

Bryce Edwards

*Acheiropoieta*

May 16 - June 20, 2024

*Cicero describes a miraculous image of Ceres as “not made by humans hand, but fallen from heaven” (non humana manu factum, sed de caelo lapsam).*

– from "Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art", Hans Belting, (1993)

In his book *Photography and Belief*, David Levi Strauss attempts to first delineate and then identify the source of photography's particular, persuasive effects. Drawing on Barthes, Berger, and Benjamin, he posits that we believe in photography, and technical images more broadly, because we perceive the photograph as a direct emanation from the past—a direct imprint (touch) from its subject. Strauss argues that this form of authenticity has an antecedent in the history of acheiropoietic icons, who derive their authority from the absence of human intervention. The imprint of Christ's body on the Shroud of Turin, for example, is more authentic than a portrait of Christ painted by the Apostle Luke in the presence of Christ, which is more authentic than an icon painted by an ordinary man, which is more authentic than its replicas. I find this hierarchy of authenticity, traced through a chain of copies, interesting.

But the historical quality of acheiropoietic icons which interests me more is their anthropological relationship to belief and presence. That is: the practical experience of belief—belief in something which cannot be touched, handled only as images and images of images; and the genuine perception that something is present when its body is absent. An authentic image is necessary in this case; but what is that authentic image? Historically, verisimilitude came through the divine impression—but can a shadow be more real than the body? And when is an image deficient? Even a perfect replica can be disappointing. Like the *Incredulity of Thomas* described by John, one can approach the evidence—but the choice to trust is still a choice.

This exhibition is guided by a further reading of the word *acheiropoietos*: without human hands. I am interested in an ethical question—what it means to believe in the presence of people, or the historical presence of people, who are within technology. These are the people in the apparatus which delivers technical images: the painters of unpainted *imago*s. A mechanical clock would have, historically, been wound by hand. A ship is manned on the open ocean. But the ship's crew disappears into the ship's shape—a remote site which incubated human arts from navigation to architecture to time-keeping.

The history of seafaring is a history of belief because it historically dealt with the known and unknown. Fernando Passoa writes that the world is only as large as the horizon you can see. You cannot see the ocean from here; and if you can see the ocean, you cannot see the ships or the other shores. Even now, it is difficult to conceive of the things which happen at sea.

- Bryce Edwards 2024. The artist lives and works in Brooklyn.