

Author: Caroline Dawson, carolineajd@gmail.com

Audio Description script for The Photographers' Gallery 2020, Sat 20 June

Please do not reproduce without permission of Author

Jan Svoboda, *Picture That Will Not Return XXXV*

The third work I will describe today is called *Picture That Will Not Return XXXV*. Like other works I'm describing, the date this one was taken and/or printed has been hand written at the top centre of the photograph in black ink - 1972.

It measures 51cm in width, by 75cm in height. This is around the same size as a standard sized pillow case. The photograph is a black and white silver gelatin print on paper. In the catalogue, the colours look sepia or reddish brown. The print on display in the exhibition is a more neutral black and white.

This image has been transferred from its original backing to a Kapa plate ... which is an extremely light foam board. It looks as if the board or plate has been wrapped in a blue-y grey muslin fabric ... a loose weave of thin fibres. The backing of this photograph is much thicker than the backing of the last other larger works I'm describing ... almost one centimetre in thickness. The edges of this photograph, are worn and well handled ... especially in the top right corner, where I can see faded tones where the paper is worn away.

The photograph has been taken from above. As the viewer, we are looking down on a collection of around 30 torn pieces of photographs and photographic paper. Each detail of the photograph is perfectly in focus ... perfectly crisp.

The background that the pieces of paper rest on looks almost like a formica table top, but equally it could be a lino flooring. The background is light grey, with a darker loose cross-hatch pattern over that. It looks as if the background is made up of square tiles - however, there does not appear to be any three-

dimensionality to each of the tiles ... no grout gap or space between each one. So again ... it could be a floor or table covering.

There are various marks on the background, including many small dots ... which could be oil stains, or just part of the pattern. In the top right corner, there are larger white marks that looks like small spills of white paint. Just above these white marks, the diagonal corner of the background is much darker than the rest of it. Suggesting something covering the table-top or flooring.

There are two main piles of photographic paper. If the photograph was divided in half horizontally, the first of these piles of paper is close to the bottom of the top half, and the second pile is close to the top of the bottom half. These piles are not neat ... the papers are spread and messy. They overlap between piles, and on the right side of the photograph - there are smaller piles and tears of paper.

The pile of paper at the top of the image looks as if someone placed a neat pile on the floor in the top left of the composition, and pulled the pile over to the right using their hand. The pieces at the bottom of pile are on the left ... the pieces at the top of the pile are towards the right of the image. There are whole photographs which have been ripped and placed on top of their other half. Some of the photographs face upwards and the subject is visible ... white and black checkered tiling ... a metal bowl or colander holding large white eggs, some trees and buildings as if viewed through a window. Some of the photographs look more like matt black pieces of paper, and some of them are upside down - with only the white back of the photographic paper visible. This is made obvious by the residue from old tape in each corner of the white papers. There is one large piece of paper placed with the print side downwards. The bottom right corner of this image has been folded up to reveal the photographic print ... although it is hard to tell what we are looking at.

The next large pile of papers in the bottom section of the photograph is an array of photographic paper, alongside what looks to be photographic printing materials ... some kind of thin metal framing squares ... a black folder ... and

what looks to be the backing of one of Svoboda's photographs. The bulk of this pile is more central in the composition than the first, and there are no visible photographic prints. Resting on top of this pile, there are three small strips of white paper ... torn in a way that makes it seem as if they were once joined together as a border for something ... perhaps a mount for a photograph.

Adjacent to the white marks near the top of the image, there are three small rips of paper. Below these ... on the right side of the image, at the centre ... there is a larger pile of ripped pieces of paper. Towards the bottom right corner ... there is another small pile of ripped pieces of paper. Each of these smaller piles of paper seem to be from photographic prints, ~~as they have grey-scale colouring on them.~~

Aside from the light which reflecting off the black surface of the small pile I just mentioned in the bottom right, the photograph is fairly flat in terms of lighting. Shadows cast downwards from some of the photographs ... suggesting a light source above, towards the top of the composition ... out of shot.

On the floor below the image there is text on the floor, which reads:

'This image probably represents the most self-reflexive point in Svoboda's artistic practice. Photographs are depicted torn up and thrown onto the floor in a seemingly random composition. Although the work maintains Svoboda's strict sense of structure, it also has an unusually strong expressive element. Svoboda here explores the limits of an image's existence, and also discovered the limits of his oeuvre.'