Indeed, no one can recall Seers ever producing a conventional child's drawing: there are no ships with portholes, no houses with pitched roof and chimney, no stick figure mummies and daddies. Seers' childhood drawings are overloaded with detail.

But the content of the images reveal much more than mere fidelity to the remembered scene; there is about the child's pictures a definite sense of an active mind weighing its environment. Even seemingly mundane drawings of domestic interiors have a preternatural air of something momentous about to happen, or having just concluded. There is often a sense of absence, as if some

vital element which the viewer senses ought to be in the picture has been omitted. The pictures strike the viewer as a cipher, lacking a key. And the composition of the drawings, with its focus on apparently insignificant objects, creates the impression that the ordering of the pictorial space is a value-map of the psychological or narrative importance of certain objects to the child. For the young Seers, her drawings were her comments, her requests, her endearments, her expressions of anger, her cries of joy. She was immensely articulate in this unique visual tongue. And then came the rupture which occasioned her first use of language at the age of eight.

According to Seers, the pivotal moment came when she was taken to a professional photographer to have a photographic portrait made. Her first glimpse of the photograph of herself forced her, for the first time, to posit herself as an object in the world. Until then, Seers claims that she lived in a world without language characterized by intense eidetic recollections of her sensory experiences. Such was the fidelity of her memory to actual events that there was no point of reference from which to differentiate present perception from recalled experience: the silent child dwelt in a perpetual reoccurring present. But the viewing of the photograph seems to have thrown her across a perceptual and psychological boundary: there was a hitherto unsuspected vantage point from which she could become an object - for the first time she experienced the sensation of being looked-at.







Seers remembers feeling the sudden beginning of introspection; an inner voice welling up in her mind, the babble distracting her senses and making the world recede. When she searched her memory to recall what she had just seen, instead of the expected eidetic replay she found only description - not the visual 'here-it-is', but a verbal 'it was such and such'. This laying of words end to end, the scanning of thoughts for meaning, was like the seven second delay on a radio talk show, a gap between event and sensory reception. Seers reports that this was the first moment that she developed a sense of past and future: the words now in her mind seemed to insist on sequences and tempo, cutting up the flow of reality into catalogued fragments. In pure shock and distress, Seers needed to fill the void opening up about her. She spoke.



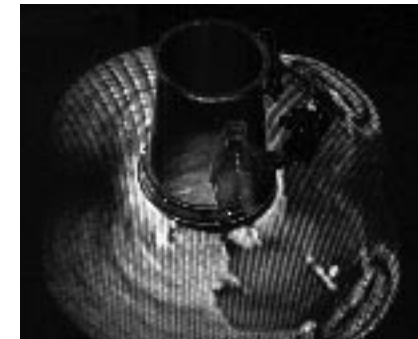
This was the beginning of the internal monologue which characterizes the self-aware being. However, Seers was not empowered by her admission into the linguistic universe, but diminished by it. The harmonious Gestalt of the eidetic omnipresence of her experiential world was shattered. The activation of her latent capacity for language was imperfect at best: Seers would always be restricted in her language skills as far as interpersonal discourse was concerned, and therefore invariably exalted the imago over the logos. Cast out of paradise, Seers craved an immediate return and hence her first articulated request was... to be given a camera. She got her wish.

In the years which followed, the young Seers began taking photographs obsessively; photographs of mundane scenes and everyday objects. She photographed cups, glasses, pots, pans, tea pots, plates, knives, forks, spoons, carpets, tables, doors, door handles, hairbrushes, chairs, sofas, beds, pillows, shoes, sandals, clothes, books, newspapers, palm trees, banyans, mimosas, orchids, sand, pebbles, rocks, fruit, biscuits, sandwiches, cakes, family photographs; she snapped away at parents, family friends, postmen, doctors, dentists, teachers, passers-by, crowds, strangers; she captured images of rooms, staircases, corridors, cellars, attics, sheds, banks, hospitals, shops, docks, ships, boats, planes. An endless succession of images of the quotidian, or partial views and fragments thereof, with no apparent distinction as to importance. What was the child doing?



