

Below the Surface

There has been much written about the photographic trace and its indexical relationship to a subject that is optically recorded and reproduced. Photography is a medium that re-presents the surfaces of objects, the exteriors of people and things in an unparalleled way. However, what exists even barely below the surface remains hidden from the camera's exacting vision. One of my intentions through the production of this work, *Below the Surface*, is to focus the viewers' attention on the physical marks and traces that are integral to the construction of interior architectural spaces. My images reveal the imperfect, often random markings on the surface of interior room walls just before they are painted. The sub-epidermis is recorded, examined, digitally enhanced and preserved upon another substrate, before the outermost stratum permanently seals it off and obscures it from view. This project, like much of my practice, is an artistic transformation of an ordinary subject, the walls of rooms, something that each of us is intimately familiar with but rarely considers.

Below the Surface is composed of pictures that depict the marks made by construction workers at a particular job site—abstracted documents of the tape and joint compound used to cover the seams between pieces of sheetrock, as well as other indentations, flaws and handwritten notations. Even though individual workers made the marks—evident in the handwriting on the walls—the techniques used in making walls seamless are universal. My focus on these utilitarian marks alludes to the relationship between the mental and physical labor involved in both the production of art and the construction of the places where we live and work. The finished pieces of art and architectural spaces may be pristine on the surface, but that which is invisible—the steps leading up to the end result, in addition to those who have done the labor—is often more meaningful to consider.

On a personal level, inspiration for this project came from the house that my father built for our family in the mid-1970s; my mother still lives there, but my father passed away in 1995. During the construction, I would help my father in the evenings and on weekends. The most difficult job was hanging sheetrock—having to hold it up for what seemed like an eternity while my father secured it with nails. My body would shake under the weight as I struggled not to let it fall onto us. The attached garage was never completely finished on the inside. The only wall on which we hung sheetrock was the one shared with the house, but it was never painted. It still has pencil and ink markings on it made by my father: measurements for the construction of that very wall, notes about other jobs he was doing in the garage, and even a drawing for a *Wheel of Fortune* float that he built for one of the yearly town parades that we participated in as children. This unfinished wall reveals more about my father's life—his ambitions, activities and contributions—than any of the painted walls inside the rest of the house. It is the knowledge of the existence of these buried messages that are meaningful yet mundane at the same time that led me to pursue this work.

In these photographs, the marks made by others have been edited by cropping out carefully selected areas, and then the contrast is greatly increased in order to exaggerate the separation between the sheetrock and the marks upon it. The final prints are presented as unique works of art and are meant to address authorship in the production of art, especially originality as it relates to the re-interpretation of another person's work. Completing this series of prints, which on the surface could easily be approached and read exclusively on a highly formal level, has been a deeply personal process through which faded memories of my father have resurfaced. Obviously, others will not share these same feelings or recollections, but will hopefully discover additional meanings and significance that may be imperceptible to me.

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