



HOUSTON CENTER FOR PHOTOGRAPHY SUMMER 2007



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cover: Janet Biggs (New York)
Deanna (Behind the Vertical)
2006, Video still
3 minutes 16 seconds

inside cover: Anne Katrine Senstad
(Oslo/New York)
I.A.L. 10.10.04
2004/2007, C-print
30 x 40 inches

In this Issue

The previous issue of *SPOT*, our SILVER 25th Anniversary Issue looked to the past. In it we asked photographers who had shown their work at HCP over the course of our history to curate a page of work. The idea was to bring the past up to the present.

In this issue we look to the future and in this, to the wider world. Our own *Antennae* show is highlighted with an essay by our curator and new Executive Director, Madeline Yale. We are very pleased that Madeline has joined our staff. She comes to us from Portland, Maine, where prior to joining HCP, she was the manager for the photographic estate of Todd Webb, served as a photographic archivist, and organized exhibitions on photography and contemporary art in the US and Europe. She has a MA in Photographic Studies from the Norwich School of Art & Design in England, a post-graduate certificate in Western Art History from Sotheby's, and a BA in Sociology from Skidmore College. Madeline has quickly established herself within the Houston community. We are excited that she is leading HCP, and if you have not done so already, we invite you to drop by to meet her.

Her show, *Antennae* examines the work of ten artists and collaborative teams from around the world, artists who have pushed the boundaries of photography in new ways. They confront established photographic thought through the use of various media – video, sculpture, newsprint, as well as conventional materials put to new use.

We look internationally to a broad possible future for photography, first through a review of *Ecotopia* by David Crossley. *Ecotopia* was an exhibition staged at the International Center for Photography this fall in New York, a show that examined the world ecologically from personal and global perspectives. Like *Antennae*, a wide variety of lens-based materials were used.

Wendy Watriss sets a context for the next Houston FotoFest in spring 2008 (themed 'China'), with compelling descriptions of the things that she and other FotoFest reviewers encountered in Beijing last year – a photographic state of affairs which is astonishing in its depth and passion.

Peter Yenne's remarkable exhibition on the *Vargas Brothers*, a Peruvian photographic duo who dealt with a wide variety of activities in Arequipa at the turn of the twentieth century is brilliantly described and glossed by Fernando Castro in an essay worthy of Borges.

6-Pack: from Mexico City, a traveling exhibition curated by the group of photographers and organized by HCP, is reviewed by Estela Reviño. Acting as spectators and creators of an emerging generation, the 6-Pack artists stage an atmosphere in flux, attempting to preserve Mexico's history while engaging in a globalized ideological context.

In this issue, we included two artist-curated sections. Krista Leigh Steinke and Nathan Baker, both of whom are members of HCP and are exhibiting in this year's Fellowship and Membership exhibitions, tell stories through images – Steinke reworks fairytales in clever ways, while Baker presents the moment when inanimate objects come to life.

Houstonian Patsy Cravens' wonderful book *Leavin' a Testimony: Portraits from Rural Texas*, is reviewed by Ebony Porter of HCP. Porter's review describes Cravens' process of looking in depth at the people and environs of Columbus, Texas – Cravens goes below the political surface of things with passion and courage.

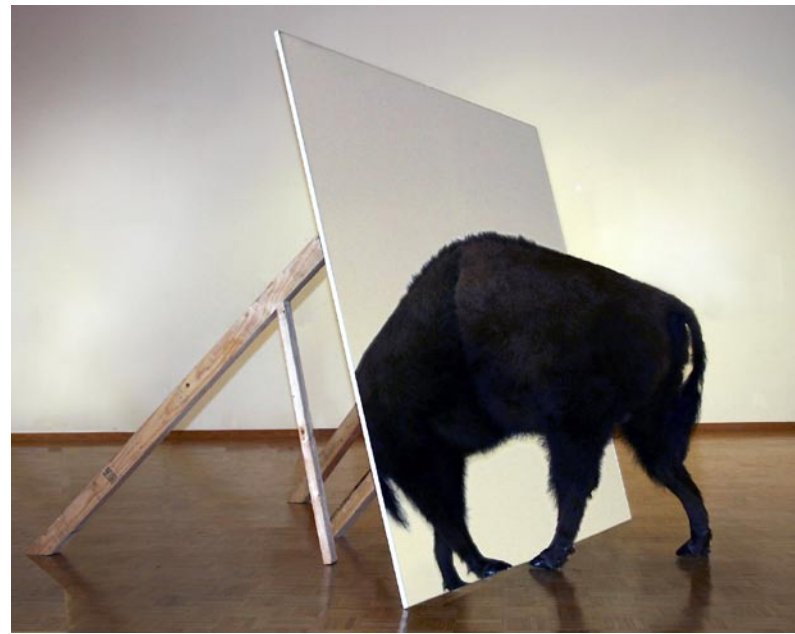
And also locally, Collaborations, an annual outreach project at HCP that culminates in an exhibition of work from Houston high school students, is described by HCP's Education Coordinator Rachel Hewlett. This is our fourth Collaborations exhibit and we look forward to many more.

Many thanks once again to our Designer, Antonio Manega, whose spectacular work won *SPOT* a "First Place Award" in Magazine Design from the American Association of Museums last year and whose inspired eye and thought continue on here.

Peter Brown

Peter Brown
Publications Chair
Houston Center for Photography

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left: Todd Gray
California Missions: America (Installation view)
 2004, Archival pigment print and mixed media
 81.5 x 109 x 83.25 inches
 Images courtesy Luckman Gallery, Los Angeles, CA.

below left: Janet Biggs
Deanna (Behind the Vertical)
 2006, Video still
 3 minutes 16 seconds

ANTENNAE

The exhibition *Antennae*, on view from April 27 – June 3, 2007, is one of a series of events celebrating Houston Center for Photography's 25th Anniversary. It is noteworthy that HCP's 25th birthday coincides with such a pivotal moment in the medium's history. While some would argue that the waning of wet processes signals the impending death of photography, others would claim that it is enjoying a renaissance. Lightrooms are replacing darkrooms, and mastering the craft of photography requires a new kind of technological sophistication. Enrollment in art school photography programs is at an all-time high, and the medium is experiencing an extraordinarily lucrative period in international art markets. Color photography is omnipresent, and hyper-real, supersized images are the fashion of the moment. Though photography was once considered the stepchild of painting and other visual art, the early 21st century marks a synergistic period of inter-media collaboration. From rabbit ears to satellite dishes, the exhibition *Antennae* espouses all of these ideas, sending and receiving today's photographic technologies, media, and culture.

curated and written by Madeline Yale



Transmitting visual information with a self-conscious eye on the past and the future, the ten artists and collaborative teams featured in *Antennae* are engaging with photographic media in innovative, thought-provoking ways. Everyday props such as cell phones, coffee grounds, 2x2's, and fluorescent bulbs mix with meticulously crafted stage sets, glossy fashion magazines, and intricately seamed tapestries of skies in the exhibition. Some of the work is clearly made for the purpose of self-reflection, while other pieces are intended to act as a galvanizing force for political and social change. Though it would be impossible to execute a fully comprehensive survey of contemporary photography, the work presented in *Antennae* introduces an array of current methodologies and concepts and proposes several trajectories for the future of the medium.

