

'The Devouring Eye: Photography and the Mouth' **Olivier Richon**

Wed 13 May - Sun 14 June

PV: Tue 12 May 6:00 - 8:30 pm

White Conduit Projects is pleased to present *The Devouring Eye* by Olivier Richon.

The exhibition title is taken from his book recently published by Mack/SPBH, in which Richon rethinks the act of looking through the language of appetite, taste and consumption. The book describes photography not as a neutral act of observation but as a voracious form of incorporation. The camera becomes an organ that both ingests and transforms what it sees. It invites us to reconsider how we relate to photographic images and how deeply they live in us.

Richon's photographs reframe seeing as a form of tasting: the camera looks, transforms and consumes. Richon's photographs are ironic quotations of texts and images, and here quotation is understood as a form of incorporation. When he positions objects, he references some themes and conventions of western still-life painting. It is the light that gives objects an uncanny sense of volume and stillness. His pictures, although quoting a tradition from painting, remain essentially photographic and optical. The uniform surface behind the arranged objects is nothing more than a studio paper backdrop.

The work reads less as a coded allegory and more as an allegorical parody, inhabiting an aesthetics of ambiguity and promising that meaning may unfold over time—or may never appear—depending on how the viewer digests the image.

Some photographs are in dialogue with specific paintings, such as the *Mound of Butter* (1880) by Antoine Vollon or *Two Monkeys* (1562) by Pieter Bruegel the Elder. Others relate to literature as in *A modest Proposal*, taking as its title from the eponymous essay on mercantile cannibalism by Jonathan Swift (1729). *A real allegory With Carrot* is a visual quotation of a moment in Emile Zola's *The Masterpiece* (1886) when the painter Claude Lantier argues that '*the day was not far off when a solitary, original carrot might be pregnant with revolution*'.

In *Kyoto Kitchen* (2016), the starting point of the work is a photograph of the kitchen of the Villa Stein (1928) built by Le Corbusier, where a fish placed on the worktop offers a link between architecture and food. A similar fish is restaged in the kitchen of a modest Soba restaurant in Kyoto. Oscillating between still life and document, the photograph is a conversation between the clarity of the cuisine of Villa Stein and the shadows of that of Kyoto. It recalls aspects of *In Praise of Shadows*, written in 1933, by Jun'ichirō Tanizaki. The shadow is an aesthetic device that gives form to looking and to taste. The visible becomes edible.

The publication *The Devouring Eye* is available at White Conduit projects.

Olivier Richon was born in Lausanne in 1956. He moved to London in 1976 and studied film and photographic arts at the Polytechnic of Central London, earning a BA (Hons) in 1980 and an MPhil in 1988. His photographs are held in major public collections including the Victoria & Albert Museum, Tate Britain, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Centre Pompidou, Musée de l'Elysée, Lausanne, Brooklyn Museum, the Art Gallery of New South Wales and the National Museum of Modern Art in Kyoto. In 2016 he completed a residency at Tokyo Arts and Space (TOKAS). His photographs of Bombay Film Sets were included in *The 80s Photographing Britain* at Tate Britain (2024). He is Professor of Photography at the Royal College of Art.



Portrait of a monkey with walnuts, 2008, C-type print, 91 x 115 cm

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Gallery Hours

Wed + Thu: 11am – 6pm

Fri 12pm – 5pm

Sat 12pm – 6pm

Sun 11am – 4pm

Nearest station  Angel

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