

NANCY GOLDRING



SHADOWS' SHADOWS

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SHADOWS' SHADOWS
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This series originated in the summer of 2015 while I was working in a tiny studio with a vast landscape view of the Italian countryside and Lake Trasimeno. I began to notice the shadows cast by the leaves of the lemon tree plants that encircled my drawing table. Timing my drawings carefully, I was able to fix the shadows as they slid across the wall, the floor, and finally onto my drawing table.

The following summer, having exhausted the shadow/plant theme, I decided to begin making drawings in which a shadow became the “form” itself. I reasoned that if they were the substance, they too would be capable of casting shadows of themselves. I struggled to calculate the angle of the hypothetical light source and the surface onto which these second generation shadows might fall. I wondered if I could then reconstruct the plant from the shadows and discover the location of the shadow forms in space in relation to their shadows, rather like imagining the soldiers’ positions from the sites of St. Sebastian’s wounds. These drawings I called “Shadows’ Shadows”.

Once back in my New York studio I produced a series of large graphite and gouache drawings made from the preliminary Italian ones. These I titled “Shadow of a Doubt” and I rendered the shadows in differing qualities of white, depending on the surface on which they resided.

Having achieved a certain resolution in the last of a series of 8, I embarked on translating the drawing into a relief collage to produce yet another kind of space between two and three dimensions. I then deployed this collage (which I called “the model”) as a kind of screen onto which I projected slides deliberately taken for the project, including shots of the shadows in Italy cast

by the lemon tree plants in my studio, pieces of the landscape outside of my window, the plaster walls of the studio. My activity of studio projection replicated the original projection, which was the casting of shadows on the wall. The process produced a strange space that seemed to live behind the shadows - as if we could perceive the shadows from the other side, suggestive of a kind of 4th dimensional realm that included time. Unlike traditional perspective, the viewer is peripatetic, moving untethered from the single "vantage point" like the shadows themselves.

Each image in the series of "foto--projections" (i.e. photographs of projections) is "true" in that it has been constructed or contrived always utilizing only actual perceptual information. Though differing in materials and surface, each image evokes varying experiences of light, weather, mood, and modes of perception, from fleeting glances to long meditative stares. Together, rather than offering contradictory experiences, each accrues meaning by the presence of the others.

Sonnet 43 Shakespeare

*Then thou, whose shadow shadows doth make bright
How would thy shadow's form form happy show
To clear the day with thy much clearer light,
When to unseeing eyes thy shade shines so!*

Emily Dickinson

*Presentiment - is that long Shadow - on the lawn
Indicative that Suns go down*

*The Notice to the startled Grass
That Darkness - is about to pass*

T.S. Eliot: *The Hollow Men (Shadow)*

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the shadow

Swineburne: *Atalanta in Calydon*

There came to the making of man...Night, the shadow of life

John Donne: *A Lecture upon the Shadow*

Stand still, and I will read to thee

A lecture, love, in love's philosophy.

 These three hours that we have spent,

 Walking here, two shadows went

Along with us, which we ourselves produc'd.

But, now the sun is just above our head,

 We do those shadows tread,

 And to brave clearness all things are reduc'd.

So whilst our infant loves did grow,

Disguises did, and shadows, flow

From us, and our cares; but now 'tis not so.

That love has not attain'd the high'st degree,

Which is still diligent lest others see.

Except our loves at this noon stay,

We shall new shadows make the other way.

 As the first were made to blind

 Others, these which come behind

Will work upon ourselves, and blind our eyes.

If our loves faint, and westwardly decline,

 To me thou, falsely, thine,

 And I to thee mine actions shall disguise.

The morning shadows wear away,

But these grow longer all the day;

But oh, love's day is short, if love decay.

Love is a growing, or full constant light,

And his first minute, after noon, is night.

—Nancy Goldring

The Truth In Shadows

Shadows suggest lack and elusiveness. Lack of light, substance, life, or, as Western philosophy reiterates, truth. Visible yet immaterial, they became a metaphor to describe the condition of uncertainty, deception, ignorance – the realm of shadows – from which philosophy promises to liberate us. Undergoing constant change, governed by light, broken by angular surfaces, swallowed by darkness, shadows are derivative and unreliable. They are, continuing a long-lasting platonic tradition, second order phenomena, transient images of perishable bodies in turn molded on perennial ideas. Moreover, the multiplicity of shadows originating from multiple sources of light makes visual experiences so varied and fractious that it becomes hard to see that we all live under the same sun. Philosophy develops as a regression from visible shadows to the real forms behind them until one turns to the absolute backlit light of truth. Why, Plato asks, indulge in the art of painting copies of copies?

