



Introduction

Lost and Found

In Jeannette Montgomery Barron's photographs still life is transformed into new life, into portraits where image, memory and a daughter's love collide. Printed and preserved on these pages, clothes that were once chosen to express their owner's taste and style, are altered. Marked by the outline of their age, time and place, they become in these pictures, a medium and a conduit. They conjure an original and vivid spirit back to life—that of the photographer's mother, the beautiful and stylish Eleanor Morgan Montgomery Atuk.

The camera is only a mechanical eye. When it blinks it takes a picture. But the image it records is meaningless without the control of a human eye. By choosing with both the conscious and unconscious, the photographer's intention is infused into the image as surely as the scent of a person is captured by their clothes. So, memory and photography can have an alchemical relationship, becoming each other's essence. The camera's shutter is a stopper on a scent bottle, trapping fugitive memories and releasing them from this book at each turn of the page. Through these pictures subtle fragrances are communicated by Montgomery Barron's camera. A ball dress seems haunted by the scent of dancing and cigars; a woollen coat's collar gently exhales fragrance whilst its wearer is gone. An absent mother is given form.

A photograph of a Norell perfume bottle, its last few drops the colour of an aged sauterne, becomes a potent image of loss and redemption. The bottle, its precious dregs, the extinct couturier's name painted boldly on the glass—are as poignant as hieroglyphs on an everyday object from an Egyptian tomb.

Gently, as her mother lost her memory, Montgomery Barron started to recreate it in these pictures of her clothes. At first they were more for her mother than for herself—then touchstones of reminiscence for both. When Eleanor died, they became a continuum of farewell, an elegy, and a hymn.

These photographs are still lives. In them a mother still lives. A daughter and artist is defined. And a stilled life is restored.

PATRICK KINMONTH, London, 2009