

Joe Coleman
Vigil to an Ordinary Life
The Folk House, Bristol



In Susan Sontag's seminal book *On Photography* she quotes the philosopher Feuerbach stating "our era prefers the image to the thing, the copy to the original, the representation to reality, appearance to being" (Sontag, 1977, p.153). Feuerbach said this in 1843 and it's true of today's era where image consumption is at an all time high, we now create as many images in two minutes as in the whole of the 19th century. With this vast flux of images we are bombarded with images as a way of constructing our identity, images of things but not their state of being.

In *Vigil to an Ordinary Life*, we are presented with glass jars on which an image has been transferred referencing the preservation of memory, but what are these images preserving? Contemporary public image making is a mass of Instagram posts, tweets, retweets and Facebook likes. There is an engagement with the medium but a lack of engagement with what these huge archive of images mean. How does an image of yourself stood in front of a monument further any kind of understanding past a shallow like? How does a #selfie or a #instadaily give your public life any further meaning? Coleman's apparently banal images address these problems, the images aren't particularly interesting, or even particularly meaningful but this is a purposeful technique from the artist. The images become a parody of this digital image culture that pervades modern life.

The images presents a lack of overt meaning but the audience cannot help but create meaning from what they see. They are presented with scenes of Coleman's domestic life including city rooftops, boilers, and a pile of wood all slowly degrading. The images present a view of Coleman's everyday life but they are unstable, resigned to change. With no discernible reference point, it is upon the viewer to complete the work, the viewer, part of the daily image culture will inevitably call upon this photographic grammar to inform the work.

The images use an emulsion lift process that places Polaroid images onto glass. The image is boiled to remove it from its plastic case and placed onto the glass jars. This

process removes the Polaroid from its protective casing and put it onto another surface that isn't always malleable or accepting, this leads to it cracking and beginning to degrade. The image becomes more susceptible to the effect of light and humidity and over time the surface will pull itself apart.

Vigil To An Ordinary Life is a lament against current uses of photography that contains more mass than meaning. We are creating more images than ever but without thinking about what they could mean, this vast volume of information piles up in an ever-expanding digital pile. These images are largely without explicit meaning, but say more about the current state of photography than anything else. Coleman's series of images are temporary in their existence, these singular Polaroid images that will only ever exist once in this form are fragments of life that will disappear, this temporality is at odds with the digital life of an image that has the ability to be endlessly reproduced and has little control over its potential uses.