I suggest that Seers' obsessive cataloguing and witnessing is analogous to the normal child's acquisition of vocabulary. Seers was inhibited from talking and therefore began to collect purely visual signifiers. Unfortunately, no record of the sequence in which her pictures were created exists; we do not know if there was any discernible pattern to her image making. However, I strongly suspect that Seers' early photography would have exhibited, to the trained observer, both syntax and grammar. My thesis is that Seers was inventing, quite instinctively, an alternate language structure based on complex signs. Pictures which survive from this period hint strongly at discursive content: the objects are not merely objects, but records of how Seers felt about those objects or of the role they played in her everyday life. Taken together, they amount to one traumatized child's attempt to put the world back together, to construct a meta-narrative re-unifying existence from the God's eye point of view of the camera.

At first, Seers' family indulged the child's compulsive behaviour. Any attempt to limit her photographic activities or withhold film for her camera led to terrifying behavioural disturbances. However, eventually the family home began to fill with useless photographs, and so her parents consulted the local doctor about 'a cure'. The simplistic recommendation was to confiscate Seers' camera and weather the withdrawal symptoms. Seers' response was to become fascinated by reflections. The child was constantly gazing askance into mirrors, windows, still water. As this behaviour was discouraged too, she began a surreptitious harvest of images glimpsed in reflective



objects such as spoons, tea pots, soda shakers - any surface in which her gaze could make an image appear. She devised endless specular contraptions which would permit her to continue to capture ephemeral images. Frustrated by their daughter's displaced compulsion, Seers' parents returned her camera as the lesser of two evils.

This mimetic need to capture images of reality in any recording medium to hand clearly stood in for the function which Seers' eidetic recall used to perform. However, the brief break with photography as such ushered in a new sophistication in Seers' gaze. After Seers resumed her photographic witnessing, photographs of reflected or distorted images became a reoccurring theme in her pictures. Complex anamorphic distortions begin to appear - images which can only be viewed correctly in curved reflective surfaces. It is as if Seers had discovered the camera's capacity to lie. Her naïve recording of the thing in itself is replaced by a sophisticated awareness of error, aberration, misregistration.



The development of Seers' obsession with photography has been well-documented elsewhere. It suffices to recall that her identification with the camera later became total as she sought to 'become a camera' by taking photographs by exposing film held inside her own mouth. Interestingly, images made in this way are inevitably distorted and are shot through with echoes of the body: saliva streaks, blood-red colouration from light passing through the thin skin of the cheeks, etc. Seers was clearly happy to abandon verisimilitude in her desire to take on the functions of the camera. I believe the sub-text to this methodology was sincerity: the artist is exposing (literally) her innermost sensations.

Isolated as an individual and an artist, the imagery of the mature Seers shows the increasing influence of melancholy and alienation, manifesting in the adoption of successive outsider personas. A fascination with cannibalism, vampires, bloody crimes, etc., is evident in her exhibited work as metaphors for photography's insatiable appetite to devour reality. Eventually, the traumatic break with photography in the wake of the Hamilton incident led Seers, improbably, into the world of ventriloquism. However, Seers' adoption of ventriloquism must be seen as a significant communicative advance. Her 'association' with her dummies, particularly with Bill in all his many guises, clearly gave Seers license to allow her unconscious to speak. Rare film or video of Seers in performance shows that the dummies in her control are fully articulate, even eloquent, in their speech patterns. Only her total identification with the object which speaks finally permitted her own latent powers of language to find expression.

There followed a growing interest in the power of the moving image, particularly television, spurred on by the supposed part her dummy, Bill, played in the early history of television. Seers' claims about her Bill being the original Stookie Bill are clearly false or delusional, since Logie Baird's Stookie Bill resides in the Photography and Television Museum in Bradford. Yet the increasingly common appearance of TV sets in her ventriloquism imagery exhibits Seers' characteristic focus not on the medium but on the mechanism.

