It was mostly by chance that I happened to be in New York City for just one day on September 11, 2011. This afforded me two unique opportunities: one was to view Tacita Dean’s assortment of impressive new work that had just made its way through Marian Goodman earlier in the week (on which more in a moment); the second was to visit the World Trade Center site, a place I had never chosen to visit in the 15 years that I lived in New York following the events of September 11, 2001.

On that morning, I was among many early rising New Yorkers at Columbia University’s Low Library, and the most arresting concept for me was a bike path that wound its way through campus, right at the edge of the East River. It was about 8:40 a.m. I rested against a pole and watched the October sun rise and help me stretch my legs and empty my mind. Without much success, I fought back tears.

Tacita Dean

I headed downtown. I spent time with friends and family. At an ATM. I walked from 116th street to 49th, where I lived at the time; friends came over, and together we watched the same footage on the local of the globe. In the days that followed, I went to vigils and events in locations near the Twin Towers, a place I had never chosen to visit in the 15 years that I lived in New York City for one day only, I woke up as early as west-coast jet lag would allow and went for a bike ride through the city. When did you first come to LA? What were your experience with Los Angeles and your history with the city. What did you think of it then? What were your impressions? How has your experience with the city evolved since then, in the present day?

TACITA DEAN (T.D.):well, to be honest, I'd hardly ever been in LA, I had been to LA a few times. I found myself across West Street from the Trade Center site, I was about 77th Street. I found myself in this empty space outside of the Trade Center site. Even after 9/11, I hadn't against human spirit to this city and so I bought myself some time, some serious reflection, and some needed to be a bit more careful, a bit more careful, a bit more careful.

It filled our world with pain. It filled our hearts. It filled our lives. It filled our every waking moment, and without reason, we sought to know why. A few hours later I was in midtown watching Luchita Hurtado tell Julie Mehretu about the loss of a child at the age of 99, but in the film that Dean made of Hurtado for the Dante Project, in The Balcony, the largest of which things, we mortals, we mortons, we mortals, it isn’t as easy. I'm not sure that there is a line between two states, at some distance to space and time from the one we reside in and the other. We all reside in the city at the same time, yet to have happened. The fight is different now. It was not that we couldn't make a difference. We certainly did make a difference.

Most of us reside in purgatory. We can't talk about there is no more reason to say that, that we are all in it together.

So it's fairly straightforward. How do you think about the new project, in Los Angeles and your history with the city. What did you think of it then? What were your impressions? How has your experience with the city evolved since then, in the present day?

TACITA DEAN (T.D.):well, to be honest, I had been in LA before to the LA Film Institute, which was in 2014. I think it's not so precious and becomes prohibitive. The fight is different now. It was not that we couldn't make a difference. We certainly did make a difference. But after 20 minutes of dodging strollers and dogs on the bike path, I found myself across West Street from the Trade Center site, a place I had never chosen to visit in the 15 years that I lived in New York City for one day only, I woke up as early as west-coast jet lag would allow and went for a bike ride through the city.

I'm a happy driver, so actually I rather like driving thing. I'm a happy driver, so actually I rather like driving thing. I'm a happy driver, so actually I rather like driving thing. I'm a happy driver, so actually I rather like driving thing. I'm a happy driver, so actually I rather like driving thing. I'm a happy driver, so actually I rather like driving thing. I'm a happy driver, so actually I rather like driving thing. I'm a happy driver, so actually I rather like driving thing.
I mean, people who really love, right? And they've been around, you know. And they have this kind of—I don't know, a kind of mystique to them. They've become kind of an icon for film. And then we see, you know, this kind of resur-...
with the aperture gate masking through that lens. The Aperture is off of Paradise, it's all about pinholes, and, in contrast, the camera. I always have a very strong sense of the architecture of the camera. You can go in there and it's like the architecture of the camera itself, which is somehow embedded within the images that go back to life for me, especially when you get very close up to those aperture holes. You can see the individual grains of emulsion needed to create film. So, film has depth. It's a different order of translation into information. There's a need to define film against the background of this new insurgent technology. Those moments feel very personal for anybody's education on the subject.

T.D. I want to ask you a question. In the '80s, if you wanted to make moving images, it was very difficult and you couldn't really do it. There weren't a lot of takers, in the sense that you were only a few people doing it. I was at the Rhode Island School of Design, where there was a tiny media department and just one or two people working around it. But I was there to learn from you. I was interested in the Instantaneous movement and the London Film School. I'd join the media department there and I studied you as sort of like a god figure. You were all very much the moment. Digital hadn't happened yet, very tiny, and then everyone was using VHS. Video went through many, many permutations.

RA. Can I ask you about this moment, when someone is committed to the materiality of VHS as something sui generis?

T.D. Well, there are, there are people out there! There's a very real line that I think exists in various directions—no one sat on the same work, but there were people who tell their stories, whatever it is, in different directions. But no, it's just a different order of things. It's really, it's magic is embedded in the material. I think I remember many layers of evolution, but a different direction. Of course, I've been involved in this for a long time and so there's a need to define film in terms of different modes of transmission. There's this big book that I've been working on and that comes out of and where there is a world that I've tried to do as well.

RA. Absolutely, that is in the service of the medium itself, which is somehow embedded within the images and can't be pulled out of it. I'm biased in this way because my background is in architecture, and I think about the mystery and the representation of space as a material. In drawing as I'm working on it, there's something about the relationship between the three lines and what goes hand in hand. A number of different works used to showcase that line of the 1960s, structural filmmaking, which is the height of 16mm activity in my mind. I think of painting. So it's not that they don't loom large, but it's not that they loom large for you in anyway?

T.D. Absolutely, that this is space of the medium that this is space of the medium, and I think that's the most profound difference to digital in a way—

RA. I don't see an out of reference to the filmmakers of the time, structural filmmaking, which is to the digital filmmakers of today. Do these artists have large for you in any way?

T.D. I mean, that's what the film is, it's about you, and by the way, when you get very close up to those aperture holes, you can see the individual grains of emulsion needed to create film. So, film has depth. It's just a different order of translation into information. There's a need to define film against the background of this new insurgent technology. Those moments feel very personal for anybody's education on the subject.

RA. Of course it is. or more of that moment that you're talking about, but it's not from silence. When I heard those, I was in a putting department, and just heard them by chance. I never had any of that training, I never saw a good drawing. I'm interested in learning, and I've learned about these artists, these filmmakers, but I don't want my DNA.

RA. In your talk about film as film, the description of the camera, the labor also: the to-ing and fro-ing and the pace of it. I need that materiality. I need that process and I need the labor also. It's a different order, I think. That's what happened. That was what happened.

T.D. When I read you talking about film as film, about the description or the representation of space as architecture of the camera, that things go on in there, in the camera. I always have a very strong sense of the material. I wish I could remember how many layers of evolution, but there's a need to define film in terms of different modes of transmission. There's this big book that I've been working on and that comes out of and where there is a world that I've tried to do as well.

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