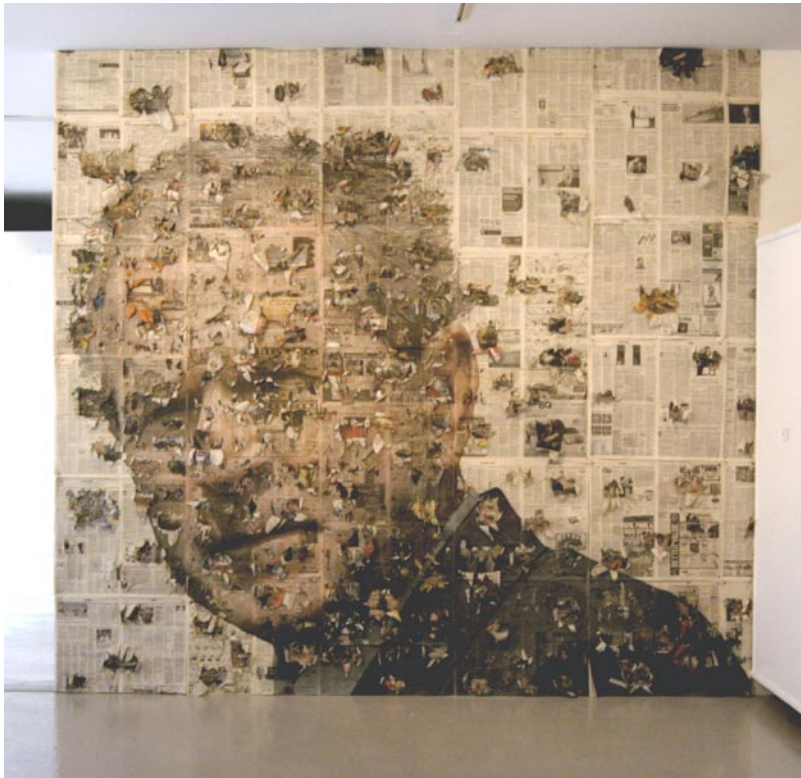
In art, animals have long been used as metaphors for humans' relationship to the natural world and for spirituality. One cannot help but notice there is no shortage of art today that features animals – much of it speaks to the confused distinction between animal/human and the increased unease with our stewardship of the earth. Todd Gray (b. 1957) is one such artist who weaves actual animals with photographs and other media. The resultant installations raise questions about our relationship to nature and more importantly, to one another. Revealing his perspective on colonial missionaries and their governments, Gray (who lives in Ghana and California) created the series *California Missions*. These missionaries propagated religious and metaphysical beliefs, exploited native cultures by using people as slaves and cheap labor, and altered the indigenous communities' relationship with nature. In *America*, a supersized photograph of ordered, European architecture is turned on its head, and is opposed by a mirror that immediately forces the viewer into a participatory role in the work. Taxidermy (to be specific, a buffalo's ass) represents the native characters who now serve as phantom trophies for those whose oppressive tactics prevailed. Giant wooden cantilevers precariously balance the image, proposing the fragility of western ideologies while the natural world's buffalo attempts to force its collapse.

The super-size scale of contemporary photography is often in partnership with constructed scenes, encouraging the viewer to step into the witness role in hyper-real dramas. While this type of imagery isn't new (precursors



left: John Sparagana
from the series *Sleeping Beauty*
2003-2007, Fatigued magazine pieces

left, bottom:
Peter Kennard & Cat Picton Philipps
Cover Story
2007, Giclee print on newspapers
120 x 96 inches & 132 x 96 inches
Installation image courtesy of Ivill Michels



In many ways, the artist as
creator of the photographic
image is now less
important than the artist as
mediator of the image.

include Gregory Crewdson, Sandy Skoglund, and Jeff Wall), it certainly has been a focus of recent work. Montreal artists Carlos and Jason Sanchez (b. 1976, and 1981), known as “The Sanchez Brothers,” create images that surpass photographic veracity. Acting as cinematographers and set designers, the artists use mise-en-scène to stage eerie tableaux that evoke a frisson of psychological uncertainty. *Abduction* was inspired by a real-life experience of one of the brothers’ classmates. Their work comments on the present dominance of melodramatic media, characterized by storylines of violence and foul play.

In many ways, the artist as creator of the photographic image is now less important than the artist as mediator of the image. Although artists John Sparagana, Peter Kennard and Cat Picton Philipps handle their subject matter very differently, they share the same objective: to comment on the overload of media culture. Acknowledging the photograph’s role in popular media as a driver for public perception and opinion, Londoners Peter Kennard (b. 1949) and Cat Picton Philipps (b. 1972) use appropriated material from European, American, and Middle Eastern newspapers to aggressively illustrate their polemical relationship with the American and British invasion of Iraq. The artists printed a large image of

President George W. Bush on a grid of layered *Houston Chronicle* newspapers for their site-specific installation *Cover Story*. Sections of the newsprint are blown out like gunshot wounds, revealing sub-layers of atrocious images of war from the Middle East printed atop Arabic text. The artists’ work presents a degraded memorial to war, subverting the original mediated images to find an anchor.

Like Kennard and Philipps, Chicago artist John Sparagana (b. 1958) distresses appropriated materials from visual culture. In the series *Sleeping Beauty*, Sparagana carefully fatigues torn sections of images from contemporary fashion magazines with the oils in his hands. This elegiac impulse is his attempt at a performative intervention with mass media, creating what he describes as “a kingdom that is slipping into an anesthetized state of consciousness.” The desire to distill visual culture is admittedly quixotic, yet Sparagana’s presentation of unhinged, fragile objects that are pinned into conversation with their unadulterated glamorous counterparts forces a juxtaposition that is distressing. Depending upon one’s approach, the beaten portions either memorialize or vilify the quest for beauty in fashion. The work also challenges the traditional definition of the “photograph” – nodding to the fair use value of photographic information.

right: Anne Katrine Senstad
I.A.L. 10.10.04
2004/2007, C-print
30 x 40 inches

below: Ken Fandell
Twisting Days and Nights, Dawns and Dusks, East and West, North and South, Above and Beyond Here and There
2007, Archival inkjet print
72.25 x 85.5 inches





above: Juliane Eirich
from the series *Haie Kula*
2006, Archival inkjet print
6.5 x 21.375 inches

left: Carlos & Jason Sanchez
Abduction
2004, Digital C-print
60 x 73 inches

Twenty-first century media is often characterized by the devaluation of privacy coupled with a heightened celebrity culture. 9/11 and consecutive acts of terrorism shook the formality of photojournalism, which finds its purpose displaced by the sweeping distribution of raw imagery created by everyday spectators. The result: no visual subject is inappropriate to present to the world. Millions of diaristic accounts of strangers' activities (that are often banal) are broadcast daily on consumer-driven media outlets such as YouTube and MySpace.

