



Sharon Lockhart, *Pine Flat Portrait Studio: Meleah, Travis*, 2005
Two framed chromogenic prints, 45 1/2 x 36 3/4 in. each

PHOTOGRAPHY AND: THE DISCOURSES OF
SHARON LOCKHART'S PHOTOGRAPHIC PRACTICE

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Some years ago, after writing an essay on Sharon Lockhart's *Pine Flat* (2005), I came across another text about the project written by the artist Frances Stark, one of Lockhart's colleagues at the University of Southern California. I had been fascinated by Lockhart's use of analog film to record a generation comfortable with digital media, her treatment of slowness, and by the flatness of some of her filmic images. Looking at the portraits of some of the youths with whom she worked, which she produced in connection with the project, I had been concerned with their scaling, and the way she avoided hierarchy by making each child the same height (page 80). Stark responded to the project more anecdotally, and much more personally, and drew my attention to Lockhart's treatment of a particular overlooked social subject. I had not considered this at all, but I now realized how blinkered I had been. Stark wrote about how working-class children are often failed by the education system, how their bodies are prey to junk food that they are sold by big corporations, how many end up in jail. I began to appreciate that *Pine Flat* was both a weighty encounter with childhood and a rare representation in American art of the white working class. The remarkable generosity of Lockhart's project became clearer to me, and I realized in retrospect that a treatment of her work would have to be as nuanced as the work itself. A critic needed to ask questions about form but take heed of social and economic context, too.

Thinking now about Lockhart's photography, I am struck in the same way by the different approaches it demands. It is easy to register the range of her photography itself. It encompasses, for example, portraits, still lifes, and images of work, among other subjects and genres. One series of images, for example, shows adolescents embracing in a corridor, clearly directed to hold poses they find awkward; elsewhere, Lockhart's choreography is less in evidence, and we could take the photographs for documents of things or scenes she has come across. All this diversity is remarkable, yet we find an equivalent variety in the oeuvres of many of Lockhart's contemporaries. What fascinates me is therefore not the variety in itself, but that, as in *Pine Flat*, Lockhart's photography seems to address, and be addressed by, a number of radically divergent art critical discourses that have emerged in recent photographic practices, some more obviously political, others more formal. Such discourses usually arise around different groups of artists, rather than around the body of work of a single figure. In this essay, I want to outline what these discourses are, and then ask what it might mean for a single artist to bring them together as Lockhart does.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE INSTITUTION

Lockhart studied under many artists who had worked with Michael Asher at the California Institute of the Arts, and one approach to her photography would be to see in it a continuation of the concerns of institutional critique. In his installations of the late 1960s and onward, Asher has addressed not only the architecture of art institutions, but also the various kinds of labor that go into making exhibitions, which is usually unacknowledged in a completed display where attention is taken up solely by the creative work of the artist. For instance, he wrote of his 1977 project at the



Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven: “By clearly distinguishing and specifically presenting the different participants (work crew, curator, artist) that make an exhibition possible at such an institution, I wanted to show how these necessary but separate functions are equally essential for the constitution of a work.”¹

One series of Lockhart’s is titled *Chronicle of Masonry Work in the Oaxacan Exhibit Hall, National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City, 1999* (1999). The group of nine photographs was made in an institution that celebrates, among other things, the masonry work of Aztec culture and features carved components of ancient buildings and large pictures of temples. But Lockhart’s photographs tell us much less about the architecture *on display* than about the architecture *of display* (highly polished floors, shiny vitrines, wooden plinths, stone benches). Lockhart also directed her attention to the masonry work that was necessary to maintain the museum itself: not the work of a historical culture, but of the present day. A triptych titled *Enrique Nava Enedina: Oaxacan Exhibit Hall, National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City, 1999* (1999) shows Enrique Nava Enedina repairing the broken floor of the museum, working behind and then within a folding screen to protect the exhibits from dust (pages 82–83). The anthropology museum photographs followed a group of works made the year before at an exhibition of the work of On Kawara at the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo in 1998, which show four museum guards sitting in a room (pages 86–87). Two more recent series record a work crew installing a sculpture by Duane Hanson at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art and a conservator testing out assumptions about how Morris Louis had made his famous “unfurled” paintings by folding a canvas over a series of supports to create a terrain over which the paint could flow. For sure, Lockhart directs these photographs, instructing the participants where to stand, lighting the scenes appropriately, and appointing highly skilled camera operators, rather than simply documenting what she finds in the museums in which she works. But nonetheless, cumulatively, these series

