

ARTFORUM

Sophie Calle

GALERIE PERROTIN | SAINT CLAUDE

10 impasse Saint Claude

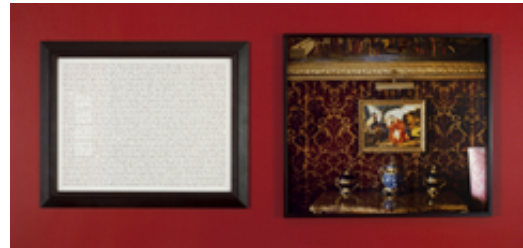
November 14–January 11

Visualizing the invisible is a recurrent theme in Sophie Calle's photo-based oeuvre—from photographs based on descriptions of beauty provided by people who were born blind to portraits of those who have lost their sight suddenly. Calle's current exhibition, "Dérobés," challenges the viewer to see vanished artworks. The photograph/text pairings in the series "What Do You See," 2013, conjure paintings by Rembrandt, Johannes Vermeer, and Govert Flinck that were among the thirteen artworks stolen from Boston's Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in 1990. Focusing on that museum's "Dutch Room," Calle's photographs show anonymous people contemplating empty frames reinstalled where the stolen paintings originally hung. Accompanying each photo, a text panel of roughly the same size offers a freewheeling description of what viewers saw while standing in front of the empty frames. The unattributed first-person accounts range from confident imaginings ("I definitely see the Obelisk") to psychological avowals ("I see my reflection, so I see my sadness").

Presented in a blood-red room, "Purloined," 1994–2013, concerns paintings by Lucien Freud, Pablo Picasso, Titian, and J. M. W. Turner that have been stolen from various collections. *Purloined: Lucian Freud, Francis Bacon's Portrait*, 1998–2013, depicts the Tate Gallery storage drawer where the portrait was typically kept (it was stolen while on loan, in Berlin). The memorializing text (assorted descriptions of the missing work solicited from curators, guards, and other museum staff) is printed small to emphasize the painting's diminutive size and intimate nature, and includes a poignant reference to sight: "There was this thing about the eyes being closed, when they absolutely weren't."

Another sentimental allusion to eyes is found in *Le Major Davel*, 1994. In this work, Calle depicts the remains of Charles Gleyre's painting of the executed officer (which was damaged in 1980 by an act of arson at the Musée de Cantonal des Beaux Arts in Lausanne) in a life-size gilded frame. In the lower right corner, a man buries his face in his hands. The rest of the composition is filled up by text—remembrances of the painting and reactions to its cruel fate that Calle solicited from the museum's staff. "It's as if his tears stopped the fire," says one of the anonymous commentators. Seen in the context of Calle's project, however, the figure's gesture is an apt reflection of the viewers' own temporary blindness.

— Mara Hoberman



Sophie Calle, *Purloined : Titian, The Rest on the Flight into Egypt*, 1998-2013, color photograph, text, frames, dimensions variable.

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