Typically, the next phase in Seers' communicative evolution was ushered in not by a process of gradual change but by a process of gradual change but by catastrophic punctuation - her favourite mouthpiece, Bill, was stolen. As an artist, Seers has been extraordinarily fortunate in her misfortunes. Had the psychical rupture of the first photo not occurred, Seers might still be a mute; had the first camera not been confiscated, she might still be locked in endless repetition of the banal; had artist Anne Hamilton not re-invented the mouth photos, Seers might have merited a footnote as the obscure precursor of a mildly interesting technique; had Bill and Candy et al remained with Seers, she might have ended her days as a macabre novelty act.



The disappearance of Bill obliged Seers to find a new mode of expression. With characteristic directness Seers resolved to become a projector. This new development grew out of Seers' decision to return to the island of Mauritius in search of childhood memories. During their last weeks together before the disappearance of Bill, Seers and her companion were watching TV in a Paris hotel room. The programme was a re-run of a popular 1970s hit, 'Paul et Virginie' by Pierre Gaspard-Huit. One particular scene on the program was filmed on La Chaland beach on Mauritius. As it appeared on screen, Seers was struck by a vivid childhood memory: she and her mother had been on the beach the day the French film crew were shooting - they had watched this episode being made. After the loss of Bill, Seers remembered this nostalgic epiphany and yearned to return to the island where she grew up and which signified for her a time without pain.

Thomas Seers 1907. Courtesy of Jule Eisenbud Collection.

Mauritius was discovered by Dutch merchantmen in the 17th century and named after their ship. The French and Hindi speaking island lies east of Madagascar at the same latitude as the middle of its gigantic neighbour. Seers' father, a Royal Navy communications officer, had been stationed on the island after Sri Lanka, formerly Ceylon, gained independence from Great Britain. There is evidence that the young Seers visited the naval base on family days and was fascinated by the disembodied voices emanating from the radio room equipment.





HMS Chichester, Indian Ocean 1967. Courtesy of Peter Seers





Pamplemousse, Ferdinand Wohrnitz 1872.
Courtesy of Mauritius Museum of Photography

On her arrival back in Mauritius Seers began an immediate search for the photographer who had made the first image of her and precipitated the awakening of her dormant capacity for speech. The photographer was F. Wohrnitz, named on the ink stamps on the rear of his photographs. Seers discovered that Fred Wohrnitz had emigrated to Cape Town in South Africa, but the name had considerable resonance in the island's history. At a small museum of photography in the capital, Port Louis, Seers found reference to Fred's great grandfather, Ferdinand. Ferdinand Wohrnitz knew Daguerre and had obtained one of the first commercially available cameras in 1840. He journeyed to Paris to buy the camera and all the chemicals and materials necessary to create a photographic studio, which he shipped to the island in an enormous crate. His studio was the first of its type in the southern hemisphere. His skills were soon put to use by the island's authorities in photographing immigrants who were being transported to the island in huge numbers to boost the native workforce. This was the first known use of the identity photo. The images now haunt the museum of photography - the immigrants were immediately cast into bonded servitude, the mutated form of slavery, which had been abolished by the British in 1844. The discomfited stares of these tragic humans, each experiencing the act of being photographed for the first time, were almost unbearable for Seers.



Ferdinand Wohrnitz 1843. Courtesy of Museum of Photography, Mauritius.



