

Tom Lovelace
MIRAGE
VALLEY



Falling Diptych, Part One, 2015,
Framed C-Type Print, 46cm x 46cm

Cover image: *Falling No.02*, 2015,
Framed C-Type Print, 62cm x 42cm

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Tom Lovelace: Mirage Valley

Curated by Alma Zevi

Lendi Projects, Celerina, CH

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Criss - Cross by Alma Zevi

Tom Lovelace was artist in residence at Lendi Projects from May to June of 2015 and, as per the mission of the residency, produced work that responded to the isolated and mountainous Engadin Valley. Lovelace has spent most of his life living and working in London, so his urban existence was shaken in 2015 with both the Lendi Projects invitation, and his inclusion in another show outside of the city – at the New Art Centre, Roche Court (Salisbury). This is the first time his artistic practice has engaged so directly with nature. However, it seemed fitting to ask him to collaborate with Lendi Projects, given that his photographic work has previously often taken the outdoors as its subject matter. Lovelace's particular angle in this respect is a presentation of landscapes that are not what they seem. The artist says: 'I attempt to disrupt and reconfigure everyday objects and environments'.

From his preliminary site-visit to the Engadin Valley in the summer of 2014, he produced a series of photographs that focus on the lines of mountain paths that criss-cross the majestic terrain. Indeed, the idea of the line was Lovelace's 'way in' to all the work conceived of during the residency, which is primarily photographic, but also includes sculpture. When he returned in 2015, his eyes followed many lines, not just the seemingly ever-changing horizon, but also that of the villages: their scale distorted, and presence overshadowed, by the dramatic backdrop. He also looked at the lines that constitute smaller, and sometimes ephemeral, elements within the valley; such as the patterns of timber barns, and discarded construction materials that he found in Celerina. The resulting work's obscure, pared-back narrative has, unsatisfyingly, no conclusion. The exhibition has no crescendo, nor a moment of enlightenment for the viewer. Instead, the works take on a cold and empty appearance. At the same time, the artist constructs, and frames, places that seem made for meditation or a pensive mood. There is no real sense of time in these photographs. Things literally 'hang' in the air. Indeed, throughout this new body of work there is a sense of hanging, hovering, waiting, thinking, calculating.

A central element in the imagery in *Mirage Valley* is a tree trunk that the artist had transported by helicopter from the forest at the bottom of the valley, to the top plateau of the *Muottas Muragl* mountain. The artist has referred to this work - which is part installation, performance, Land Art, photography and sculpture – as 'the most practically ambitious work I have taken on'. One might ask: what does the gesture of transporting this piece of wood mean? Is it another exercise in scale - how does the tree trunk look different at the top? Is it about perspective and site-lines? A more difficult question: is it a futile action? While I cannot answer this, I can say with certainty that this exhibition is about transporting and transposing things. Moreover, it is about things being out of place. The artist relentlessly dislodges things that seem permanent and static, so that the familiar

slips into a curious new light. Conversely, Lovelace's artistic language has a distinctive formal rigour that clashes wonderfully with this visual instability. Things are physically, geographically, rationally 'out of place' in this show. And the artist displays no sign of returning them to 'their place'. Yet, strangely, this does not feel like an exhibition about thresholds, impermanence, or even movement. Maybe it is more like a resting place.

Tom Lovelace, *Mirage Valley* by Inès de Bordas



Robert Smithson, *The Great Pipes Monument*, 1967

In September 1967, Robert Smithson embarked on a trip in Passaic, his native town in New Jersey, with his Instamatic 400, a notebook and a copy of *Earthworks*, a science-fiction novel by the British writer Brian Aldiss. A photographic essay documenting his wanderings through Passaic was published in *Artforum* later that year under the title "The Monuments of Passaic" and became a landmark text for both Land Art and associated sculptural practices of the 1960s. Walking across the Passaic Bridge and along the banks of the Passaic River, Smithson identified pre-existing structures in the landscape – industrial or domestic – and ascribed to them the status of "monuments". These included *Monuments with pontoons*, a pumping derrick with a long pipe attached to it, *The Fountain Monument*, a structure consisting of six pipes that pumped water into an artificial crater, and *The Sand-box Monument*, a simple square sandbox found on a children's playground. In each case, Smithson was responding to, and recorded photographically, forms with either very basic or serial structures that resembled minimalist sculpture forms.