archive the various kinds of work that always take place in art institutions, but that are seldom the focus of artistic attention. One reason that these photographs are unusual is that the labor of guards, repair workers, installers, and conservators is rarely represented in such a careful and even celebratory way. Where artists have produced photographs of these activities, the photographs have been much more casually taken, and displayed as documents rather than as large-format color images (for instance, the documents of Mierle Laderman Ukeles’s 1970s performances).

As critics such as Miwon Kwon and James Meyer have remarked, in the 1990s, a number of artists who had taken seriously the histories of institutional critique began to concern themselves not just with physical institutions and sites (such as the art museum), but with discursive institutions; in other words, they continued to address sites, but a “site” for them might have constituted a range of ideas or an intellectual discipline. For instance, Zoe Leonard’s photographs targeted the institution of medicine, and Mike Kelley’s architectural models, the institution of education. These artists brought the investigative approaches that developed from institutional critique to bear on these new sites or institutions. This context helps to account for the photographs Lockhart made in the Amazon in the late 1990s, where she addressed the institution of anthropology, finding various ways to challenge the traditionally objectifying function of photography in this discipline. Lockhart made a series of portraits of families in the region, each time taking a first group portrait, and then a second and third, encouraging the families to adjust their positions within the group in response to Polaroids that she gave them of their initial arrangements. By linking all three photographs together, Lockhart indicates that the group portrait is an outcome of an encounter between herself and the family where all participants have agency. As part of the project, Lockhart also confronted the historical racism of “primitive art,” which tended to exoticize its subjects. *Maria da Conceição Pereira da Souza with the Fruits of the Island of Apeú-Salvador, Pará, Brazil: (coco, ajirú, murici, cajú,*



Sharon Lockhart, *Enrique Nava Enedina: Oaxacan Exhibit Hall, National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City, 1999, 1999*
 Three framed chromogenic prints, 49 x 64 1/2 in. each

mamão, tucumã, taperebá, goiaba, tamarino, graviola (1999) is a series of ten prints featuring the woman mentioned in the title. In each shot, she is holding up a different fruit. While artists before Lockhart might have created a single image conflating the body of the woman with a cluster of fruits so as to emphasize the supposed fertility of the land and people, Lockhart instead uses a serial form, repeating both the camera angle and asking her model to repeat her pose. The work becomes a kind of archive of fruit, and the woman becomes a forceful presence rather than an object. Moreover, the juxtaposition of fruit and the female body is so obvious that it serves to satirize, rather than reinforce, the kinds of associations that have historically existed between them, especially as the woman, returning the photographer's gaze, seems to be completely aware of the cliché and artifice of this juxtaposition.

PHOTOGRAPHY AS A MEDIUM

Lockhart certainly seems to be concerned with the inquiries of institutional critique; she asks critical questions about photography's relationship to anthropology, and finds non-objectifying means to represent other cultures. All this notwithstanding, when looking at her photographs, it also becomes clear that she is interested in seemingly disconnected questions pertaining to photography's specific identity as a medium or technology. Photographic images are formed by the temporary exposure to light of light-sensitive paper; created in an instant, photographs still, even petrify, their subjects. These are commonplace characteristics and descriptions of the medium, but ones that Lockhart productively confronts.