In artistic settings such as HCP, a trend of biographical and autobiographical work has emerged in recent years, mirroring the general public's voyeuristic hunger. British artist Matthew Noel-Tod (b. 1978) uses the mobile phone as a democratic tool of communication for his autobiographical narrative. Shot at crudely low resolution, Noel-Tod's feature-length video *Nausea* is a self-portrait of the artist over the course of one year. The work is a subversive form of the traditional documentary: the camera's eye, marked by the shakiness of the hand-held recording device, is filtered through tiers of distortion. Noel-Tod creates impressionistic layered stills, single-pixel color fields, and manipulated moving images to define

his personal landscape. His "journal of observations" is overlaid with disjointed syntax borrowed from Jean-Paul Sartre's novel *Nausea*, drawing a parallel between the existentialist text and Noel-Tod's nihilistic veracity. The original, melancholic score by Thomas Stone underlines Noel-Tod's nostalgic impulses to understand his identity and mortality.

Working collaboratively, real-life partners and parents Mary Magsamen and Stephan Hillerbrand (Houston, TX, b. 1969 and 1965) have a very different autobiographical vision. Employing household ingredients in a lighthearted manner to construct abstract, topographic photographs, installation, and video, the artists create a dialogue about an event that is universally understood yet privately experienced: the act of drinking coffee. An aquarium sets the stage for their mouths' musings; Hillerbrand blows milk into coffee and Magsamen blows coffee into milk. Whirling smoke-like patterns emerge, mixing with hair and lips. By largely isolating the mouth from the rest of the human form, Magsamen and Hillerbrand ask us to examine the orifice's sexual and predatory characteristics as it concurrently consumes and expels the ingredients. A video activates the photographs, and is set to the tune of watery gurgles

and child's music by Raffi. Their ejections attempt to keep up with the confusingly sped up and reversed score, signaling the artists' autobiographical longing for the relaxed, daily ritual of consuming coffee during early parenthood. Beneath their playfulness, Magsamen and Hillerbrand nod to a deeper meaning: the manner in which one engages in the everyday act of consuming coffee becomes a signifier of personal rituals and identity. Using repetitive dualities, the pair's work further questions gender-based politics.


Of late, much significance has been paid to identifying a "third wave" of feminist art. Though the cohesiveness of this movement (if it can even be called such) is most aptly classified by its fractured nature, nevertheless it is always interesting to examine the complex manner in which our culture constructs gender identity. New York-based artist Janet Biggs' (b. 1959) work directly focuses on the quest to maintain youth and beauty while attaining control and power. In her poetic video, Biggs features the decisive moment in which fourteen-year-old Deanna transitions from childhood to adulthood and achieves a professional athlete status in the video *Deanna (Behind the Vertical)*. Biggs gratifies Deanna's performance by inverting the image, allowing Deanna to appear to levitate effortlessly above the water's edge. Yet, in Deanna's quest to flawlessly execute difficult maneuvers, the video inevitably raises questions about the obsessive control of the female body.

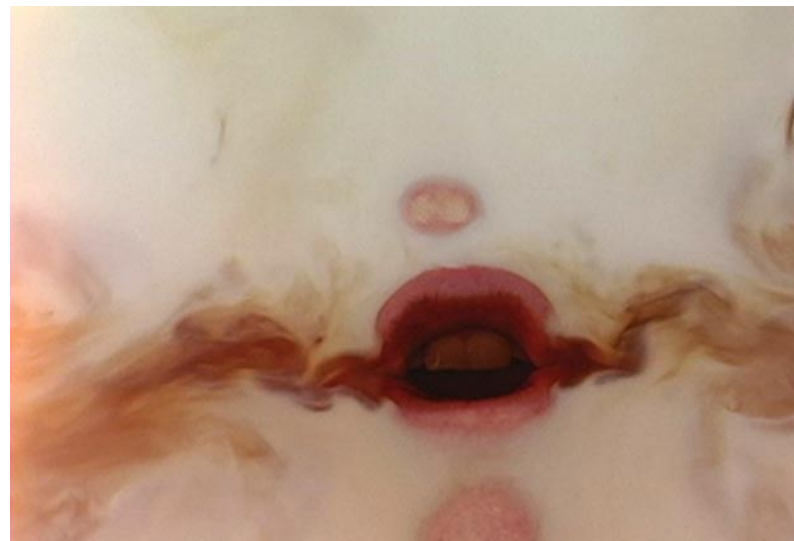
Oslo and NY artist Anne Senstad's (b. 1967) work signifies the nexus of art and photography. The artist's paean of affection for Josef Albers, James Turrell and Dan Flavin is evident in her wholly abstract images. Like Magasmen and Hillerbrand, Senstad borrows everyday objects. Using store-bought fluorescent light fixtures, she photographs the light they cast on surfaces. Senstad's controlled study of the perception of light, titled the *Pink Project*, examines the tonal properties of the color pink and its associative euphoric qualities. Through the process of mingling pink with other colors that vary in warmth and frequency, the behavioral and operational waves of the construction change to radiate new meanings. Though not digitally altered, Senstad's horizonless color fields challenge the traditional rules of photographic composition.

Leaving the minimalist ambient forms (as referenced by Senstad), Chicago artist Ken Fandell (b. 1971) combines system-based rules with intuitive methods to create large, quasi-organic

weather images that reflect an impossible amalgamation of day and night sky. Using highly sophisticated Photoshop techniques, Fandell builds his own environment, seaming together extracts of the atmosphere taken from multiple vantage points all over the world. Hung like tapestries, his site-specific work has a tangible, sincere immediacy. When approached from a straightforward, visual perspective, the work references the tradition of Italian illusionistic ceiling painting. Its heavenly elusive title, *Twisting Days and Nights, Dawns and Dusks, East and West, North and South, Above and Beyond, Here and There*, playfully contests our desire to predict, classify, and control our environments. Above all, the true mechanics of the system that Fandell creates successfully exemplifies an interlocking relationship between technology and art.

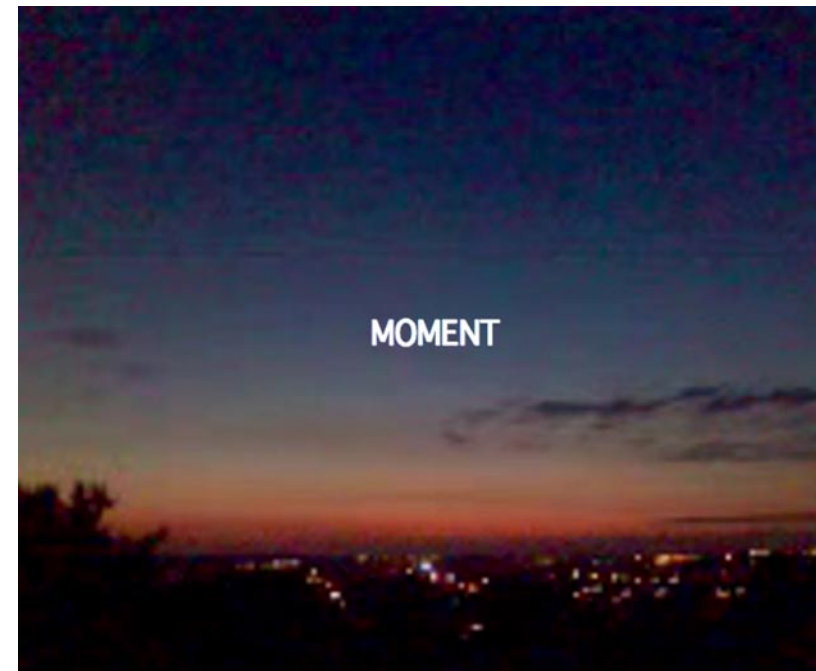
Despite all the recent trends, there is still a place for classical tradition in contemporary photography. Following the lineage of the Dusseldorf school created by Bernd and Hilla Becher, Munich artist Juliane Eirich (b. 1979) presents straightforward, compositions of austere plain architecture in her series *Hale Kula* (Hawaiian for "schools"). Her images are classic in form and small in size, beckoning intimate observation (unlike Andreas Gursky's and Candida Hoffer's recent work from the same lineage). Eirich records acts of surveillance, forming a visual dichotomy between an imagined paradise and the threat of harm. In daylight, the structures she photographs are sanctuaries for learning and enlightenment. Despite being rendered purposeless at night, they are illuminated to thwart vandalism. The panoptic view complements the artist's subject, allowing Eirich to present a vigilant perspective of schools that takes on a prison-like persona in the contrasting darkness.

