

# AFTER VERMEER

## Paul Kilsby

Jean-Claude Lemagny, formerly of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, which has several of Kilsby's photographs in its permanent collection, wrote:

*'A refined and visionary photographer, Paul Kilsby transcends the confines of different epochs in his exploration of our common cultural past. Graced by the magic of his perfect technique, his highly original photographs fuse their sources to yield new hybrid images which sustain our fascination by their visual logic.'*

This exhibition consists of fifteen photographs by Paul Kilsby, artist and lecturer at the Royal College of Art. Each of the images in the exhibition revisits paintings by the seventeenth century Dutch painter, Johannes Vermeer. Kilsby has for many years been fascinated by Vermeer's use of the camera obscura, a device which, he believes, gave the painter an experience of the world that was essentially optical and photographic two centuries before the 'birth of photography'. With this as his starting point, Kilsby has turned his camera onto reproductions of Vermeer's paintings, exploring their unique qualities of focus, lighting and composition through a variety of interventions. His strategies include recomposing new versions of the paintings, sometimes introducing figures from one painting into another; creating optical interruptions of one kind or another; and exploring a restricted focus in a way that recalls the cinematic narrative convention of throwing one figure into a blur while another snaps into sharp focus. In these and other ways Kilsby seeks to explore not only the uncanny visual immediacy of Vermeer's paintings but also the intense silent narratives of people wholly immersed in thought.

"My photographs spring from an enduring obsession. I first saw Vermeer's paintings as a schoolboy and recognized straightaway that there was something strange and beautiful about how they showed the world. I was reminded then of peering into the ground glass screen of an old Kodak box camera I had been given – there was something shared in the luminous and liquid tonalities of both. Now, of course, I realize that as I wandered round my house I was using that old camera as a *camera obscura* and that Vermeer had, to all intents and purposes, a parallel and prescient 'photographic' experience. In a way, Vermeer was proposing a photographic paradigm. There has been plenty of theoretical and practical analysis of Vermeer's use of the camera obscura in recent years, trying to prove one way or the other whether he did or did not own and use the device. But that doesn't interest me any more – it is obvious to me as it is to anyone who has used a large format camera that Vermeer's paintings draw upon an experience of the world mediated by an optical, photographic experience. The photographs in this series seek to explore that silent, optical world. They begin as still lifes made up of reproductions, sometimes scoring, sometimes folding, sometimes cutting sections out and reworking Vermeer's compositions. I'm interested too in exploring a restricted focus as a way to 'reroute' the paintings' narrative strands. These photographs are made physically and optically, without digital interventions." Paul Kilsby

The photographic prints in this exhibition were made using the special technique known as the platinum palladium process. This technique involves great expertise both in the preparation of the precious metal salts of platinum and palladium used and in the coating by hand of the watercolour paper with the light sensitive emulsion. The results give an unparalleled luminosity to the prints due to the greatly extended tonal range, which is capable of retrieving the finest nuances of light and shade. Photographs made using this process are also valued for their longevity – the stability of the platinum and palladium ensures that the prints will last for centuries without any changes. Preparing the prints for this exhibition has involved close co-operation between the artist and 31 Studio over several years.

## **Publications and Exhibitions**

Paul Kilsby has exhibited in many group and one person exhibitions both in the UK (including London, Bath, Birmingham, Newcastle, Oxford and Plymouth) and overseas (among them New York, Prague, Paris, Plovdiv, Bulgaria and Perm, Russia). He has work in private and public collections in France, the Czech Republic, Russia, the USA and the UK. He has written numerous catalogue essays on a range of artists, including Daro Montag, Susan Durges, Garry Fabian Miller, Jo Broughton, John Blakemore, Vered Lahav, Cia Durante and Peter Bobby. A book of Kilsby's photographs, *The Seer & The Seen*, with an introduction by George Melly and an essay by Alex Martin, published by Festerman Press, is available via Amazon.

## **THE EXHIBITION – Now available for hire**

### **Content:**

The exhibition comprises of 16 works mounted and framed – 16x 86x66.5cm – 10.74 metres. The frames are dark stained wood with standard glazing. The frames are mirror plated. The prints are floated on an off white mount. The frames must be fixed to the wall via the mirror plates with security screws.

### **List of Images:**

The Maidservant, The Cylinder, The Balance, The Prism, The Cone, The Geographer, The Allegory, The Luteplayer, Three Women, The Pitcher, Two Women, The Hat, The Curtain, The Astronomer, The Mirror I and The Mirror II

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