The Morris Louis photographs, for instance, could be read as allegorical images whose subject is neither really Louis nor the activity of conservation, but photographic stillness. To understand this point we can simply contrast the activity of the conservator with the information provided by the photographs. The conservator attended to the temporality

of Louis's process: he was able to discover how acrylic paint flowed over and into the canvas and how quickly it did so, how much time it took before the paint stopped seeping into the canvas, and when the next color could be poured. The photographs do not show us the activity of pouring paint, and they fail to provide crucial information about time, only presenting a sequence of fixed instants in the process. Indeed, we have no idea how much time elapsed between the images. They seem therefore to register—indeed to make as their very subject—photography's stillness. In *Lunch Break Installation, "Duane Hanson: Sculptures of Life," 14 December 2002–23 February 2003, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art* (2003), Lockhart addresses photographic stillness in a different way. She pictures a crew of workers installing Duane Hanson sculptures of workers, but in such a way that it becomes unclear who is real and who is a statue (pages 92–99). This is partly because of the way the workers are lit, but mainly because the real workers were asked to hold poses necessary for the photographic exposures of large-format cameras, which make them look awkward and unnaturally still. In transforming the workers into stationary forms akin to Hanson's sculptures, Lockhart underlines in an almost theatrical manner the capacity of photography to freeze and objectify its human subjects.

Leaving the "museum" photographs, we can now see how this line of inquiry extends to Lockhart's largest group of "still life" photographs, those showing NŌ-no Ikebana arrangements of sprouts and cabbage leaves. These photographs were taken over a period of time during which the plants wilted and withered and the leaves fell off the stalks. Though change registers between one photograph and the next, it is impossible for a single photograph to show the process of withering. Each individual photograph is a *still* life, representing the arrangement as it existed in the brief moment of the exposure rather than in the process of withering. The large scale of each photograph, and the compelling composition of the plants, also makes it possible to treat each image individually, as a completely self-

sufficient, perfect recording of the precise appearance of the plants, rather than as a successive stage in the narrative of the arrangement's gradual decline. Lockhart once installed an entire room with these photographs around four walls, and walking around, the viewer becomes conscious of the time it takes to look at the series as a whole. Yet precisely because one becomes aware of the duration of one's encounter with the whole installation, one also acknowledges the contrasting instantaneity of each single photograph. If I am correct in suggesting that this series also has at its heart a recognition of photographic stillness, of the inability of photography to show the *process* (rather than results) of change, what seems extraordinary is that to make this point, Lockhart recognized that she needed to choose a subject that ostensibly was about change.

A very different way of addressing photography as a medium is to investigate its connections to, and distinctions from, other mediums; and in this context, we can invoke some of the photographs that Lockhart has made that appear like film stills. One of the most dramatic of these is *Untitled* (1996), which shows a man in a hotel room at dusk, turning his head around to look down at something out of the shot. Like many works from this group of images, this photograph tempts us to treat it as a still—that is, as a picture connected to a sequence of other stills before and after it. We begin by constructing a plot around this scene, asking what the man is doing in the room, why he seems nervous and somewhat ill at ease, even questioning what it might be that has caught his attention. But these questions soon seem inappropriate: the incredibly precise composition of the photograph reveals that its real subject is the man's situation in space rather than in time. He stands in the opposite direction to the direction in which he is looking, somehow trapped at the center of the image between its left and right sides, but undecided about to which he belongs. He is also trapped at the center of the axis that extends from the position of the camera back toward the window (through the plane of the photograph). The claustrophobia of his position is emphasized by the reflections behind him; rather than offering a generous sense of the space of the city outside, the window multiplies and disperses the contents of the room, something particularly marked by the sequence of fragmented reflections of the lampshade that spread out in a horizontal line. Lockhart's photograph certainly evokes a psychological state, a moment of anxious indecision, but the affect of the image is conveyed through photography's facility to depict the subject fixed in space, rather than by cinema's facility to position a subject in a narrative. This is to suggest that Lockhart's single "cinematic" photographs actually underline the distinct formal facilities of photography rather than cinema.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE BEHOLDER

The last image I discussed shows a distracted man who is absorbed in his thoughts, and it relates to other pictures Lockhart made in 1996, where absorbed subjects are centered in a complex space. Another photograph shows a girl asleep on a table. Above her we see a view outside a window; below, this view is reflected in the glass surface of the table top. Though she seems fixed, it becomes hard to differentiate outside from inside. A third photograph pictures

a woman standing shoeless on a rug, stilled in the mid-ground between the forefront of the image (where another table reflects her arm and hand) and the dining room that opens up behind her. The viewer of these three photographs can maintain a sense that the scene exists as if he or she were not there. This is possible because the photographed subjects seem totally immersed and completely unaware of the presence of the photographer, and also because the depicted space is self-contained, too—indeed, doubled onto and into itself with reflections, entirely separated from the actual space in which the photograph is displayed, and which the beholder occupies.