Art was born, the myth goes, out of the attempt to fix shadows, as Butades' daughter did when she drew the contours of her beloved's shadow in order to keep a lasting trace of his presence. While philosophy looks behind the shadows searching for the entities from which they originate, art has at times ventured in the opposite direction, asking the question: Can shadows generate *things*? And if so, what would originate from shadows?

"Man is the dream of a shadow", sang Pindar, a Greek poet a generation older than Plato. Some translators, anxious to clarify this misty verse, add "man is *but* the dream of a shadow", thus dispelling the charm of the poem. In fact, it contains more than a hyperbolic rendition of human fragility, which, as a trope, was already widespread in Greek lyric and dramatic poetry comparing humans with shadows. By defining men as shadows' dreams Pindar opens up a new path for imagination to explore. Imagine, he invites the reader, deriving bodies from dreams of shadows: perhaps this

ontological inversion may produce a picture close to the truth of our existence.

As Pindar gives shadows the capacity to dream, one can experiment in endowing them with other properties they usually lack. Nancy Goldring presents us with shadows able to cast shadows of themselves. This is a bold move. Casting shadows is a prerogative of bodies, and different poetic traditions believe it to be a particularly important one. On the day of her wedding, beautiful-eyed princess Nala, a character in the *Mahabharata*, encounters five figures, all looking identical to her beloved Damayanti. Only one figure, however, casts a shadow: noticing it, Nala identifies the real Damayanti and chooses him over the four gods who had taken his semblance in order to seduce her.

The anomaly of Dante's presence as a living body traveling in the dim light of purgatory becomes apparent to the shades inhabiting that region as soon as they see his shadow on the rocks. An anonymous soul interrogates the visitor:

"Tell us how is it that thou makest thyself
A wall unto the sun, as if thou hadst not
Entered as yet into the net of death". (Purgatorio, Canto XXVI, 22-24).

And, at times, Dante himself forgets that the figures surrounding him are shades rather than bodies: seeing his shadow alone on the ground, he worries that Virgil, his incorporeal guide, might have abandoned him:

"The sun, that in our rear was flaming red,
Was broken in front of me into the figure
Which had in me the stoppage of its rays;
Unto one side I turned me, with the fear
Of being left alone, when I beheld
Only in front of me the ground obscured". (Purgatorio Canto III, 16-21)

Shadows' Shadows suspends the rule that shadows don't produce shadows. What if they could? The construction of a world without this rule is at once

a visual and a thought experiment. It proceeds by graded complication in both shape and meaning.

The form of a hypothetical lemon tree is reconstructed from the position of hypothetical shadows generated by a hypothetical light source hitting the shadows of a real plant as if they had substance. Then the drawn shadows are given greater substance in the relief onto which photographs are finally projected.

A constant, rigorous quest for truth runs through this series, and the progression from the drawings to the foto-projections develops like an exploration of different facets of truth. Truth – as a relation to reality, truth as the potential always embedded in reality, and truth as lived experience – all gradually emerge, intersect, add to each other.

The drawings preserve and displace elements of the context from which they originated: the colors of the gouaches truly are in the surroundings of the original shadows that were observed. Moreover, in the drawings, all the physical laws of reflection stand, so that the world emerging from them is, if not actual, nonetheless perfectly conceivable, and therefore, in a logical sense, possible. Truth, this series suggests, may be larger than a set of facts and extend to include endless possibilities. Truth is here approached through visual hypotheses that in turn make new hypotheses visible, in a potentially endless chain enticing the viewers' mind as well as their eyes.

