

EDGAR MARTINS

Destinerrance

12 October – 10 November 2018



Photographs extracted from the series:

Siloquies and Soliloquies on Death, Life and Other Interludes, 2017

What Photography has in Common with an Empty Vase, 2018

Purdy Hicks is pleased to present an exhibition of new photographic works by Edgar Martins. *Destinerrance* is themed on the object of the letter as a medium of documentation, visibility, and absence, represented here through abstraction, association, with collages and investigative still lifes. In Martin's structured vision of the isolated still life, the subject is considered with intensity yet liberation from the traditional photographic form, finding at times irony or absurdity in its presentation.

Destinerrance is a term proposed by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida in his seminal book *La Carte Postale*. According to the author, *Destinerrance* combines notions of destination and destiny with error or errancy. Every missive, every letter, he suggests, risks ending up in the wrong place, being misinterpreted, arriving at the wrong addressee, because it must use iterable language, and therefore the context of any given utterance can never be finally exhaustively delimited. Every written letter becomes a *dead letter* too, gets stuck in the *dead letter office*, no return to sender, no addressee found, because of the inherent quality of writing to detach from its author, to circulate and continue to signify long after death.

The images included in this exhibition tap into Derrida's conception of *Destinerrance*, and comprise previously unseen works from Martins' most recent projects: *Siloquies and Soliloquies on Death, Life and Other Interludes* (2016), and *What Photography has in Common with an Empty Vase* (2018). Although the subject-matter of this exhibition is the letter itself (the suicide letter, letters exchanged with inmates and their relatives, the poignant post-it note, etc), Martins' images suggest that neither text or image is a communication system capable of fulfilling a documentary function.

The work explores the philosophical concept of absence and address a broader consideration of the status of the photograph when questions of visibility and documentation overlap.

From a humanist perspective the work seeks to reflect on how one deals with the absence of a loved one, brought on by enforced separation. From an ontological perspective it seeks answers to the following questions: how does one represent a subject that eludes visualization, that is absent or hidden from view? How does photography address the politics of visibility in an era that privileges transparency but is also sceptical of fact? And what does it mean for photography, in an epistemological, ontological, aesthetic and ethical sense, if it does not identify with the referent but the absence of the referent?

Martins' objectives were twofold: to communicate by subtraction, rather than addition, by destroying rather than creating, by obfuscating rather than revealing, thus addressing, in the process, many of the gaps in information, perception and representation and profound anxieties rooted around the ethics and aestheticization that pervade contemporary photographic discourse, when documentary photography and questions of visibility intersect.