Rose Hill, Ferdinand Wornitz 1873.
Courtesy of Mauritius Museum of Photography



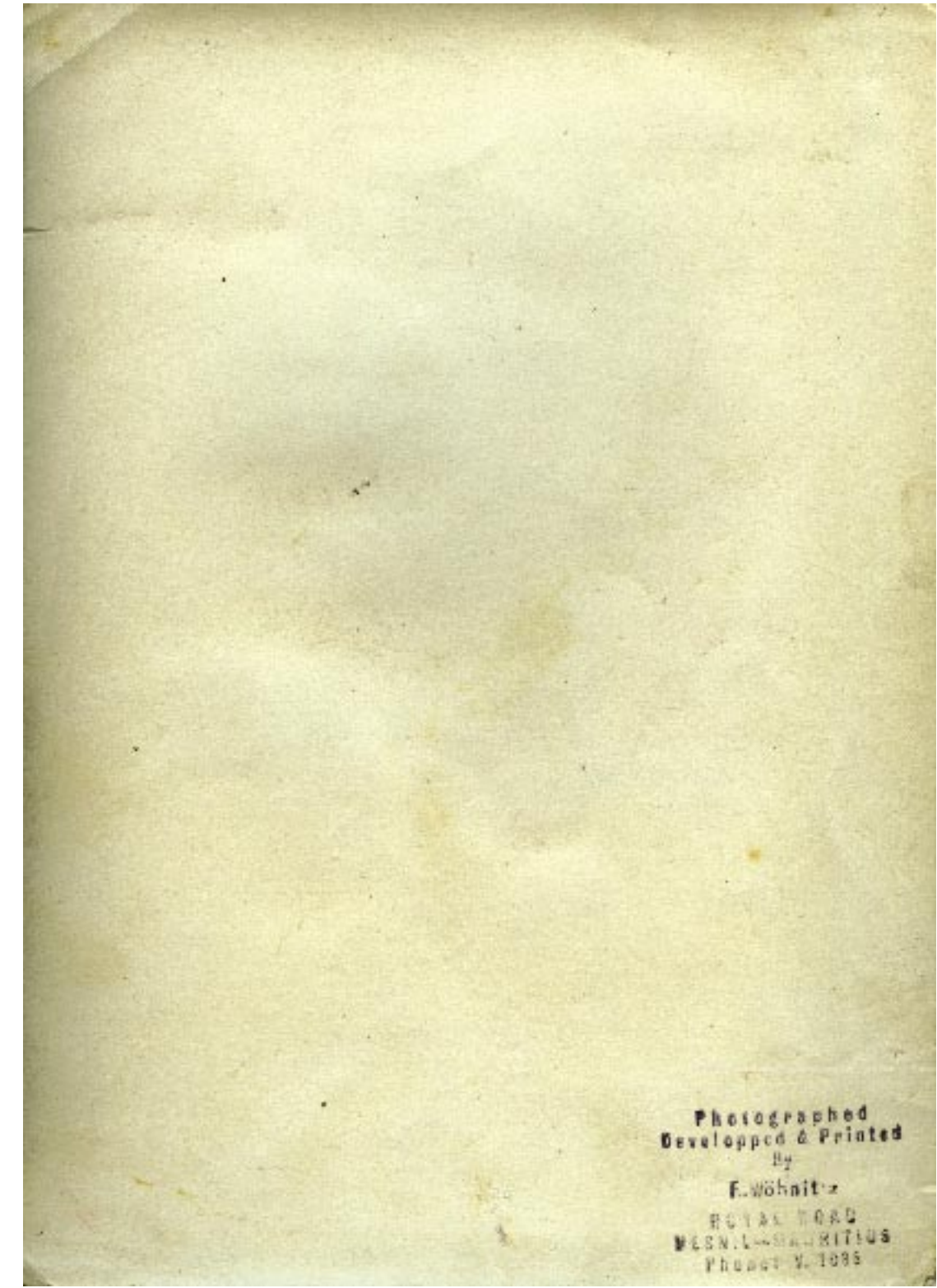
The Island, Ferdinand Wornitz 1873.
Courtesy of Mauritius Museum of Photography



Wohnritz Family Home, Ferdinand Wohnritz 1873.
Courtesy of Mauritius Museum of Photography



Banyan, Ferdinand Wohnritz 1873.
Courtesy of Mauritius Museum of Photography



After the search for Wohnritz was concluded, Seers began to look for her childhood home. Strangely, she was at first unable to locate the residence, despite having made hundreds of detailed eidetic drawings of the house during her mute childhood. For unexplained reasons, all photos of this type had been removed from Seers' possession by her mother. Some of the drawings which survive have a somewhat sinister air, like the aftermath of disaster, and prompt speculation that Seers' childhood silence was a response to some unknown trauma. Seers herself is adamant that she simply had no use for speech until the crisis of the Wohnritz photo.