The constellation of ideas presented in *Antennae* reflects a wide variety of approaches to the medium and to currently available lens-based technologies. It is an exciting and equally uncertain time in photography's development. In the past 25 years, the exponential curve of technological progress, as driven by market forces, spawned a new digital era. This era is influencing how we absorb information, and perhaps, how we look at our environments. The connecting threads in *Antennae* mainly lie in the sentiments expressed: of late, photography regularly emits melancholic undertones, signaling a splintering of shared identities and experiences. 



above left: Mary Magsamen & Stephan Hillerbrand
Coffee & Milk
2005, Archival inkjet prints
16 x 20 inches

above right: Matthew Noel-Tod
Nausea (Video still)
2005, Video captured with Sony Ericsson K700i mobile
phone 3gb footage, transferred to DV PAL
54 minutes





6-Pack from Mexico City

by Estela Reviño

Six artists from Mexico City converge through proximity in age and ideals to present a cohesive view of Mexico's current society. Philosophically, they propose independent ways of approaching ideas, concepts, and aesthetics to represent the endless political, historical and social unrest where modern societies unfold. The result is a critique of the reason of existence of any being in any society. In *6-Pack: from Mexico City*, the artists erase the clear lines between photographer and artist and the documentation of fiction and reality. Their social critique of Mexico and its memory rise to the forefront in their work, resulting in fugitive images of their environment that are internationally important.

Dante Busquets' project *Sateluco: from 10 to 20* concentrates on Mexico City's middle and upper middle class. The importance of this project relies on documenting a small social sector while, at the same time, acknowledging the artist and his class within the existent diversity of Mexico City. He visually and subjectively emphasizes the relationships he has with those who share an affectionate connection with him, while breaking away from and searching for himself in others. Documenting *Satelite* is as important as documenting any other city in Mexico or abroad, since it scrutinizes a certain social sector, unfolding it to its final consequence.

In *Artifice*, Benjamín Alcántara is interested in the power that mass media communications have on the construction of our identity. His images are playful and sarcastically staged portraits of people who embody those stereotypes, resulting in a fictional portrayal of reality based on absurd social ideals.

In the project *In Passing* ("De Paso") Víctor Mendiola provides an intimate view of Mexican subcultures, revealing the marginal semblance of a society. By becoming a participant in his characters' lives, Mendiola shares the groups' everyday experiences of surprise and expectancy without falling into the superficial, cliché illustrations so recurrent and common in this genre.

Omar Gamez offers us two possibilities of the limits of desire and sexuality in Mexico's gay culture: "*The Dark Book*" is a dark, anonymous and impartial possibility, where the importance of the experience is the relief of a sexual pulsation. "*Natura*", the other possibility, is a ritual of integration with the natural, a celebration of a sexual preference and a conscious decision to part with the current culturally imposed morality.


In *The Death of Narcissus*, Adrian Aguirre uses multiple architectural images from different vantage points in Mexico City and surrounding areas to create a fictitious puzzle of the urban world.



left: Dante Busquets
Canchas de Tenis de Izcalli del Bosque
From the series *Sateluco: Entre los 10 y los 20 (Sateluco: From 10-20)*
2005, Chromogenic print
19 x 23 inches

above: Benjamín Alcántara
Untitled
From the series *Artificio (Artifice)*
2003 - 2004, Archival digital print
47 x 47 inches

The construction of cities is a crystallization of an idea of stability that originally was the reflection of the celestial order. Mexico City struggles with the chaos of its present habitat, often serving as an antithesis to the idea of the modern city which provides protection to its citizens. Aguirre offers a spiritual order for the city environment that brings us close to the idea of utopia: the perfect place humans aspire to exist within throughout history.

Finally, in *Equally*, Enrique Greenwell engages in an introspective discourse on authorship and photographic authenticity. As a witness to the flow of daily life in Mexico, Greenwell appropriates public space to confront the omnipresent dilemmas of alienation and the search for identity. His scenes include objects, landscapes and representations of characters absorbed in destiny. The characters seek a sense of place within an evolving city, suggesting the paradox of predator and prey that are equally fused in their identities. 

6-Pack is a collective of 6 photographers based in Mexico City. The traveling exhibition '6-Pack: from Mexico City' was organized by HCP (exhibited Feb. 22 – Apr. 16, 2007) and will be on view at Blue Star Contemporary Art Center during fotoseptiembre from Sept. 6 – Oct. 22, 2007. This exhibition was made possible with support from Haynes and Boone, the Consulate of Mexico in Houston, Texas, Texas Commission on the Arts, and FONCA.

Seis artistas de la Ciudad de México convergen por la cercanía de edades e ideales para presentar una visión coherente de la sociedad Mexicana actual. Filosóficamente, nos proporcionan maneras independientes de abordar ideas, conceptos, y estéticas que representan la interminable problemática política, histórica y social donde se desenvuelven las sociedades modernas. El resultado es una crítica a la razón de existencia del propio ser de cualquier sociedad. En *6-Pack: de la Ciudad de México* los artistas borran la línea clara entre fotógrafo y artista y el documento de la ficción y de la realidad. La crítica social de México y su memoria emerge a la vanguardia de su trabajo, dando como resultado imágenes de su entorno de relevancia internacional.

En el proyecto *Sateluco: de los 10 a los 20* Dante Busquets se concentra en la clase media y media-alta de la ciudad de México. La importancia de este proyecto radica en la documentación de un pequeño sector social, reconociéndose él mismo y la clase a la que pertenece dentro de la diversidad que existe en la ciudad de México. Su intención es enfatizar de manera visual y subjetiva su relación con quienes mantiene un lazo afectivo, salir de sí mismo y buscarse entre otros. Documentar *Satélite* es tan importante como documentar cualquier otra ciudad dentro y fuera de México, ya que escudriña un cierto sector social, desdoblándolo hasta sus últimas consecuencias.

En *Artificio* Benjamín Alcántara se interesa en el poder que tienen los medios de comunicación masiva en la construcción de la identidad, sus imágenes son escenificaciones lúdicas y sarcásticas de personajes que encarnan esos estereotipos, dando por resultado una ficción de una realidad documentada de la construcción de ideales sociales absurdos.

En el proyecto *De Paso*, Víctor Mendiola proporciona una mirada íntima de las sub-culturas Mexicanas, revelándonos el semblante marginal de una sociedad. Al ser partícipe en la vida de sus personajes, Mendiola comparte las experiencias diarias de sorpresa y expectación sin caer en la ilustración cliché y superficial tan recurrente en este género.

