

HUXLEY-PARLOUR

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Abelardo Morell
Through the Looking Glass

23 March - 16 April 2016

Beetles+Huxley to present a solo exhibition of the critically acclaimed photographer Abelardo Morell.

Renowned for his appropriation of defunct photographic processes, Morell is one of the most innovative photographers working today. Producing images that connect the antique beginnings of photography to the modern environment, Morell uses a variety of unusual methods – tintypes, glass negatives, wet plate collodian, cyanotypes, cliché verre and, most famously, the camera obscura.



Camera Obscura: Manhattan View Looking South in Large Room, 1996

Translated from Latin as 'dark chamber', the camera obscura is an ancient concept described by Aristotle and drawn by Leonardo da Vinci. It involves the projection of an image onto the interior of a darkened box. Morell has gained fame and prestige for creating life-size camera obscuras to produce otherworldly, oneiric photographs. The exhibition will show a cross-section of works from Morell's celebrated career, including many of the *Camera Obscura* series.

Morell was born in 1948 in Havana, Cuba. His father was imprisoned several times by the Castro regime before being tipped off that he was marked for the firing squad. The family fled Cuba in 1962, settling in New York where they lived in a basement apartment and Morell's father worked as a caretaker. Speaking no English when he arrived in New York, Morell worked as a pharmacy delivery boy, allowing him to buy a box Brownie camera. Attending Bowdoin College on a scholarship, he took a photography class in his second year. He went on to undertake a Master of Fine Arts at Yale University School of Art, graduating in 1981. His first photographs were taken in a documentary style, similar to Gary Winogrand and Robert Frank.

Whilst teaching an introductory photography course at Massachusetts College of Art Morell was inspired to make his classroom into a life-size camera obscura in order to convey the fundamental principles of photography to his students. He covered the classroom windows with black plastic and cut a small hole in the material. Turning off the lights in the room, the wall opposite the window was immediately covered in a blurry scene of the road outside the window, upside down. Morell then set about trying to photograph the image produced in a camera obscura. His process took months to develop and required at least an eight-hour exposure time. Having honed his technique, Morell travelled the world reinventing famous scenes through the gauze of his otherworldly camera obscura process. The Eiffel Tower, San Marco Square in Venice and the Manhattan Bridge are all rendered strange through their passage into the dark chamber of the camera obscura.

As well his *Camera Obscura* series, works from Morell's *Tent Camera* project will be on display. During a visit to Big Bend National Park Morell became interested in the desert floor and sought a method to project the surrounding desert onto it. A prefab dome tent with a periscope inserted in the roof allowed him to make images of a semi-abstract appearance that combine urban and rural scenes with the visceral nature of their surroundings. Abelardo Morell will be a rare opportunity to see the work of this master of photography in London.

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