Perhaps, the overabundance of detail in her recall of the physical structure of the house masked any memories of its situation relative to recognisable landmarks. To progress the search, Seers therefore contacted her estranged mother and requested her help in looking for the family home. Seers had last seen her mother on Mauritius as a child. Her marriage to Seers' father ended after an affair with an antiques dealer, with whom she later left the island by yacht. Her mother readily acceded to this request for help; perhaps this was the true reason for Seers' amnesia.



Seers' mother, Pamela, flew to Mauritius to be reunited with her daughter. They grew acquainted on La Chaland beach, but each of them recalled entirely differently the scene of the French film crew filming a shipwreck with model vessels. Seers later bought a model ship and carried the prop around with her, perhaps hoping a consensus of memory might coalesce around it.









Seers and her mother then hired a car and searched for the house, excitedly swapping idyllic memories of languorous days on white beaches, snorkelling across coral reefs in a turquoise sea, a rope swing in the giant banyan tree, lopsided rides on giant tortoises. Seers did not speak to her mother about a deeper compulsion that motivated her search for the house. She had brought with her a collection of wigs that mimicked her mother's hair. In one of her recurring dreams, she awakens to discover that her own very short hair has grown out until she has long hair like her mother - the discovery is accompanied by a feeling of ecstasy. I have been told by Seers' father of an incident in her teenage years when her new stepmother cut Seers' flowing hair whilst her father was away at sea. On his return, he wept at the sight of her shorn head and feels that his relationship with his daughter never recovered from that moment. It was Seers' intention to reinvest the house with both her own presence and, with the aid of the wigs, the simulacrum of her mother. This dramatic staging was the nascent beginning of the projector phase, the re-emplacement into the scene of trauma in which Seers could play the role of both victim, perpetrator and nurturer.

The two women arrived first at the naval married quarters in which they had briefly occupied a flat before moving to the permanent residence. Seers' recall of these flats was exact, down to the layout of the rooms, the quality of the fixtures and fittings; her accuracy was soon confirmed after a current resident allowed them to look around the dwelling. But the flats had become very run down in the intervening years and Seers' mother could not or would not accept they had dwelt in those particular buildings. The photos Seers took of Pamela in the flats show her sense of misplacement and despair. Seers' father, Peter, relates a curious story of a séance held in the flat. Although sceptical to the point of derision, he humoured his wife and participated. He recalls that the ouija board spelled out the word 'victualled'. This is naval slang for a seaman who is about to become single: a few days later Pamela left.

Seers and her mother then drove around the Vacoas area searching for the larger house. Pamela became increasingly distressed: the area had been transformed into a sprawling warren of houses, a marked contrast to the handful of well-spaced homes she remembered. At one point during the journey Pamela suddenly cried out for the driver to stop in front of a house she was sure she recognised at last. But the startled driver halted so abruptly that the following car rear-ended the vehicle. Eager to avoid complications, the driver sped off and when he was eventually persuaded to go back into Vacoas, they were unable to find the same street again. They never found the house.