Omar Gámez nos ofrece dos ventanas hacia los límites del deseo y la sexualidad en la cultura gay de México: *The Dark*



above: Victor Mendiola
Untitled
From the series *De Paso (In Passing)*
1993-2003, Archival digital print
24 x 36 inches

below: Omar Gámez
Untitled
From the series *Natura*
2005, Chromogenic print
32 x 32 inches

Book, una posibilidad oscura, imparcial y anónima, donde lo importante de la experiencia esta en el desahogo de una pulsión sexual. *Natura*, la otra posibilidad, es un ritual de integración con lo natural, la celebración de una preferencia sexual y el consciente despejo de una moral socialmente impuesta.

En *La Muerte de Narciso* **Adrián Aguirre** utiliza imágenes arquitectónicas de diferentes puntos de la Ciudad de México y sus alrededores para crear un rompecabezas ficticio del entorno urbano. La construcción de las ciudades es la cristalización de la idea de estabilidad que, originalmente sería el reflejo de un orden celestial. La Ciudad de México pugna contra el caos de su hábitat actual, convirtiéndose en la antítesis de la idea de la ciudad moderna que ofrece protección y límite a sus ciudadanos. Aguirre le ofrece un orden espiritual al entorno citadino que nos aproxima a la idea de utopía: el lugar perfecto en el que aspira a existir la humanidad a través de su historia.

Por último en *Igualmente*, **Enrique Greenwell** se involucra en un discurso introspectivo de autoría y autenticidad fotográfica. Como testigo del devenir cotidiano en México, Greenwell se apropia del espacio público para confrontar el omnipresente dilema del extravió y la búsqueda de la identidad. Sus escenas incluyen objetos, paisajes y representaciones de personajes absortos en el destino. Los personajes procuran el sentido de ubicación dentro de una ciudad en evolución, sugiriendo la paradoja de la presa y el cazador que igualmente fusionan su identidad.



above: Adrián Aguirre
Untitled
From the series
La Muerte de Narciso
(*The Death of Narcissus*)
2002, Archival digital print
45 x 78 inches

right: Enrique Greenwell
Untitled
From the series *Equally (Igualmente)*
1997-2006, Gelatin silver print
7 x 7 inches





Installation image courtesy of
International Center of Photography.
Images featured left to right:
Yannick Demmerle, from the series
Les Nuit Etranges, 2004;
Stephane Couturier, *Proctor Valley*,
San Diego, 2004;
Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla,
Amphibious (Login-Logout), 2005, (video).

This installation at the International Center of Photography was the second of ICP's planned triennial events to show contemporary photography and video around a major issue. It was an exhibition full of nooks and crannies and futuristic sculptural surfaces to create somewhat immersive spaces for much of the work.

Almost everything was large scale so the sense of, "Oh, I see..." about the environmental theme was immediate and constant. An impressive degree of skill and enormously hard work was evident in many of the pieces. A video called "Safari," by Catherine Chalmers, is an amazing, very close look at small creatures scurrying around their ecosystems. It turns out to have been shot in a manufactured aquarium in Chalmers' studio, but it feels wild and fantastic and sparked that, "Good grief, I've never seen anything like this before" reaction that is so much a part of photography's usefulness.

A little room with two black-and-white projected videos shows, on one wall, a group of soldiers preparing for something, listening intently to an officer describe what will presumably happen next, and on the other wall a distant video of tiny little people scurrying about in a desert scene with mountains in the background and little explosions happening all around. The feeling is of watching the lambs, which are very young, getting ready to venture out into that desert in Iraq or Afghanistan, although it turns out they're actually in training in California. It's frightening and sickening until the instant you know about the California part, and then it's suddenly almost without meaning. But the image survives and even today I get something about Iraq that really only came to me through a stand-in, or symbol, of the real thing.

The perspective of seeing nature as Other, or outside humans, is an old and honored one in photography, and some of the spectacles actually do seem to build on and supercede what has gone before. These photographers see the environment as either fabulously beautiful and interesting or as blighted and dying (or occasionally horrible *and* beautiful), generally because of human actions. In these works we learn some new things to worry about, including the concept that in some "near future" certain great natural places that are now national parks might be closed to visitors and essentially disappear, including from maps.

Exhibition Review

Ecotopia
International Center of Photography
September 14, 2006 – January 7, 2007

by David Crossley

ecotopia



Mary Mattingly
The New Mobility of Home
(The Nobility of Mobility), 2004
 © Mary Mattingly
 Courtesy Robert Mann Gallery, NY.

The perspective of seeing nature as Other, or outside humans, is an old and honored one in photography, and some of the spectacles actually do seem to build on and supercede what has gone before.

But only Mary Mattingly really plays with the idea of the human as an intrinsic part of nature, struggling to belong. The disturbing image of a single person looking away from the camera and into a vast and distant landscape that looks very difficult in survival terms, is made creepy and powerful by the great shaggy coat and other clothes the person is wearing, which are then described as a wearable home. The notion of the single individual wearing everything he or she possesses and striking out into the world to try to live not only suggests some awful disaster has taken place, but also gives that fear of nature and need to “conquer” it a troubling context that describes the plight we’re actually in.

Curiously, I haven’t been able to find any discussion of why the exhibition is called “Ecotopia,” a term that implies an environmental utopian wonderland and was the name of an earlier novel that

described and proposed such a place. The vision of the artists and photographers here is profoundly dystopian with rare exceptions, most especially a large and gorgeous landscape (*Mountain XIII*) by Clifford Ross that breaks technical ground in its use of a large new camera invented and built by Ross that claims to be “unparalleled in its ability to sharply render detail.” One of his images of Mount Sopris in Colorado is described as the “most technically perfect mural-size photograph ever.” *Mountain XIII* is pretty perfect, as is the subject matter, which it is refreshing to realize is still actually there in the world. 📷

(A short slide show with audio by one of the curators is at *The New York Times* website, available through <http://tinyurl.com/2hskyk>. For more information, visit www.icp.org.



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The Vargas Brothers of Arequipa

In memoriam Delford Vargas

by Fernando Castro

curated by Peter Yenne and Adelma Benadente

The Vargas Brothers – Carlos (1885-1979) and Miguel (1887-1976) – practiced the art of photography at a time when Pictorialism rendered it international. In their Art Deco home there were stacks of 1920s Pictorialist magazines like *Foto Magazine* (Buenos Aires), *Foto* (Barcelona), and 1930s issues of *Camera Craft* (San Francisco). They were not the only or the first photographers of Peru's southern city of Arequipa. Carlos Heldt, Emilio Díaz, Max T. Vargas, among others, preceded them. In fact, the Vargas Brothers learned the craft and business of photography from Max T. Vargas (no familial connection), the region's most successful studio photographer. Max T. also happened to be the father of Alberto Vargas, the creator of "The Vargas Girls" – the forties exemplars of American female beauty. Regrettably, Max T. left Arequipa and his photographic archives vanished. Fortunately, in 1912 the Vargas Brothers, his heirs in Arequipa, opened their luxurious establishment at the city's main square.

