

M + B

1000 Words

Hannah Whitaker

Peer to Peer

Mörel Books

February 16, 2015

By Lewis Bush

For an artist to toy with the material qualities of photography is a common device, even at a time when that materiality is becoming increasingly anachronistic. The great majority of photographs have been abstracted out of existence, transformed into reams of code. The original, material forms of photography, like film, are now almost solely the domain of artists and photographers with a point to make.

Hannah Whitaker's *Peer to Peer* published by Morel Books uses a combination of collage, in camera masking and other forms of manipulation to shatter the surface of her analogue imagery, in the process disintegrating them into many parts. This might seem like a well-worn path, were it not for the way these bits are organised to form distinctive patterns appearing to the viewer like a lost visual code. Indeed even the pictures in their arrangement across the pages seem to hint at some form of cypher, with empty areas occupied with an almost imperceptible varnish which echoes the shape of absent photographs.

The subjects of Whitaker's photographs (a mixture of portraits, still lifes, landscapes and nudes) seem in many cases much less important than the patterns, which dominate and overwhelm the images below. The shapes and forms used create a powerful over-riding mood, with mosaics of dots and squares forming a calm, stable pattern reminiscent of Morse code, while the more anarchic triangular breakdowns prove enticingly aggressive. Vertical lines create the effect of a bar code or zoetrope, and the image beneath takes on a strangely powerful sense of motion.

The result of these experiments then is more than a nostalgic exercise in collage and old-fashioned photography. Instead *Peer to Peer* is a book seemingly with one foot in the material past, and with the other in the ever more dematerialised present. It is a book that plays with the codes and conventions of photography and abstract art, and does it fittingly enough, with the very material of photographs themselves.



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