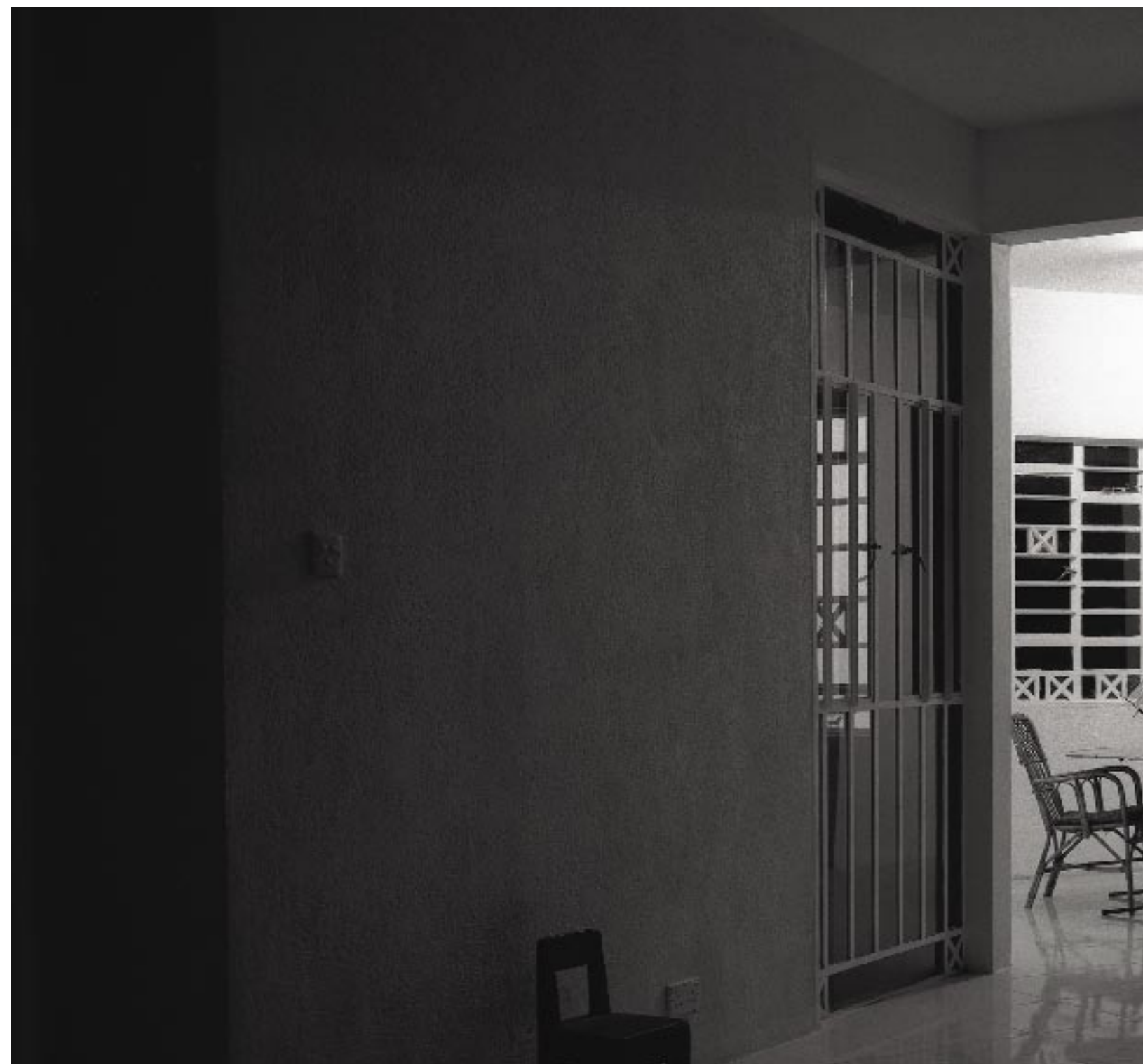




Before departing the island Seers and Pamela visited a fortune teller in China town, a Madame Kwok. Pamela revealed that part of her reason for returning to Mauritius to be reunited with her daughter was a desire to tie up loose ends. For most of her life she had entertained the conviction that she was destined to die at the age of 63. Now 62, she wanted to consult Madame Kwok about the possibility of her imminent death.

Madame Kwok read Seers. She correctly identified that she was an artist but warned: give up photography. Then she ‘saw’ something which greatly disturbed her. Looking aghast at Seers, she began to babble “it will come from you - they will see and you will be outcast - what, what comes out?” Madame Kwok terminated the reading and begged Seers to leave the island.







