

NUDGE INTO FORM

Kyla McFarlane

At first, there seems to be little evidence of the bodily work of the artist in the overlapping shards of colour and form that traverse Danica Chappell's photographic works. Yet, they are described as haptic, a term that characterises a kind of tactile knowledge, an understanding through touch, the fifth of our senses.

Touch is of course one of the ways we perceive the world, but it is perhaps the furthest from our sense of sight, that which is connected to the perception of light, and therefore to the photographic. What, then, gives rise to this description? Like fingers working across Braille, Danica Chappell's actions in the photographic darkroom are a kind of bodily confidence, a hidden performance from which deceptively formal photographic works emerge over time. Working between positive and negative, Chappell deftly layers.

The title of this exhibition, *Nudge into Form*, is perhaps also the best way to describe this process, suggesting for me a kind of *coaxing* by the artist, a prodding and suggesting of the artwork into being, the result of extended hours in the darkroom, with just the materials – the substrate, the paper, the coloured light – for company, and inspiration. It is, in many ways, a world away from the world itself. Photography and body working deeply back into themselves.

For this current body of work, Chappell is experimenting with scale, and with the photographic substrate. Each of Chappell's chosen substrates have different associations. Duratran is a substrate of display and durability, while tintype is the nineteenth century reborn, fetishised. Chappell's third substrate, the slide transparency, sits somewhat between the two, both the object and medium.

Chappell fills a window with painterly, darkroom-built colour on Duratrans, an act that reflects on the long history of windows and coloured light. Though the colour in Chappell's window work originates from the dark, and the work of touch, rather than sight, or spiritual concerns.

Against this large-scale experiment are her tintypes. These compositions are monochromatic, shadowy, diaphanous ... this substrate makes veils of the layered sheets, emphasising the shadow, the tear and the deep, dark hole in the image.

All of Chappell's final works are complex abstractions: overlapping colour fields, sharp-edged strips and diaphanous bleeds that allude to the spray of paint from a nozzle. The medium itself gives this form. The material, layer upon layer, gives rise to depth and edge within a flat substrate. They reward the long look, building upon themselves, form working with, and against, form.

What does this mean? Well, take a long look at the slide transparencies, their buckled folds echoed, then contradicted by the linear forms within. The layered, multitudinous depth, translucent and murky. The mottled stain against the hard edge inside. The serrated edge. The framing support that pinches this little object. Chappell has managed something curious here, a melding of translucency and opacity, light and dark, surface and edge and depth. She has, through her haptic work, confused the inherent with the alchemic, the sculptural with the photographic. Deeper and deeper we go into the image and, as we emerge, we are brought face to face with the object.