

THE
PHOTOGRAPHERS'
GALLERY

CLARISSE D'ARCIMOLES FORGOTTEN TALE

19 AUG - 24 SEP



The Photographers' Gallery
16 - 18 Ramillies Street
London W1F 7LW
Oxford Circus
tpg.org.uk

CLARISSE D'ARCIMOLES

THE PHOTOGRAPHERS' GALLERY



Performance is at the heart of the work of French photographer Clarisse d'Arcimoles' (b. 1986). Based in London she studied Set Design for Performance at Central Saint Martins followed by a Postgraduate course in photography. Her practise marries these two mediums.

In her work she restages photographs often casting herself as sitter, recreating a certain mood or scene through costume, tinted make-up and pose.

In her series she *Un-possible retour*, d'Arcimoles restages old family snapshots with the subject in the same pose, clothes and setting. Initially a simple idea, on closer inspection the viewer can see the care that has gone into mirroring the original image as accurately as possible.



For her piece *Forgotten Tale* the artist meticulously re-created a life-size black and white photograph taken in the impoverished East End of London in 1902.

The reconnection of the past and present reflects d'Arcimoles' fascination with photography as a permanent recorder of memories combined with the impossibility of reversing time.

EDITION INFORMATION

Prices start from £325 + vat.

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Victorian poverty proves pertinent in *Forgotten Tale* at The Photographers' Gallery



For years, artists and writers have been inspired by the destitution of the Victorian poor. Works such as Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* and Jack London's *The People of the Abyss* have come to define an era synonymous with slums, street urchins, prostitutes and gangs. Now, one young artist has joined their ranks, tackling the subject in an original and thought-provoking exhibition, *Forgotten Tale*, that opened at London's Photographers' Gallery on Friday. Four years in the making, the work not only makes the Victorian era tangible for contemporary viewers, but also has something pertinent to say about the poverty that still exists in the capital today.

"I always wanted to enter into a black and white photograph. And now I've done it," exclaims Clarisse d'Arcimoles. After moving to London from her native France in 2005 to pursue a Set Design for Performance degree at Central Saint Martin's, d'Arcimoles became fascinated by photography, and completed a postgraduate degree in the subject.

Since then, she has cleverly blended the two disciplines to illustrate photography's power to recreate memories in playful and nostalgic artworks. For example, in *UnPossible Retour* (2011) she re-staged old family photographs 20 years later, subtly highlighting the passing of time while with *Rise and Fall* (2012), she recreated a flat in a demolished post-war apartment block. Through revisiting the past, she forces us to reassess the present anew, making her one of 2016's most exciting emerging talents.

Fittingly, we meet at a café in Spitalfields Market, just yards from the East End slum that inspired the whole project. "*Forgotten Tale* was inspired by a photograph of a poverty-stricken mother and her six barefoot and grubby children making hairbrushes in a common lodging room in Spitalfields, one of London's most notorious Victorian slums," she explains, sipping her Americano. "Taken in 1902, just months after Queen Victoria died and Edward VII was coronated, the picture shows hardship, but also bravery and familial tenderness." The final work is a human scale, black and white

recreation of the poorly furnished common lodging room featured in the photograph – imagine a theatre or film set – with a bed, fireplace, table, chairs, gas light fittings and a cupboard.

The detail of the recreation is astounding. A collection of porcelain trinkets scatters the mantelpiece, copper coins are painted graphite grey, horsehair on the table for the brushes is sepia-silver toned, and even the wallpaper is bleached out in sections to mirror the uneven exposure of the original picture. “I looked at the picture millions of times, and I always found new details, new object that I hadn’t noticed before,” she explains.

D’Arcimoles discovered the photograph in the Bishopsgate Institute archive, also in east London, in 2011. Since then, she’s spent time working on other projects while fundraising and meticulously collecting objects from car boot sales, antique stores and eBay. “I was drawn to the image for a number of reasons,” she says. “Having lived in east London since I moved to the city in 2005, I was naturally interested in the Spitalfields’ history. It has always been an area of immigration. At that time it was Italian and Irish, then in the Sixties Bangladeshi and Russian. People have always come here to make a new life, for a new beginning.”

More intriguingly, the image held secrets. “I know the year and the location that the photograph was taken in, but apart from that everything is a mystery. That’s why I called the project *Forgotten Tale* – I started inventing a story about the family. Where is the father? Perhaps he is absent, or perhaps he was killed in the Boer War, we’ll never know for certain.”

For Clarisse, recreating a Victorian photograph in the present gives it new meaning. “It reminds people how gloomy, bleak and hard life was in the East End. Yes the picture is a documentation of hardship, poverty and labour, but it also highlights their brave determination to survive and love. Despite the fact her children don’t have shoes, the mother’s working really hard to make it. Sadly, we’ll never know if she did make it in the end.”

One of the more interesting aspects of the work is the absence of its subjects. Why did she leave the people out? “It makes you focus on the objects that tell their story,” she muses. “I want it to feel like they’ve just got up and left the room... it’s a memorial to their lives.”

Perhaps the real value of *Forgotten Tale* is its intrinsic connection to the present. By delving into this long forgotten family’s life, we’re reminded how little has changed over 100 years later. According to New Policy Institute statistics, in 2016, almost half of the children that live in Tower Hamlets are in poverty (49 per cent), the highest in London.

The borough also has the lowest male life expectancy, the capital’s second highest unemployment rate and above average homelessness. By inviting viewers to step inside a time past within the frame of a black and white photograph, we’re shown how this forgotten tale is concerningly current.