In a manner analogous with this approach to the landscape (and also related to that of Smithson's peers Michael Heizer and Richard Long) British photographer Tom Lovelace is interested in responding to and distilling the characters of found structures within the photographic frame. The potential of seemingly simple, basic forms and shapes as the basis of photographic images is at the core of Lovelace's practice. During his residency at Lendi Projects in the valley of Engadin, in the Swiss Alps, Lovelace identified forms revealing the relation of man-made interventions in the landscape and the natural world: taking the legacy of what previous generations of photographic artists referred to as the 'man-altered landscape' back into an expanded sculptural field. As such, Lovelace's work returns to the boundary between photography and sculpture articulated so effectively by Smithson in Passaic.

In *Celerina Study*, for example, a series of black and white photographic studies that became the starting point for his intervention at Lendi Projects, Lovelace deliberately singled-out a man-made line running through the valley of the Engadin and observed the ways in which it affects, shapes and disrupts the landscape. The works he produced subsequently explore the importance of the line within the landscape through a series of interventions, fabricated structures and photographic images. His set of seven timber reliefs entitled *White Entrance*, echo both the shape of the door of a local barn and the lines witnessed within the valley in which it is set, while the *Falling* series by contrast, was produced by Lovelace's own direct intervention within the landscape, through which he transported a fallen tree from the bottom of *Muottas Muragl* back to its perceived original site at the top of the mountain peak. *Platform at Pontresina*, a second, more conventionally sculptural intervention, consists of an installation of five industrial pipes positioned on a disused concrete platform in the forest halfway up the mountain, which likewise responds directly to found forms.

In an interview published in 1984 for his show *Michael Heizer, Sculpture in Reverse* (Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles), Heizer described his interest in sculptural practices as lying in the process of locating "the object in an organic condition that I otherwise would have liked to build" and to "isolate elements from nature if they function as part of a work whose greater sense is only possible by what I construct to surround or support them". It is in the context of such ideas that works like *Pontresina Platform* are best understood, exemplifying the way in which Lovelace's practice is rooted within the radical approaches to sculpture initiated by artists like Heizer and Smithson in the 1960s, and still of such vital importance today.



Platform at Pontresina, 2015, Framed Black and White Photograph, 82cm x 65cm

As I walk through the streets of the Celerina, I feel the weight from above; the mountains, the forests, the rocks, crags and clouds. They are ever present, subtly dominant. There are moments when I slip back into Tom from the fens. I grew up in Cambridgeshire, where the land is flat as can be. Clusters of trees, the odd building and electricity pylons are the few objects, which pierce the horizontal lines that underpin and order the landscape.

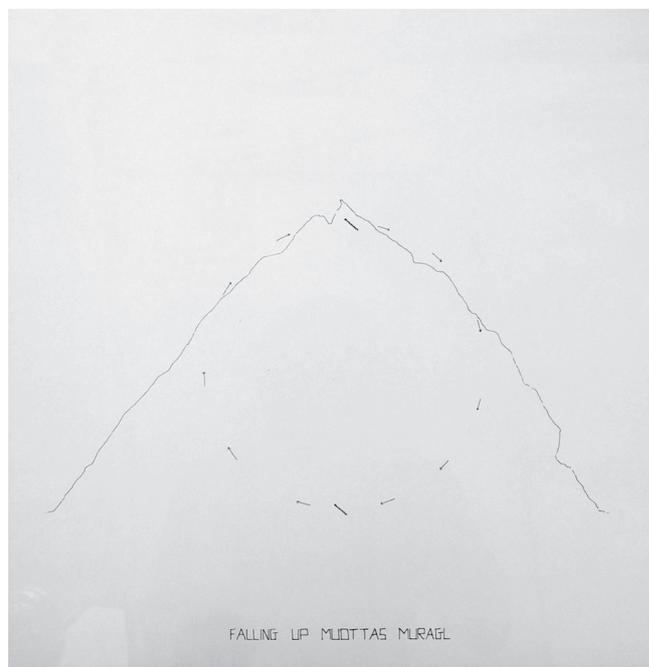
It is the concept of the line that has been at the forefront of my thoughts since arriving in the Upper Engadin on 25 May. On the ground (the populated villages and towns), domestic life is grounded in geometry, the straight edge, and the line. But the line in the Engadin is different from the line in the fens. In the fens, the straight edge has no other. There is no difference (J Derrida). The line and its significance has affected me more in five days in the Engadin than it has in thirty-three years in the English fens. In the Engadin, it is as though the horizontal and vertical line is constantly weighed upon by the ever-present mountains and dominant natural forms. The man-made lines found in the towns of the Upper Engadin are in constant flux, competing with the natural forms of nature never far away in the distance, seemingly hovering above.



