

In 2005 Tiana Peterson produced two photographs that suggested a shift in her concerns away from 'art photography' to a direct engagement with the biographies and production of two male subjects Frank Lloyd Wright and Frank Gehry-towering 'grandfathers' of the modern and postmodern styles of architecture, respectively. The first of the two images 'Harry Callahan's Wife' (2005) is a spare picture of a sapling suspended, somewhat desperately, between two thin posts in bleak encouragement of growth. A simple interpretation might include the following, that modernist photographer and Chicagoan Harry Callahan's exceedingly patient wife/muse Eleanor was no sapling physically. Browsing online through Callahan's art I find several images of Eleanor outdoors, in one she faces us from a distance on a horizon line of dark trees, possible descendants of the fragile tendril in Peterson's image, perhaps the site where once Eleanor obediently stood. In another image from 2006 a large, floor-to-ceiling object looms wrapped in protective plastic. A surrealist enigma to some, those familiar with photography will see an enlarger, a very big and serious one, technology on the verge of extinction sensibly cocooned while not it use. Totemic and alien it is also an antique, a choice of photographers who still prefer to hand print their work in the age of all things digital. The mummification of this optical tool suggests preservation of the obsolescent, and the origins of myth.

In 2007 Peterson began work on a body of art deriving itself from an intense interest in the biography, work, and residual traces of the renowned architect Frank Lloyd Wright. 'Intense interest' is an appropriate description of Peterson's thorough engagement with this controversial subject(s); I don't believe her work 'research driven' in the fact that it disassembles more than it adds to a body of information-it may even be parasitic. The various photographs, accumulations, videos and objects do not illustrate or translate Wright's vast legacy. Instead she constructs a language filtered through the iconic 'vision' of this Chicagoan (like Callahan) and free thinker of the prairies. What I suspect Peterson may see in Wright is a heliocentric monolith of a subject, as dominant as that enlarger, from which emanates an aura of occult veneration worth messing with. Peterson's courtship of her subject via the standard means of communication (letters, proposals, etc.) earned her close proximity to the central power place, specifically a short residence at Taliesin Wisconsin, Wright's compound and 'source, sketchbook, and laboratory'. Peterson stalks the peripheries, photographing debris adjacent to a Wright structure and teasing personal details about the man out of sanctioned gift shop fodder like playing cards. Play and social interaction camouflage the artist's intentions as she travels closer to the eye of the conical storm. No pilgrim, the artist's determined homing in on sacred ground recalls the travels of a displaced fictional mid-westerner Dorothy, of Frank Baum's Oz books, America's most enduring fairytale. Under this lens that great skateboard ramp of a temple, Wright's Guggenheim Museum in New York, transforms easily into the Emerald City, citadel of the medicine show conjuror turned 'wizard'.

Taliesin itself, despite the upbeat description on its website (quoted above) is one dark entity, having hosted events comparable to any Stephen King novel. Tiana/Dorothy gains entrance only to find the wizard not at home. She occupies herself with interchanges with the other worker bees in this particular hive. She initiates and photographs a gathering of earnest young architects and fellow residents engaged with assembling a picture puzzle; a mild distraction from whatever it is they should be doing. Peterson is in fact purposely opening up a black hole 'wasting their time'-anathema to the

competitive climate of the architect's studio.

The architect as cult figure is not unique to this time in history or to America alone. The male architect is a paternal figure, both good and bad, and Peterson's developing art engages this powerful construct. Taking Godardian inventory of her own work space she recognizes within it configurations of books that mimic the 'creations' of her subject. The studio space, as with many artists (less so photographers) becomes the source of invention and its contents elevated in value. Clutter, a by-product of research is increasingly fetishised in art destined to future display in a vitrine/reliquary. Frank Gehry's 2001 exhibition at the Guggenheim (fittingly) featured a gallery space (not a curved display nook) whose walls were covered with photographic murals of Gehry's LA offices-tangled wiring and stack upon stack of clutter recalling a technician friend of mine's observation that a "clean shop is a slow shop" Ever seen pictures of Gerhard Richter's studio?

In yanking out the three dimensional cardboard 'pop ups' from a child's book on Wright (2007) and later on Gehry (2009), Peterson performs another disruption in the pulsing field of her subject's wide ripple of affect. None of Pop's 'pop-up's pops up, so what do we see? In Wright's case jagged white tears remain, specters across a landscape, while Gehry's masterpieces have been gently steamed off the page leaving blunt, geometric forms in their absence. Early in her stay at Talesin Peterson sent me an image of herself sitting at a desk with her head in her hands, her eyes betray that she's either exhausted, bemused, or both. Above her head is an elaborate triangularly segmented ceiling reminding us whose house we are in. Like Baum's Dorothy (and her great granddaughter Princess Leia) Tiana's penetrated the defenses of the Dark Practitioner and waits, pondering her next move.

Tim Maul NYC 8/2009