The "*Estudio de Arte Vargas Hnos*" was not only a successful commercial photographic studio, but also a cultural center where other artists, including painters, poets and musicians showed and/or performed their work. Their acme, the 1920s and 1930s, coincided with an economically, politically and intellectually seminal era for the region. But it was a time of turmoil as well. The landowning classes perpetrated a chilling level of violence against indigenous populations. Some of the violence was connected to a product that made Arequipa prosperous: wool. The female workers sorting wool the Vargas photographed in 1920 give us a small glimpse of the wool industry. Their portrait of Miguel Quispe in native attire (1927) is a piercing depiction of a leader who, under the nom-de-guerre, "El Inca," had commanded an insurrection in pursuit of civil rights and had militarily occupied an entire province in 1922.

Most of the works in the FotoFest exhibition *City of Night: The Vargas Brothers Studio, Arequipa, Peru 1912-1930*, fall within the period that Peruvian historians call the "Oncenio Leguista," so called because it covers the eleven-year period (1919-1930) of the presidency-turned-dictatorship of Augusto B. Leguía. In spite of the regime's partially sympathetic support of indigenous communities, in 1920 it passed the infamous *Ley de Conscripción Vial* that amounted to the unremunerated forced labor of indigenous peoples for the purpose of building roads. This fact is the subtext for pictures like the "Automobile Service of Don Celso Velarde" (1928) and "New Road from Arequipa to Vitor" (1928).

Arequipa's architecture and its surrounding landscape is often the backdrop for the Vargas' most compelling work: the nocturnes. The fascination for the night is epochal. To begin with, it was one of the preferred themes of Pictorialism worldwide and it belonged to a conglomerate of images shared by both modern and romantic art. In Peruvian poetry, the theme was ubiquitous during the first three decades of the twentieth century. The members of the literary group *Aquelarre*, who were part of the Vargas' milieu, revered the night. Two members of the group, Renato Morales de Rivera (1890-1931) and César Atahualpa Rodríguez, wrote the poems "Lunar Elegy" (1916) and "Nocturnal Fantasy" (1926), respectively. The Vargas night-time meanderings for the purpose of photographing became a sort of "happening" for their bohemian entourage.¹

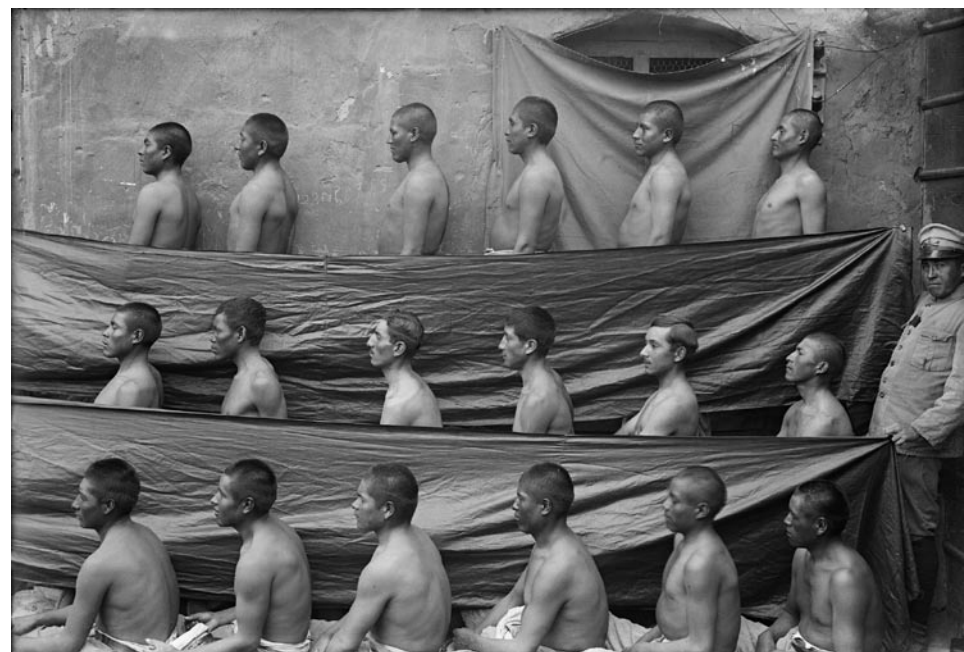
To produce the nocturnes, the Vargas took advantage of the bright lunar nights of the Andean highlands and the white-stone buildings of Arequipa. They used bonfires, magnesium flashes, and long

left: Carlos and Miguel Vargas, *Miguel Quispe "El Inca"*, Arequipa, Peru, c.1925, (printed by Peter Yenne)

right, top: Carlos and Miguel Vargas, *Helba Huará Dancing to Chopin's Funeral March*, Arequipa, Peru, c.1924, (printed by Peter Yenne, not in the *City of Night* exhibition)

right, bottom: Carlos and Miguel Vargas, *Isabel Sánchez Osorio*, Arequipa, Peru, c.1926, (printed by Peter Yenne)





THIS PAGE

top, left: Carlos and Miguel Vargas,
Panorama of the Vargas Bros. studio,
Arequipa, Peru, c.1926
(printed by Peter Yenne)

top, right: Carlos and Miguel Vargas,
Panorama of the gallery of the
Vargas Bros. Studio, Arequipa, Peru, c.1926
(printed by Peter Yenne)

left: Vargas Bros. Studio,
Recruits, Santa Marta Barracks, c. 1915
(printed by Peter Yenne)

below, left: Vargas Bros. Studio,
Women Sorting Wool, Arequipa, Peru, c. 1920
(printed by Peter Yenne)

NEXT PAGE

top: Carlos and Miguel Vargas,
Helba Huara as a Warrior Princess,
Arequipa, Peru, c.1924
(printed by Peter Yenne)


center: Manuel Jesús Glave, *Car and Driver,*
Don Celso Velarde's Taxi Service,
Puno, Peru, 1928
(printed by Peter Yenne, not in
the City of Night exhibition)

bottom: Carlos and Miguel Vargas,
Anatomy Lesson, Arequipa, Peru, c.1920
(printed by Peter Yenne)

exposures. The long exposure in the “Nocturne of La Cabezona’s corner” (1928) allowed them to depict themselves twice in the picture – a feat that must have surely bewildered their peers. While many nocturnes are celebrations of a bohemian lifestyle and some have a dark side (no pun intended), an important few comment on the advent of modernity. Such is the case of the “Nocturne of the old Tingo Bridge” (1928) where an automobile is crossing the bridge against a background of the snow-covered Andean peaks. The long exposure leaves stellar tracks in the sky and strategically placed sources of light delineate the arches of the bridge and what looks like a Model T Ford.

As astounding as the Vargas nocturnes are, the importance of their archives lies in the fact that their subject matter is more diverse than that of any other Peruvian photography studio at the time. Their approach at times is so relaxed that the viewer tends to forget that they were photographing with a large 5x7 camera (or larger). With a very modern, thoughtful and almost cinematic vision they depicted family homes, offices, factories, parades, churches, disasters, schools, hospitals, and of course, people.

