

december (trophy hunting)

content warning: animal death

about three weeks ago, i saw a deer on the side of the road. it had fallen, or been dragged, into a large puddle. it had been there for at least a day before i got there. it was so still, so posed, almost attentive, but resting. the violence that brought it there was completely invisible, almost forgettable. the water was a clear mirror.

the deer was dead when i shot it. here, as an image, it's been removed from its body again, hanging on the wall. to look at death, and especially images of death, gives us a privileged distance from it. as photographers and as audiences, we get to just look at what others experience.

for these reasons, photography can sometimes take the form of trophy hunting. shooting not to kill, but to immortalize. this metaphor imagines the photographer as a careful marksman, a technician above all else. the gendered language isn't an accident. there's a lot of glory in it, even pride.

killing a deer with your car is a different story. some photos you crash into. they might crash back into you just as hard, but at the end of the day only one of you is hanging on the wall. taxidermied roadkill.

i hope these photos are gentler than what they imply. to be direct, they are mostly imagined scenes from before and after the crash, in the lives of both the driver and his deer. wandering through an abandoned house, a near miss by the side of a luckier road, passing a rest stop restlessly.

mounting and displaying pictures means making a spectacle out of something invisible, making it into an object of the gaze. to challenge this, i wanted to destabilize the visual experience. many photos are rotated incorrectly or shot at strange, uncomfortable angles. i also refuse to hide the process that brought these images here. the camera, lights, and shutter are all visually evident.

i sought out materials for this that were translucent, light, and frail. often, this brought me to items like lace, that are gendered feminine. the tracing paper that these are printed on is intentionally fragile. i hoped to express through these materials a sense of spirituality, or specifically a thin veil. through translucency, i want to be able to see through the photos and their subjects: revealing not just what we see, but also the world behind.

— cass clark