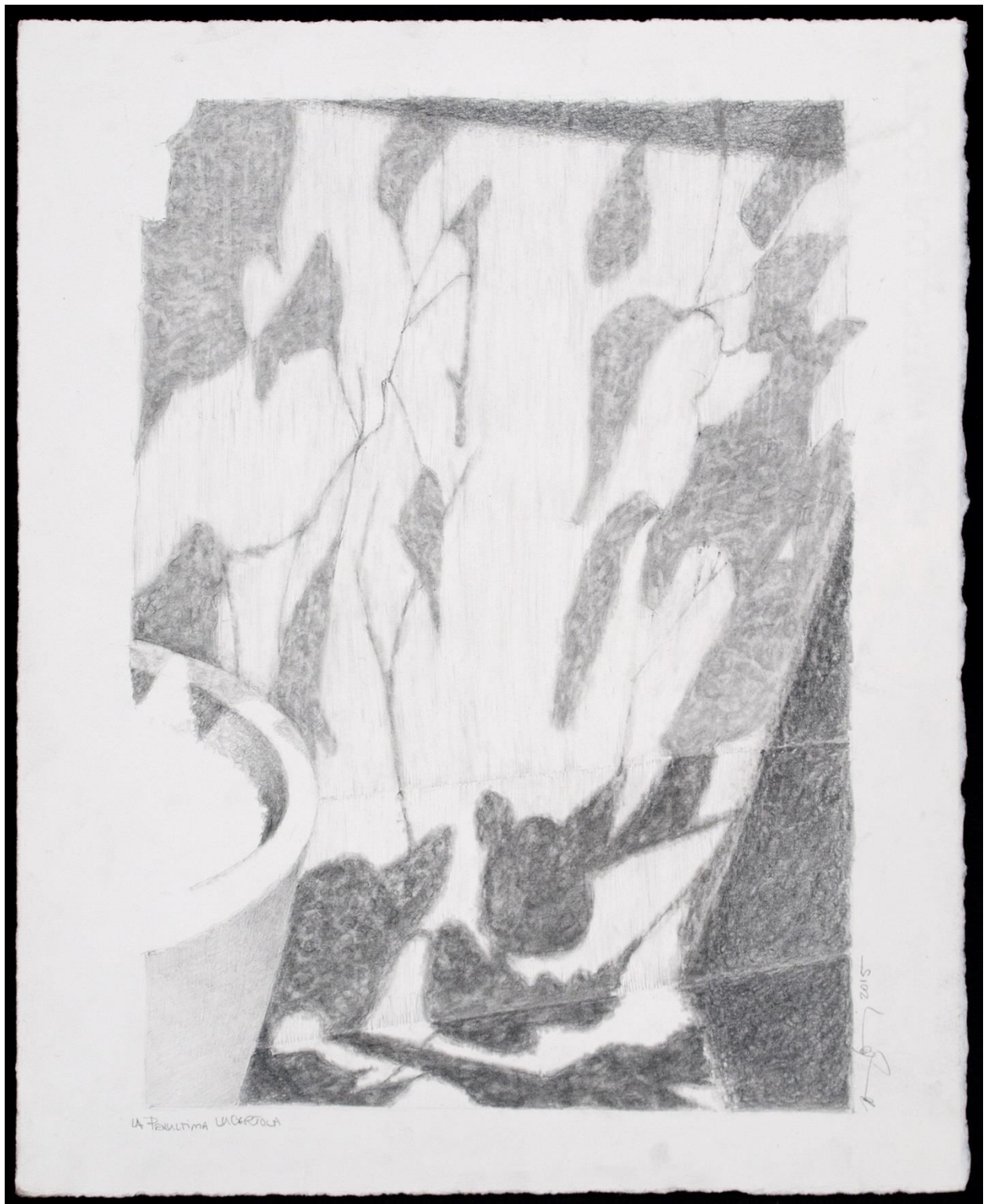
Looking at the drawings, one's eyes move alternating between positive and negative shapes, tantalized by a gestalt experience and riddled by the intricacy of the composition. At the same time, cognition and imagination play freely in one's mind, as it happens when one experiences beauty.

Introducing the foto-projections, the series reaches a new level of complication. It discloses a new dimension of truth – lived experience. The photographs projected onto the model lend the shadows light, color and texture. While the drawings opened up a potentially infinite series of possible worlds generated by shadows cast by shadows cast by... the foto-projections arrest this mathematical vertigo. Here the movement is not progression anymore, but variation: the layered composition of each image

derived from the same model evokes a distinct, unique atmosphere. One image shows agile shadows rustling behind a jewel-like concretion of turquoise and gold; another imposes on the shadows the stillness of a pale-yellow summer afternoon, solidified in the texture of a plaster wall. Imagination concurs with memory to condense the spatial and temporal elements of experience into images.

English philosophers of the empiricist tradition believed memory consisted of the shadows that perceived objects have left in the mind. Their mistake was to take the mind to be passive. Illuminating the ever-present activity of the mind, *Shadows' Shadows* shows how the truth exceeds the actual to project itself into the potential, and how memories of the past are layered, composite, self-transforming shadows. This series by Nancy Goldring at once stimulates our perception and makes us aware of the workings of our perceptual experience; displays possible worlds and triggers reflection of what is needed for a world to be possible; awakens memories while making us see the architectural structure of memory.

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2020



LA FANTASMA UNDERSTOWN





SHADOW GARDEN IV

2016



SHADOW GARDEN, III (ROSENE)

Doyle 2016



F. 2/6 → 2011







