Zoe Leonard

Analogue 1998–2009
342 chromogenic color prints and 70 gelatin silver prints


Analogue, by Zoe Leonard (American, born 1961), is a landmark project comprising 412 photographs conceived over the course of a decade. Displayed in serial grids and organized into twenty-five chapters, Analogue documents the eclipsed texture of twentieth-century urban life as seen in vanishing mom-and-pop stores and the simultaneous emergence of the global rag trade. Leonard took her own New York neighborhood, Manhattan’s Lower East Side, as a point of departure in the late 1990s. She then followed the circulation of recycled merchandise—used clothing, discarded advertisements, and the old technology of Kodak camera shops—to far-flung markets in Africa, Eastern Europe, Cuba, Mexico, and the Middle East.

The disappearing storefronts and neglected products are echoed in the obsolete technology the artist used to reproduce them: a vintage 1940s Rolleiflex camera, a tool “left over from the mechanical age,” as Leonard put it, along with gelatin silver and chromogenic printing processes. Tapping the traditions of documentary and conceptual photography, Analogue is positioned in the genealogy of grand visual archives that extends from Eugène Atget’s compendium of Paris to Martha Rosler’s photo-text work on New York’s Bowery. Leonard’s project is an urgent document and a poetic allegory of globalization that reveals the circulation of goods and the homogenization of diverse geographical locations in the twenty-first century.

Organized by Roxana Marcoci, Senior Curator, with Drew Sawyer, Beaumont and Nancy Newhall Curatorial Fellow, Department of Photography.

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