



Gerard Pryor, *Trans Self Portrait*, 2015, ink jet print, 8.5" x 11". Edition of three

Gerald Pryor's Trans Juxtapositions at Wook Choi Gallery in New York City

by Jonathan Goodman

Gerald Pryor, a photographer based in New York City, has been making trips to Chinese cities – Shanghai, Tianjin, Beijing – since 1986. His digital photographs, 27 by 40 inches in size, are usually diptychs, issued in editions of three. Sometimes juxtaposing nature imagery from Sag Harbor, Long Island (where he has a home), with busier, more urban scenery from China, Pryor makes use of the contrasts to present statements about city and country life, at the same time illustrating his vision of the Dao, or path in life, as adumbrated by Lao Tze. As a result, these pictures are highly evocative, intimating philosophical insights indirectly, in the manner of Chinese

spiritual writing. Pryor's photographs, which are composed of two images, one on top of the other, contrast both scenery and ways of life taken from two very different cultures. Photography always gives the illusion of an ultimate realism: a truth that we at first believe but then recognize as an inevitably subjective statement, like all others. Pryor's photos utilize the condition of photography both to compare with and measure against the ability of cultures close by to coexist, imagistically speaking, with places far from home.

Some of the juxtapositions are very striking, indeed. *Trans Self Portrait*, 2015 consists of a picture of the

upper torso, neck, and lower half of the face of the artist – we see only his mouth and part of his ear. The pinkish color of his skin stands out. Beneath this image is a group of gray rocks extending along the shore, with a bit of light coming in at the top of the composition. The disparity between the two images couldn't be more extreme; the viewer's challenge is to work out a link between the two, one that does justice to the sharp difference between both. This much is clear: the person before us is a representative of humanity in a highly vulnerable form, whereas the stone imagery beneath Pryor indicates a portrayal of nature, one quite unattached to what we associate with people. Here, it seems, it is the variance between the two that counts: the fragility of the human condition and the long-lived integrity of stone.

Transasia Stack 2, 2015 presents a picture of a large evergreen surrounded by snow, with a small patch of ground circling the tree. Its branches extend outward toward a gray-blue sky, with suffused light coming forth from the lower part of the firmament. The clouds diffusing the light are beautiful, as is the polarity between them and the tree. This image could be in Asia or New York, but no matter the particulars of its locality its presence is universal. The composition is a play between darks and lights, with a gray upper atmosphere intervening in the middle ground. Sometimes Pryor exercises his imagination by distilling the human condition in relation to nature, but in this image, nature takes over completely, resulting in an impossibly pure treatment of the exterior world. Should such a treatment not succeed completely, it is not because of the artist's expertise so much as the weight of photographic history, which dulls our perceptions of the purity of the environment. It is hard today to see a tree in all its clarity. Legacies in art can often get in the way of creativity, but in Pryor's case, he transforms earlier visual accounts into something new, something inspired.