The events which followed became so notorious that they featured prominently in the Mauritius press. Eye witnesses have sworn that what they experienced was real, but others present are equally certain that nothing out of the ordinary occurred. In any event, Seers was forced to leave the island to escape unwanted media attention and pursuit by believers in the supernatural. The phenomenon has become known as extramission. Witnesses to that first occurrence state that imagery began to project from Seers from a head-mounted system of lights. They witnessed tableaux or dramatic scenes played out on surfaces within Seers' ambit that could act as screens. A double of the artist herself also appeared, but in some sort of idealised form or alternate persona. At first, most people assumed they were seeing pre-recorded projections, but it soon became obvious that the projections were responding to events, reacting in a way Seers couldn't have pre-programmed in advance.

Film record of these extramission events now exists but their authenticity is fiercely disputed. Seers is notoriously reluctant to perform on demand and any objective tests of the phenomenon have proved negative or inconclusive. Nevertheless, if we discount mass hypnotism, and whatever the mechanism, Seers has found a way to externalise her thoughts. She has at last achieved a synthesis between medium and imagination.



International Roaming
Online
Créateurs à travers le monde.
Intel

Lundi 19 juillet 2004 - Rs 10 - ISSN 1022-4408 - 42^e année - N° 15124 - <http://www.lexpress.mu>

l'express

28 PAGES

There is only
CO
Jusqu

se, le poète
l'ant

>13 L'EXPRESS NORD

Centre de formation
Upadyaya : l'emploi à la clé



>14 INTERNATIONALE

: US air
kills 11 peo

RENCONTRE

Lindsay Seers, d'images en imagination

« All'important creative, with her expert
craftsmanship. With an artistic vision that
"grands" images, Lindsay Seers fits the
image. The artist's spirit of an instant.
That's what she does. She takes a few
minutes and you have a masterpiece in your
hand. Plus ça change ! »

Métaphores, métamorphoses, métamorphoses.
De l'anglais aux images, elle devient l'opéra d'un
univers où les images bougent. Durant ses
"représentations" qui durent une vingtaine
de minutes, ce métamorphoseur d'expressions,
explique l'art de l'écriture. Plus de 20 ans de
son œuvre.



prend également conscience de son rôle,
d'être véritable "instrument" vers les
trouilles.

À l'époque, la fille a sept ans. Un
village anglais avec une petite école
bavaroise s'élève dans le paysage.
"Faisant partie d'un village anglais de
notre époque, de celui que je ne connais
pas le nom de l'île." Sept ans, sept de
l'âge. Chaire pure-bouche, sauprés l'ar-
rière. Pour son anniversaire, le père de
Lindsay décide d'emmener la fille et
sa mère, l'écrit, qui aura l'air d'un docu-
mentaire. "Quand j'ai vu la photo, je me suis
rendu compte que je ne pouvais pas en avoir le
même, que je n'étais pas l'un de ces autres
enfants."

Enfin, deux ans après, l'âge de
Lindsay Seers est devenu la dernière
de Lindsay Seers. "Voilà, c'est tout
mon monde." Lindsay a été l'un des
plus de la State School, du University
College, Lindsay, elle a travaillé en MA
et l'un des plus de l'University College de l'université
de Londres. Des années d'après
où Lindsay Seers aime des choses mignon-
nes de Helen Bonington, Roland Barthes,

La plus se souvient de la maison, du jardin,
des arbres des gens et des choses. Elle fait
à son petit espace de maison. "Devant son
même espace photo. En commençant sa
démarche en commençant ses images par
son. C'est le son prochain qui sera. Mais
il sera aussi dans les images de la voir
spécialement à l'extérieur, plus son son.

Une telle demande de questionnement
se pouvait pas l'écouter sans des questions.
"Comment ça compte, le personnage de l'écrit-
ture ?" "C'est un espace de l'écrit." Lindsay
Seers explique document à son "exis-
tence" de projection. Une nouvelle métamorphose
des images de la vie qu'elle est venue
passer à l'écrit, l'écrit de travail de l'écrit
écrit de l'écrit.

Alina GRIFFIN

Lindsay Seers, avant et après
transformation en appareil photo.
Objectif : méditer le
temps, l'écrit et le goût des choses.



ASSOCIATION