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Clarisse d'Arcimoles. Forgotten Tale

13 November – 14 December 2013 at Breese Little Gallery, London.



Breese Little are delighted to present an exhibit of Clarisse d'Arcimoles' current work in progress, *Forgotten Tale*. Three years in the making, *Forgotten Tale* is a new experiment involving photography, set design, installation art and painting, scheduled for late 2014. d'Arcimoles will recreate a 1902 photograph found at the Bishopsgate Institute, London, of a turn of the century Shoreditch slum. The final installation will be a three-dimensional replica of the original photograph, which will subsequently be explored physically by the viewer and the public. The photograph will be re-enacted in the same area it was first taken a hundred years ago, a house on Fournier Street in the heart of Spitalfields.

This project will give rise to a rediscovery of photography, presenting it as a powerful critical tool of reality and history; a very different idea not only of space but also being-in-the-photographic-world will emerge. This timely project has a deep connection to Spitalfields' local history as well as its community and changing face as new initiatives continue to thrive and increasing volumes make the pilgrimage to the neighbourhood.

We are seeking to raise £30,000 to fund all elements of creating the set inside the house at Fournier Street. Our funding targets are divided into three stages, starting in November 2013 with a unique, non-profit Christmas sale of d'Arcimoles' work and presentation of the project's development. All proceeds from this month-long exhibit will go to *Forgotten Tale*. There will be a celebratory Christmas Fundraiser on Tuesday 3rd December, with an informal Q&A with d'Arcimoles, who will explain the project further.

We hope to raise the first £10,000 by Christmas. The second stage of funding begins in early 2014 with a Kickstarter campaign. In advance of the launch, d'Arcimoles' explanatory 4-minute film, exploring the idea of being transported into a black and white photograph, is on her website: www.clarisse-darcimoles.com.

Forgotten Tale is a complex and ambitious project requiring a high level of different fields of experience. Your involvement will support and develop a rare investigation into the boundaries between different artistic media.

We can offer various opportunities to support the project, all of which are invaluable to the emphasis on collaboration and community in *Forgotten Tale*. The artwork will be accompanied by a substantial education programme, including related lectures, events, and community projects.

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Opening hours
Tuesday - Saturday
From 12pm to 6pm



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Forget Nostalgia – A Little Theatre of Self



© Clarisse d'Arcimoles
'Tinted Soldier' 2012

© Clarisse d'Arcimoles
'Ancestors' 2012

Clarisse d'Arcimoles

Forget Nostalgia: A Little Theatre of Self

20.11.12 - 19.12.12

Breese Little / London / England

Forget Nostalgia – A Little Theatre of Self / Reviewed by Anna McNay / 19.12.12

For her second solo exhibition with *BREESE LITTLE*, French artist Clarisse d'Arcimoles has turned the Great Sutton Street space into a local photographer's studio in Britain a century ago. Venturing in from the cold winter air, the warm red walls, wooden panelling, worn Persian carpet, and the various suitcases of bought, found, donated, and home-made props and costumes warm the visitor to his core. The model boat standing against the cloudy backdrop at the far end of the gallery beckons to him to step not only further inside, but simultaneously back in time.

The walls are hung with d'Arcimoles' modestly sized photographs – each a near faithful reproduction of a Victorian or Edwardian original, sourced from her own collection, online, or the collections of Martin Parr and Tom Phillips. However, the once anonymous sitters have here been replaced by d'Arcimoles herself, who, ever since she was a child, has longed to be able to "jump into" these old black and white scenes, like a *Mary Poppins* of photography. Trained initially as a set designer, and then as a photographer, d'Arcimoles' work is a mixture of playfulness and nostalgia, subversion and recreation. Her longing to revisit and restage the past is firmly anchored with a desire to bring it into the present, and, as such, although staying resolutely away from the digital, which she feels looks "really fake", she nevertheless opted to use a 120mm medium format film camera from the 1970s, rather than a genuine Victorian model. Similarly, she was not shy to use modern techniques of photomontage and post-production Photoshop, explaining that, in the end, the project as a whole (which she astoundingly completed in just three months), felt like taking a trip through the history of photography, beginning with reproducing the Victorian set, and progressing through various processes and techniques to the present day.

The process also took d'Arcimoles, or, at least, her final works, on a journey from 3D (the original models and set) to 2D (the original image) back to 3D (the recreated set with her in it) and finally to 2D again (the ultimate work). It was so important to her to render the final images flat that she spent hours finding that one single point in her studio at which to erect the tripod, from which the perspective would play along with her trickery, concealing the presence of a stool behind the boat in *Tregirls Beach*, or the meeting of backdrop and carpet in *Britannia*. To invert the original, she created her sets in black and white, and took her photographs in colour. However, there are few colour elements showing through in the final works – just the odd smear of paint on the background studio walls (a small clue to the modern setting of these images), or, in the case of *The Minstrel* – her favourite piece owing to its simplicity – merely the eyes and hair. *The Tinted Soldier* is the exception, however, as an homage to its titular process, so common in Victorian times, with the soldier here having half his face pinked in quite garishly, almost evoking the suggestion of serious battlefield trauma or burns. This could be my overactive imagination running wild, but, as d'Arcimoles says, it's all about storytelling and *a little theatre of the self*.

Various works recall the frivolity of a seaside trip, where holidayers might pose with their heads through painted wooden boards on the pier (see *The Swimmers* and *The Moon*), whilst others, such as *The Ancestors* and *Aspidistra*, are more serious in their pose and direct gaze. Really, there is something to tickle almost everybody's fancy.

This exhibition might perhaps be seen as a taster of things to come, since d'Arcimoles is currently working on her next project, to recreate the scene from a photograph she has found of a turn of the century Shoreditch slum. This time, however, she will not place herself in the scene, but invite visitors to become the sitters, as they literally step into the frame.

For more information on Clarisse d'Arcimoles, see her website:

<http://www.clarisse-darcimoles.com/>