These three photographs suggest that Lockhart's work can be considered through a third and final discourse concerning beholding and absorption. Here I am thinking particularly of the arguments made by Michael Fried about the painting of Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin. Recalling the arguments of his book *Absorption and Theatricality* in his later book *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*, Fried writes that, following from Denis Diderot's critical writings, there was in France an "ongoing effort [from 1755] to make paintings that by one strategy or another appear—in the first place by depicting personages wholly absorbed in what they are doing, thinking, or feeling—to deny the presence before them of the beholder, or to put this more affirmatively, to establish the ontological fiction that the beholder does not exist. Only if this was accomplished could the actual beholder be stopped and held before the canvas; conversely, the least sense on the beholder's part that the depicted personages were acting, or even worse, posing for the artist (and ultimately for the beholder) was registered as theatrical in the pejorative sense of the term, and the painting was judged a failure."² Recently, Fried has detected a resurrection of this absorptive tradition in picture-making, championing the work of Jeff Wall, whose "interest in absorption and antitheatricality links his work with the Diderotian tradition."³ Lockhart's 1996 photographs would be other contenders for Fried's attention, since they, too, seem to picture absorbed individuals. But what really fascinates me is that in her most recent photographs, Lockhart has begun to confront ideas about beholding in a radically different way than Wall and Fried. While still making photographs of people utterly absorbed in activities, she finds ways to make the viewer completely conscious of his or her own physical position and situation, creating situations that Fried would call theatrical. The literal space *outside* the photograph occupied by the viewer begins to count as importantly as the space depicted within it. At the same time, the composition and subject of the photograph no longer allows the viewer to forget his or her presence when looking at the photograph. As we shall see, this turn in her work should in fact come as no surprise because it connects with her dedication to the theoretical legacy of institutional critique.

To chart this shift, we may start by considering the diptych *Maja and Elodie* (2003), which consists of two photographs of a child playing with a jigsaw puzzle on a rug beside a woman. The two figures seem to be completely concentrated on the game, but one soon realizes that the child is in fact inanimate, another Duane Hanson sculpture. At the point we recognize this, we realize not only that the child is not



Sharon Lockhart, *Untitled*, 2007
Framed chromogenic print, 44 x 60 1/2 in.

“absorbed,” but that the adult is not either, and instead is playing a very obvious, very false part in a directed scene: she is, in Fried’s words, “acting” for the viewer. At the same time, we become aware that, although we stand outside the photographs, we have our own role to play in this scenario, a role as contrived and scripted as the woman’s. Our role comprises two acts: first, to spot the difference between the human and the sculpture; and second, to spot the difference between the two photographs as we move our gaze from one to the other—the woman picks up a piece in the right photograph, but not in the left.

Another photographic installation is connected to the film installation *Pine Flat*. Titled *Boy with Guitar* (2005), the photograph features a teenage boy playing guitar in a recording studio, completely concentrated on his task. He wears headphones, and he is recorded by a microphone whose wires stretch out to the right side of the photograph. In front of the photograph, Lockhart installs a plinth-mounted turntable that plays the recording we see being made in the photograph. We can listen to the music from the turntable; once again, therefore, we can understand that Lockhart is interested in involving the viewer in the scenario of the photograph rather than situating him or her as a detached beholder of it.

