



In many ways, *Glass Life* brings together a number of aesthetic innovations that Cwynar has been developing over the past decade or so. Her early works investigated the possibilities of archival imagery of varying kinds, reassembling, rescanning, and reusing the photographs in different ways, in an effort to disrupt or reinterpret the imagery and its underlying pictorial assumptions. In the years following (as seen in her 2017 gallery show, here), Cwynar kept iterating on those original ideas, adding in the lightning strike innovation of an interrupting clear Plexi sheet, which allowed her to physically layer images on top of each other in unexpected ways. She also dipped her toe into the pool of video, extending some of her existing aesthetic frameworks, adding more motion, and playing still images and video off each other. Her 2019 museum solo at the Aldrich (reviewed here) summarized many of these threads, and new videos on view there once again introduced alternate methods and techniques for moving photographs around and intermingling them with video. With each step in her artistic journey, she's discovered more ways to manipulate and rearrange imagery in different forms, building up to the brimming toolbox she shows off in *Glass Life*.

The video installation is a six channel projection, shown on a large main screen, two smaller side screens flanking the central one, and three mini screens set behind against the back wall. The flow of the video largely originates on the main screen, with the two side screens providing alternate views, supporting details, or further tunneling into certain topics. The three back screens provide the animated avatar face of a woman in a blue swimming suit and swim cap, who periodically talks in synch with the surrounding voice over; she also appears as a swimming presence in the midst of the flow of imagery (both as a physical cutout and as an animation), almost like a guide.

One way to consider what Cwynar is doing in *Glass Life* is to see the entire production as a performance of thinking. With some exceptions, the main flow of "action" takes place against an indeterminate gray grid, where images in various forms are laid out at differing depths, sizes, and spatial positions, like a three-dimensional collage. For the most part, we move downward in a scroll slightly too fast to entirely process, but other side to side motion, back and forth rewinding, and conveyor belt progressions also take place, as do "clicking" on a still photograph to turn it into a video that then plays, pulling us "downward" and "expanding" (using the side screens) into its own area of attention. Cwynar also physically intervenes with her hand or arm now and again, touching, holding, moving, pinning up, or otherwise reorienting the imagery. To say that the overall feel is dizzying is perhaps an oversimplification; it feels fast, jumpy, squirrely, and intensely stimulated, but there is a logic that can be followed (even when the tangents start to feel pretty random) that slowly aggregates and coalesces into something approximating thinking in this distracted digital age.

The conceptual through line is an amalgam of all kinds of references and influences – photographic, intellectual, philosophical, political, cultural, and personal, with the frame constantly shifting via juxtapositions, connections, and repositionings. Ideas link to memories, which wander to reproductions (of reproductions), which are then gathered into congregations and networked nodes, all of the reshuffling and remixing accompanied by snippets of spoken texts that offer interpretations, descriptions, reflections, and analyses of related, but more abstract, concepts.

If this work had been silent, it would have been all fleeting recognition and overloaded task switching; but with the voice over, that semi-controlled frenzy becomes intellectualized, like a brain interpreting its inputs in real time. Cwynar draws from an impressive list of sources, from Virginia Woolf and Emily Dickinson to Plato, Camus, Lacan, and Shakespeare (and beyond, as a long list at the end of the video attests), the overlapped voices competing, repeating, and almost conversing, as though actively wrestling inside our own heads. What emerges are snippets of derived (or applied) insight that seem to inform the flow of imagery swirling around the gallery:

- "In the glass life, everything can be used."
- "We appear to be both obsessive documenters of our experience, yet largely indifferent to, or overwhelmed by the archives we create."
- "We have to watch ourselves become ourselves in order to be ourselves, over and over again."

- “Everything is significant or irrelevant, depending on which view suits our needs.”
- “You feel like everyone is watching you, but they are just watching themselves.”
- “A nation built on freedom is just another place to go shopping.”
- “Beauty brings copies of itself into being.”

These and many other decontextualized quotes, allusions, and remembered bons mots pile up atop the imagery, deepening the matrixed loop that we find ourselves trapped inside. And the words sweep past at such a rate that we can hardly process them all, many lucidly pointed texts flitting in and out of conscious thought before vanishing into the crowd rushing by.

The sophisticated interaction between image and text in Cwynar’s *Glass Life* is what gives it its thought-provoking 21st century punch. It successfully simulates the layered complexity of our over-saturated, over-stimulated attention span, where time feels malleable, anxiety creeps in as we constantly survey ourselves, and our efforts to make sense of all the symbols, signals, and information get increasingly manic and frustrated. Its wide ranging, searching pace is unsettlingly familiar, rooting us in the unrelenting contemporary pastime of watching ourselves watching ourselves.