The kind of portrait the Vargas truly excelled at was of women. The exquisite portrait of Isabel Sánchez Osorio (1926) owes as much to the beauty of the poser as to their technical skills and erotic gaze. Among the many outstanding Vargas portraits of women there are a handful of the renowned *cusqueña* dancer, Helba Huara (1900-1986). But the 1924 Vargas portraits of Helba are histrionic, not erotic – they let her body and facial expression project the persona she was acting out. Helba’s life is as fascinating as her portraits. Unhappily married at age fourteen, she had to endure mysterious illnesses throughout her lifetime. In spite of her physical frailty, she had a successful international career as a solo dancer. André Kertész photographed her in Paris on several occasions. In a poem titled “Helba Huara” French poet Jacques Prévert wrote “...suddenly silence explodes under your steps...” Her daughter, Elsa Henríquez, who later married French photographer Emile Savitry, was the model for Balthus’s painting *The Window*.² Helba’s husband, Gonzalo More, was the lover and leech of the Catalan writer Anaïs Nin at the same time Nin was also “doing” Henry Miller.⁴

The Vargas studio closed in 1958 and their locale is now a restaurant. Their large format cameras, their enlargers and their archives were moved to their home. After their demise, Delford Vargas, Miguel’s son with Carlos’ daughter, was for many years the sentinel of their legacy. He was the last photographer in the Vargas lineage. If you asked him who his father was, he would say, “I am the son of the Vargas brothers.” After Delford himself died, the Art Deco house was sold and the contents were split up among the surviving heirs. 

End Notes

1. Alejandro Peralta, member of the puneño avant-garde Orkopata group, wrote five poems about the night: “Nocturne of a suburb,” “Nocturne of the frogs,” “Nocturne of the void,” “Musical moon,” and “Insomniac glasses.” This list could be expanded even further, but it is worth adding one more poet to it: José Carlos Mariátegui. Mariátegui wrote a poem titled “Nocturne” (1915) and another one titled “Insomnia” (1916). These poems were signed with the nom de plume, Juan Croniqueur –an alias that reflects the powerful French influence on the Peruvian literary groups at this time. Ten years later, Mariátegui became the most influential political thinker of the Onecenio.
2. I am deeply indebted to Eduardo Pineda, a Peruvian curator currently at the Museum of the African Diaspora, San Francisco, for his invaluable research on Helba Huara and Gonzalo More. After I gave a lecture at the Mexican Museum in San Francisco titled “The Frayed Twine of Modernity: Peruvian Photography in the Southern Andes 1900-1930,” Pineda took it upon himself to pursue the leads about Huara I had hinted at. He even went to Paris and interviewed Elsa Henríquez, Helba Huara’s daughter. He is a true expert on Helba Huara.
3. One of André Kertész’s portraits of the couple in their frugal Paris apartment in the book *André Kertész in Paris* is labeled “Ohne titel, Paris in 1928.” Now we can title it “Helba Huara and Gonzalo More, Paris, 1928.” The reader may draw whatever conclusions he/she may about how the history of art is written.
4. In *The Wisdom of the Heart* (1941) Henry Miller wrote, “The real function of the dance is metamorphosis. One can dance to sorrow or to joy, one can even dance abstractly, as Helba Huara proved to the world.” Miller’s and Prévert’s writings are evidence of the force of Huara’s artistic presence in the Parisian artistic milieu.






left: Krista Leigh Steinke
"they wondered where the path would lead them,"
 2006, Digital C-Print
 28 x 36 inches

right: Krista Leigh Steinke
"the better to see you with", she said,"
 2006, Digital C-Print
 28 x 36 inches

below: Krista Leigh Steinke
"and this little one had none,"
 2006, Digital C-Print
 22 x 28 inches



reality and fiction. To achieve this, I combine traditional photography with digital manipulation and compositing. When photographing this series, I arranged the location and props and then invited the children to spontaneously interact in the staged environment. An uncanny relationship emerges between the candid gestures and expressions of the child and the elements that are premeditated. I often consider this work a collaboration between the models and myself or a documentation of an impromptu theatrical performance. In an attempt to remove the images further from reality, I merged the photographs with old super8 film stock which slightly alters the

colors and produces the blurred vignette around the photos. I grew up in the 70s and 80s, so the "home movie look" of super 8 film is reminiscent of my own childhood and creates the illusion of peering into an etheral window. This effect also introduces a voyeuristic quality to the work, commenting on the complex relationship that adults have with children and placing the question of innocence onto the viewer's lap. As we peer through this window, are we the big bad wolf, the girl, the woodsman, or grandma? Or can it be that we carry all of these characters inside of us at the same time? 

Placing a contemporary spin on familiar archetypal stories, *Backyards, BB Guns, and Nursery Rhymes* is a photographic series that uses references from children's literature as a point of departure to explore childhood and the peculiar world of "make-believe". Designed to teach morals and values, children's nursery rhymes, fables, and fairytales were created to help children confront emotional conflicts such as the internal struggle between right and wrong. Smashing apples on a porch, burying dolls in a sandbox, or running away from suburbia, the children in my photographs appear to be in the midst of some kind of mischief or trouble. As my title suggests, there are three main characters featured in my images: the setting, the props, and the child model. The role of the antagonist and the protagonist

fluctuates among these three, blurring the lines between good and evil. The images are intended to be read as visual metaphors that stir up psychological underpinnings of fear, anxiety, or desire. By creating tension between the familiar and comfortable and that which feels ironic, awkward, and unpredictable, I attempt to reveal hidden, uncomfortable truths about the human psyche. My aim is not to illustrate a specific story but to capture an unresolved moment from which viewers must imagine a beginning and end and rely on personal experience and individual ideologies to help interpret and attribute meaning to the work. I believe that "childhood" can be seen as a microcosm of the human experience and the play life of a child can poetically mirror society and culture.

In order to imitate the fantasy world of a child, my images, on both a formal and conceptual level, sit on the cusp between

Backyards, BB Guns, and Nursery Rhymes

photography and text by Krista Leigh Steinke





Nothing stays still very long in China today. In Beijing, artists often find themselves moving month by month, from one warehouse district to another. As soon as they move into under-developed areas of the city and create studios and art spaces, they find themselves having to move, displaced by higher priced development. Only the now famous Dashanzi Art District, which has its own international Art Festival, seems stable.

Created within the walls of a former East German weapons factory, Dashanzi is a huge rambling area of galleries, cafés and artist studios. There is photography everywhere, and prices are high. In the 798 gallery, a show of medium format, limited edition digital images of the Cultural Revolution had prints selling for \$60,000 apiece. There were a large number of red stickers in evidence.

When Chinese photographers and businessmen visiting FOTOFEST2006 asked FotoFest to create, or re-create, the FotoFest Meeting Place portfolio review in Beijing, the expectation was that it would happen perhaps in one to two years. But two months later they emailed that they had raised the necessary funds and were ready to start work on organizing the Meeting Place FotoFest Beijing 2006. It took place in October 2006, with over one thousand photographers registering from all over China. (Clint Willour from the Galveston Arts Center and Houston Center for Photography Exhibitions Committee, and Burt Finger from Photographs Do Not Bend in Dallas were among 30 participating international reviewers.)