Lockhart can also work with single images unaccompanied by objects to raise the viewer’s self-consciousness about the act of looking. The subject of *Untitled* (2005) is a cello restorer holding a cello upside down, working very carefully with it, again oblivious to our presence. Had Wall, for instance, photographed him, he probably would have shot from within the workshop. Lockhart, however, arranged for the photograph to be made from a position a distance away from the workshop, down a darkened corridor; indeed, the restorer is framed by the shadow of this corridor. Though attention is directed to his activity, we are therefore also encouraged to think about the position of the camera and to imagine the camera (and by extension, ourselves) as voyeurs, peeking on the man from a point where shade protects us from being seen by him. Another photograph called *Untitled* (2003) shows a woman immersed in the act of reading. Behind her, facing directly forward, is a large rectangular white expanse that appears like a monochrome in the center of the photograph. In its corner, however, we glimpse what we soon realize is a reflection of the top of the woman’s book: Oliver Byrne’s *Euclid*, a nineteenth-century mathematics text illustrated with colored diagrams with some resemblance to De Stijl paintings. We understand now that we are looking directly at a mirror that does not reflect us, and that the camera was positioned in such a way that it was not reflected. Taking the diagram reflected in the



Sharon Lockhart, *On Kawara: Whole and Parts*, 1964–95, Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, January 24–April 5, 1998, 1998
Four framed chromogenic prints, 64 1/2 x 49 in. each

mirror as a cue, we could produce a diagram to explain the triangulated positions of the camera, the woman, and the mirror; even if we are unlikely to go to such lengths to plot out the scenario the photograph describes, we can be sure that Lockhart's construction of the image provokes us to think through literal questions about the camera's—and by proxy our—position.

If a viewer becomes self-conscious of the activity of looking before all of these works, then in front of *Untitled* (2007), perhaps Lockhart's most poignantly beautiful image to date, this self-consciousness reaches a new pitch. The photograph shows two girls reading Braille books on a pale wood table with no adornments (page 85). Behind them is an elegant, dark-wood panelled wall and a clock; to the right, a tall, cream-colored, crimped curtain. Light streams in from this side of the image, illuminating the sides of the girls' faces. The décor and lighting of the room are very graceful, yet visually inaccessible to its protagonists. Certainly this is an image that allows its beholders to look at the subjects secure that they are not seen, but the fact that this situation would have been literally true even for the photographer reverses its implications. The photograph causes us to be self-aware, rather than to forget ourselves, and we become conscious not only of the activity of beholding, but of the ability to look. The photograph is particularly effective because it is so sensitively composed—the curtain falls at the exact corner of the table, the blonde girl's gaze echoes the direction of the clock's minute hand. To appreciate the details of the photograph's composition is to recognize the pleasures of

looking and to become more implicated with the subject of blindness: the more we enjoy the photograph, the more we become aware of the distance between us as viewers and the readers.

KAWARA'S GUARDS AND ENRIQUE'S GAZE

We are coming to the point where we can connect some of the broad concerns of Lockhart's work. I have just argued that in a recent group of her photographs, we see a shift from the tendencies of the images made in 1996 to more recent ones. Both show absorbed individuals, but while the earlier ones encourage the viewer to forget his or her literal presence as a beholder, the second group draws the viewer's attention to the act of looking. Whether or not Lockhart intended it, this turn amounts to a rejection of the arguments about absorption that Fried has promoted. Indeed, the turn is a mark of Lockhart's distance from the tradition that Fried sees continuing with Wall. It signals Lockhart's affiliation instead with what Fried would call a theatrical tradition, but what we, setting aside the pejorative implications of this word, could call the phenomenological concerns of minimalism. Better put, we see now that Lockhart shares some of the intellectual ambitions of minimalism—to facilitate the viewer's increasing self-awareness before the artwork. Like minimalists before her, she thereby insists that the work is not autonomous, but connected as a real thing to the space the viewer occupies.

Historically, the thinking that informed minimalism developed



into the premises of institutional critique: the recognition that the encounter with art takes place not just in real space, but a space with architectural restrictions and economic determinations, where real labor takes place, even if it is usually not considered by the viewer. If we can chart a line connecting minimalism to institutional critique, we can also realize that this line connects different groups of Lockhart's works. In other words, there is a link between Lockhart's works that picture characters in such a way that the beholder is made self-aware, and her works that explicitly deal with institutions (and then with the representation of other cultures, of labor, and so on), a connection prefigured in the history of 1960s and 1970s art.

