

# Fixing Memory

*Is it not possible – I often wonder – that things we have felt with great intensity have an existence independent of our minds; are in fact still in existence? And if so, will it not be possible, in time, that some device will be invented by which we can tap them?... Instead of remembering here a scene and there a sound, I shall fit a plug to the wall and listen in to the past ... Strong emotion must leave its trace; and it is only a question of discovering how we can get ourselves again attached to it...*

Virginia Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past' in *Moments of Being*, 1939, p. 74.

The chatter of remembered experience pervades the work of Janna van Hasselt as layered images push and pull against each other, echoing the patterns of memory. Recollections advance and recede as the imprints of the past dissolve into mutable compositions. Memories shift, fade, resurface and transmute. In these works, the ephemeral and fragmentary nature of memory is revealed and the desire to capture and preserve the intangible past is exposed.

Like Virginia Woolf, van Hasselt too yearns to 'listen in to the past'. The images made visible on these walls are the artist's own memories laid bare. Each work represents a cross pollination of imagery and experience drawn together to create an enduring impression of a moment in time.

Van Hasselt's print project began in 2004 when she traveled to the Rhode Island School of Design on a four month exchange programme. The sounds, smells, feelings and images encountered during this stay have provided the stimulus for the artist's most recent body of work. *RI 02906* thus emerges as something of an autobiographic visual diary. The imagery is eclectic; interior and exterior spaces, domestic furnishings and fittings, architectural details and aerial landscapes, sketches and spontaneous mark-making all recall specific times and places, and each has its own story to tell. Intuitive scribbled drawings, photographs, maps and other collected ephemera are here replicated, juxtaposed and/or transposed in combinations that amplify the aesthetic resonance of the past.

In one sense then, these works are a personal document, memories made concrete and lasting. But, more than this, van Hasselt's images can be seen as an insightful reflection on the way in which memory itself functions, and a cogent consideration of the collective need we feel to hold on to bygone experiences. Within each work van Hasselt evinces a sophisticated understanding of spatial and temporal concerns, exploiting these formal structures so as to convincingly capture the inconsistent and unstable nature of memory and recollection. The layering of prints disrupts the conventional spatial dynamics of the picture plane so that images advance and recede in a continuous state of flux. Individual prints are flattened out so that depth is now registered by reading the images through and against one another. In this way too, time is compressed and reconfigured. There is no chronology or linear development here. Instead, memories randomly diffuse through van Hasselt's works. If individual motifs are recognized as markers of specific experiences, then what we find in these layered works are endlessly variable pathways to the past, each of which helps keep remembered experience vital and dynamic.

**Barbara Garrie**