Untitled, Barr, 2015 Framed C-Type Print, 35cm x 25cm

Tom Lovelace lives and works in London. He studied Photography at the Arts University Bournemouth and Art History at Goldsmiths College, London. Lovelace works at the intersection of photography, sculpture and intervention. His practice is grounded in a reinvention of everyday objects, materials and processes. The history of photography and its relationship with the disciplines of sculpture and performance underpin his research.

Recent exhibitions include *This Way Up* (Flowers Gallery, London 2015), *GROUNDWORK*, (New Art Centre, Roche Court, Salisbury 2015), *To Camera* (Golden Thread Gallery, Belfast 2015), *Against Nature* (London Art Fair, 2015), *Project 05* (Contemporary Art Society, London 2014), *The Opinion Makers* (Londonewcastle Project Space, London 2014), *Blog Reblog* (Austin Center for Photography, Texas 2014) *Totem and Taboo* (Unseen Amsterdam 2013), *Uncommon Ground* (Flowers Gallery, London 2012), *Work Starts Here* (Son Gallery, London 2012) and *Ristruttura* (Project B Gallery, Milan 2012).



Falling Diptych, Part Two, 2015,
Framed Drawing, Ink on Paper, 46cm x 46cm

Alma Zevi is an independent curator and writer specialising in contemporary art. She founded Lendi Projects in January 2013 as her first permanent space, with the aim of creating a non-profit venue where early-career artists can work and exhibit. Alma is passionate about promoting and nurturing emerging artists with exceptional talent. In this context she has curated exhibitions in galleries, museums and artist-led spaces in Austria, Greece, Italy, Switzerland, and the UK. Since 2010, Alma has been working closely with Not Vital, compiling and writing his catalogue raisonné. She has also curated several of his museum exhibitions, the most recent being at the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire de Geneve (2014) and Museo d'Arte di Mendrisio (2014-2015). Alma frequently contributes to numerous art periodicals, including *The Art Newspaper*, as well as co-authoring gallery and museum catalogues. In 2013, she launched her website, *ALMA'S ART DIARY*, where she publishes articles about art that she is in close contact with.

Inès de Bordas is co-founder of Adad books, an independent publishing company for photo-books based in London. As well as editing other photographic publications (*Chris Shaw: Before and After Night Porter*; Kehrer, 2012), she has worked on photography exhibitions in Miami, Tokyo and London (including *Inside Out: Photography After Form* at the Cisneros Fontanals Art Foundation, 2010; *Chris Shaw: Before and After Night Porter*; Tokyo Photo, 2011; *Another London: International Photographers Capture City-Life*, Tate Britain, 2012), and more recently worked for Tate Britain on research towards the donation of the Eric and Louise Franck London Collection. Recent publications by Adad Books include *Pictures from Moving Cars* (with John Divola, Daido Moriyama and Joel Meyerowitz) and *Abstracts with the collective AM Projects* (which includes Antony Cairns, Tiane Doan na Champassak and Daisuke Yokota).