So we can now understand the points of contact between the discourses that inform her various groups of work. But it is also possible to look at the ways in which different critical discourses are brought together in the *same* works. I want to cite two series in which considerations of time and spectatorship tie together with concerns about institutions and the representation of other cultures and labor. These are the photographs of the attendants at the On Kawara exhibition and the triptych showing Enrique Nava Enedina. In the first series, Lockhart focuses on the stationary yet dignified labor of museum guards. She composes the image in such a way that the artwork they guard falls out of shot. Also absent from view are any visitors to the exhibition. The work of a museum guard seems lonely, banal, and repetitive. This is emphasized by the distant presence in each photograph of another guard, and by the serial structure of

the photographs, in which the same guard appears in the first and last of the four images, clearly repeating her shift. One person's labor is interchangeable with another's, and the only variety in a day will be to swap seats and guard another room, just to return to where you began. Where Kawara's paintings suggest the specificity and speciality of each passing day, in Lockhart's photographs we have another sense of time—repetitive and undifferentiated. If the series undercuts the rhetoric of time that persists in Kawara's work, it does so because of how Lockhart puts the medium of photography to work. Photography's ability to freeze life makes the guards seem all the more petrified. Lockhart's photographs represent nameless seconds of time interchangeable with other instants that are set to repeat and repeat.

While the guards in these images look straight ahead, or down (somewhat gloomily) at the floor, Enrique Nava Enedina gazes at the camera and, by extension, the viewer of the triptych of which he is the subject. But it is more accurate to say that he first gazes at, then marks the presence of, and finally scrutinizes the camera: in the first image, Enedina sits, hammer and chisel in hand, looking straight out, a pose so unforced that we can well imagine that he would turn his head in this direction sitting thus. In the next image, he is shown in the midst of work, crouching over his tools. Nonetheless, he continues to mark the presence of the camera, his face slightly blurry, suggesting that he was photographed just as he craned his neck toward it. In the last image, he is crouching again, but this time, still: he takes time from his work to return the photographer's stare. His

look becomes more and more active and the question of looking is emphasized by the presence in the photographs of a folding screen that separates him from the camera, but serves to frame his look as the subject of the work. Seeing this triptych installed, walking along the photographs, one becomes progressively aware of Enedina's stare and at the same time, of our activity, looking at him. (In passing, we can note that Lockhart's triptych could serve as a useful counterpoint to a Wall image with similar iconography—*Morning Cleaning, Mies Van der Rohe Foundation, Barcelona*, also made in 1999, the crucial difference being that Wall's worker does not address the viewer and seems oblivious to the presence of the photographer.)

Both groups of Lockhart's photographs draw our attention to the work that is required for an institution (such as the one in which we would view these very photographs) to function. But what is so effective is that Lockhart addresses this subject by also thinking about our relationship to time and to the image. Our response to the Kawara guards is more nuanced because of the contrast of their stillness and our movement as we walk by; our confrontation with Enedina's labor stems from our awareness that he targets us as a *viewer*, so that we think about the difference between the work of viewing, and the work of fixing a floor. For Lockhart, in other words, questions about the representation of labor and the investigation of institutions are necessarily connected to concerns with temporality and spectatorship, and this approach to photography continues in her most recent work.

CODA: LUNCH BREAK

I opened this essay by recalling how I had failed to appreciate Lockhart's attention to the working class in *Pine Flat*; however, in front of the photographs and films of *Lunch Break*, it would be impossible not to realize that this is a profound confrontation with the subject of labor. Lockhart's project includes three main groups of photographs. The first comprises group scenes of workers that forge a carefully balanced representation of the lunch break (pages 17–21). Alongside the images of workers are two other series of photographs without any people present. One, of independent businesses, shows unstaffed refreshment stalls run by workers at the shipyard (pages 32–41); the other shows lunch boxes themselves, sometimes in diptychs or triptychs with the box in different positions, open and closed, standing up and on its side, and so on (pages 57–78).

