

## VACANCY

By Suvan Geer

I was reminded in particular of the emotionally dense yet apparently straightforward photos and video work of Los Angeles artist Emilie Halpern. She makes beautiful, color saturated images of totally mundane things like ice cubes floating in a blue haze or wilting flowers in an outstretched hand. While her images of these unremarkable things are lovely to look at, like the Crime Stoppers photographs it is often what is absent from them that makes the images resonate. Her photo of a mingled pool of two lovers spit on a dark table leaves out their bodies yet summons us to think of them in the disturbing terms of bacteria or disease.



Emilie Halpern, *kiss*, 2001  
C-Print, 16 x 20 inches

The short video "Luna" shows the artist gently kissing the wing of a huge and gorgeous, live night moth as it lays lethargically sprawled on a wall during the day. To watch her kiss the slumbering insect's outstretched wing is to feel all the wonder and inherent reverence of that gesture. Absent from the image but available elsewhere is the information that a touch to the wing's fragile surface can rob the moth of its ability to fly and so make it incapable of mating. It is that knowledge that unmakes the tender kiss and reveals instead a covert act of sexualized violence.

Art that uses absence to shift our perception from the apparent meaning of the scene presented to another that is also real, but outside the visual arena puts us in touch with what is most elusive in human experience. Such work begs us to consider the implications and impact of things not readily visible, and so hints at an entire world nesting within our seemingly solid touch-it, see-it reality. A world that we are unwittingly shaping or being influenced by and so deserves attention.

Edited for length.