One way in which we could assess these various groups of photographs would be to contrast them with other work with ostensibly similar subjects. Steering clear of the kind of representations of work produced in the 1930s, Lockhart produces neither a romantic account of labor nor a heroic one (indeed, the fact that she takes a break as her subject precludes this from the start). She photographs from within a shipyard, rather than from a position of distance, and in this respect her work can be distinguished from recent photography that transforms sites of production into spectacle: an example of this would be Andreas Gursky's photograph *Salerno* (1990), which shows a vast dock from a distanced aerial view, and is composed so cargo and ships make up clean blocks mimicking the look of geometric

abstraction. Lockhart also avoids the melodramatic, preferring to picture everyday scenes rather than extraordinary ones: here we could contrast Wall's *Outburst* (1990), which pictures an argument in a sweatshop. Stepping clear of spectacle and melodrama, Lockhart has also refused to take refuge in the agonizing self-reflection of much leftist practice. Many artists decide that it is simply impossible to picture a place of labor without objectifying workers, and instead assume that all they can do is thematize their own compromised position. Cutting through these debates, Lockhart has created a dignified representation of her subject. Another trajectory of recent practice that we should recall here is the work of Christopher Williams, whose images bring together formal features of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, or New Objectivity (high focus, neutral lighting, "objective" views) and of product photography. Williams's subjects are chosen because of their specific histories, and they are often design classics. Lockhart's series of lunch boxes can be read as a dialogic response to Williams. Her photographs suggest that the representational devices of product photography and the photographic techniques of New Objectivity can be turned toward a subject that is not associated with the history of design, but with the everyday and commonplace conditions of labor. Lockhart insists that simple objects should be treated with the scrutiny of the kinds of photography that Williams has deployed.

Lockhart's project could be framed by a comment of Benjamin Buchloh's in his discussion of Allan Sekula's 1999 exhibition *Fish Story*, another work of great import in terms of its negotiation of the shipping industry. Buchloh noted "the contemporary (im)possibility of an iconography of labor in a self-declared post-industrial and post-working class society."⁴ Looking back over recent art history, Buchloh argued that "the experience of *production* and the conditions of industrial labor have been banned by a massive representational prohibition from modernist visual culture."⁵ One of the compelling features of Lockhart's project is that she has been able to fight against the "representational prohibition" that Buchloh identifies; however, another is that she has managed to picture labor while deploying (rather than just critiquing) the representational devices of "modernist visual culture." While the photographs of the independent businesses can be read as allegorical rather than documentary images, the lunch box photographs stage an argument about the uses that can now be made of modernist photographic strategies such as New Objectivity. Other "modernist" aspects of these photographs include their focus on stillness; in noting this, we can recall that throughout her photographic practice, Lockhart has turned to the subject of stillness as part of a reflection on the medium of photography.

The lunch break would have appealed to Lockhart given her predilection for moments of pause and stillness. But another reason that the subject was of interest to her is that it is an aspect of working life under threat. In the drive to increase productivity, many factories are doing away with the communal lunch break; workers begin to do staggered shifts, and their breaks no longer fall together. Lockhart's project is an account of a feature of work that is under siege and disappearing, an archive of what is about to be lost (in this respect, the body of work has some common ground with the work of the Bechers, whose subject was often industrial

sites, rather than practices, facing obsolescence).

Looking at Lockhart's *Lunch Break* photographs, we also sense the rarity of the kind of *artistic* labor of which they are the product. Lockhart could only have produced these representations of the lunch break through her sustained work with the men and women of the shipyard, and it is evident from the photographs that she was sufficiently trusted by her subjects for them to welcome her into their spaces and for them to entrust her with their possessions (the lunch boxes). But how many other artists take time to work this carefully, and how many can? In a context where artists face more and more pressure to produce and exhibit new bodies of work with every new season, Lockhart's slow dedication to looking and recording the life in the shipyard seems more and more remarkable.

Notes

- 1 Michael Asher, *Writings 1973–1983 On Works 1969–1979* (Halifax, Nova Scotia: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design; Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1983), 178.
- 2 Michael Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 40.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Allan Sekula: Photography between Discourse and Document," in *Allan Sekula: Fish Story* (Rotterdam: Witte de With, Center for Contemporary Art, 1995), 191.
- 5 Ibid.