In most areas, China is playing the global 'game' with seeming ease, even beginning to shape the rules of the game. But in photography, many good artists have yet to become part of the larger world. Despite many shows of Chinese photography in Europe, the U.S. and other parts of Asia, and despite two international festivals in China – Pingyao and Lianzhou, there are large numbers



left: Zeng Han
Soul Stealer – COSPLAY No. 4, 2006

top, right: Lu Nan
From the series *Four Seasons, Everyday life of Tibet Peasants*, 1996-2004

right: Han Lei
Profile of a Fat Boy, 2004



BY WENDY WATRISS

GLOBAL

PLAYING

below: Wang Ning-De, *Same Day No. 27*, 2006

right: Liu Yi-Qing, *Jam and Yuanyuan*,
From the series *White Fiction*, 2005



what is happening to their country: the huge internal migration of people; working/living conditions of factory workers in the new industries; the transformation of cities and replication of Western architectural styles; the despoliation of land and natural resources. The amount of very penetrating black and white documentary work is a stunning contrast to the joyous color posters that came out of China in the 1970s and 1980s.

In the work of many younger artists, one also sees a struggle of how to incorporate contemporary avant-garde art practices into work that gives *testimony* to the scale of upheaval in China, what it means, and the society it leaves behind. Much of the contemporary work on urban transformation is in large format color, and very ironic. There is a staged and color narrative photography about the lifestyles of young people, the anomie of modern youth, the search for identity and place. Much of this work reflects personal and psychological responses to China's own political and social history that is only now becoming part of public dialogue – histories that were previously concealed, stories such as those of Chinese “comfort women” used by the Japanese army during World War II as “sex slaves,” or the stories of Chinese orphans abandoned by their families.

With photography, there is a lot of experimentation with

performance and the technologies of moving media. Many young Chinese artists are exploring video and web-based work. In fact, the number of media festivals and events significantly outnumber those for photography per se.


To broaden visibility, open opportunity, and create further exchange with Chinese artists, FotoFest is dedicating its 12th International Biennial, FOTOFEST2008 to *CHINA* and a related theme, *TRANSFORMATIONS*.

In exhibits curated by FotoFest, the focus is on presenting work by Chinese photographers, primarily those living and working in mainland China. These exhibits will emphasize contemporary work, but there will also be historical exhibitions showing photography from little known archives, particularly from periods of time, such as the years between World War I and II, where the photography is little known.

Alongside the exhibitions, FotoFest plans to sponsor forums and talks with Chinese artists and curators and a symposium looking at the history and development of Chinese photography.

Because there has been such an important diaspora of Chinese people over the past 170 years, FotoFest is hoping to work with other spaces to present work by Chinese Americans, Chinese living

abroad and non-Chinese photographers who have done work in and about China.

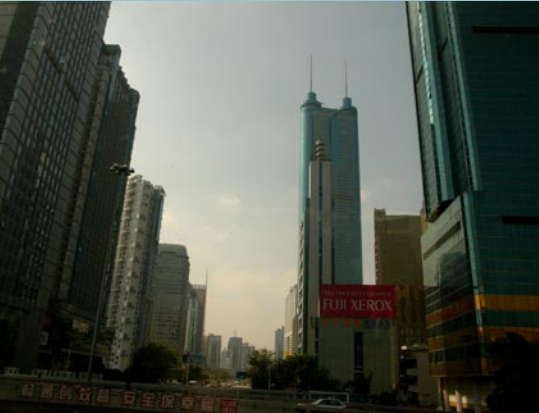
The *TRANSFORMATIONS* theme relates to what is happening in and to China, but it is more open-ended. It is not limited or restricted to China-related work. It can be interpreted however artists and curators would like to represent or ‘see’ it: related to youth and age, the urban environment, physical or psychological metamorphosis, passage of time, architecture, war, technological change, and history, to name just a few areas of possibility. Work submitted to FotoFest on this theme will also be available for viewing and possible selection on the FotoFest website. 

top, left: Li Lang, *Qinghai*, China,
From the series *Scape*, 2006

top, right: Li Lang, *Jiansu*, China,
From the series *Scape*, 2006

bottom: Wendy Watriss reviewing work
at FotoFest's Meeting Place, Beijing China
Courtesy of Fred Baldwin

Along the Pearl River from Hong Kong
to Guangzhou stretches an amazing
corridor of growth.
Courtesy of Fred Baldwin



Journalist Na Risong showing Lu Nan image
at Lianzhou International Photoweeek in China.
Courtesy of Fred Baldwin



Jimmy Chu, Wu Jialin, and Lei Gau
discussing ways to find better photo materials.
Courtesy of Fred Baldwin



Other FOTOFEST2008 Programs

International Meeting Place portfolio review program
Doubletree Hotel Downtown, March 7–20, 2008.

This program is open to all interested photographic artists.

The program has three sessions, and it is available 330+ artists. FotoFest does not pre-select the registrants. Registration opens with a blind lottery or selection of registration forms sent to FotoFest after the first information mailing was sent in spring 2007.

Information on the Meeting Place, the first mailing and the registration information is posted on the FotoFest website at www.fotofest.org. There is a period of six weeks to send your registration form to FotoFest before the first selection process is done July 9, 2007.

Rupture

photography and text by Nathan Baker




left: Nathan Baker
Ice Cream
2006, C-Print
74 x 60 inches

below: Nathan Baker
T-Bone
2006, Piezo Print
32 x 40 inches



This body of work, titled *Rupture*, aims to portray the situation that arises when things break down; when the routine of life pauses and the door is opened for basic, unmediated humanity to step in and replace the automata of contemporary rigor.¹ Such moments are inflections on how we function on a most basic level, without the societal and psychological influences that we have grown to rely upon. Separated into two distinct groups, the photographs provide a shift for the viewer between directly experiencing this moment and a voyeuristic perspective that allows the viewer the spectacle of watching another in the thrall of this experience.

The pictures sans people focus on the confrontational aspect of a common accident. Objects that are “ready to hand” (defined as things, often taken for granted, that exist as a standing reserve for use) have taken on a new role – one that beckons us to disregard our context of comfort and react innately to the loss of this ready-to-handedness. It’s almost as though the objects we have put into servitude have decided to form a coup d’état against our normality and force us to realize the futility in contriving our lives in this manner.

The next group of photographs depicts scenarios in which people are in this static state – after being presented with a stimulus, yet before a conscious reaction. This moment depicts when the things we have taken for granted step up and remind us of our humanity. The pictures present a perfectly eerie stillness – one that pervades throughout the scenario and represents the shattering of one’s assumed identity in relation to their context. 

Nathan Baker is a graduate of Columbia College Chicago. His series “Rupture” can be viewed at Houston Center for Photography in the 25th Anniversary Membership Exhibition, juried by Anne Wilkes Tucker (June 8 – July 8, 2007), or at www.nathanbakerphotography.com.

1. This project references the “Present at Hand” theory introduced by Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time*, trans. by Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

Collaborations IV is an annual program organized by the Houston Center for Photography that unites students from Houston area high schools. The ambition of the program is to educate and inspire young photographers. Collaborations was founded in 2003 as a challenge to students from two diverse high schools, Jack Yates High School and The Kinkaid School, to come together through a common interest – photography. This year’s program has grown to include five additional schools: Lamar High School, Bellaire High School, St. John’s School, High School for the Performing and Visual Arts, and Jersey Village High School. by Rachel Hewlett

COLLABORATIONS IV



above: Chantal Fernandez
Taxi
2006, Gelatin silver print
7.5 x 11 inches

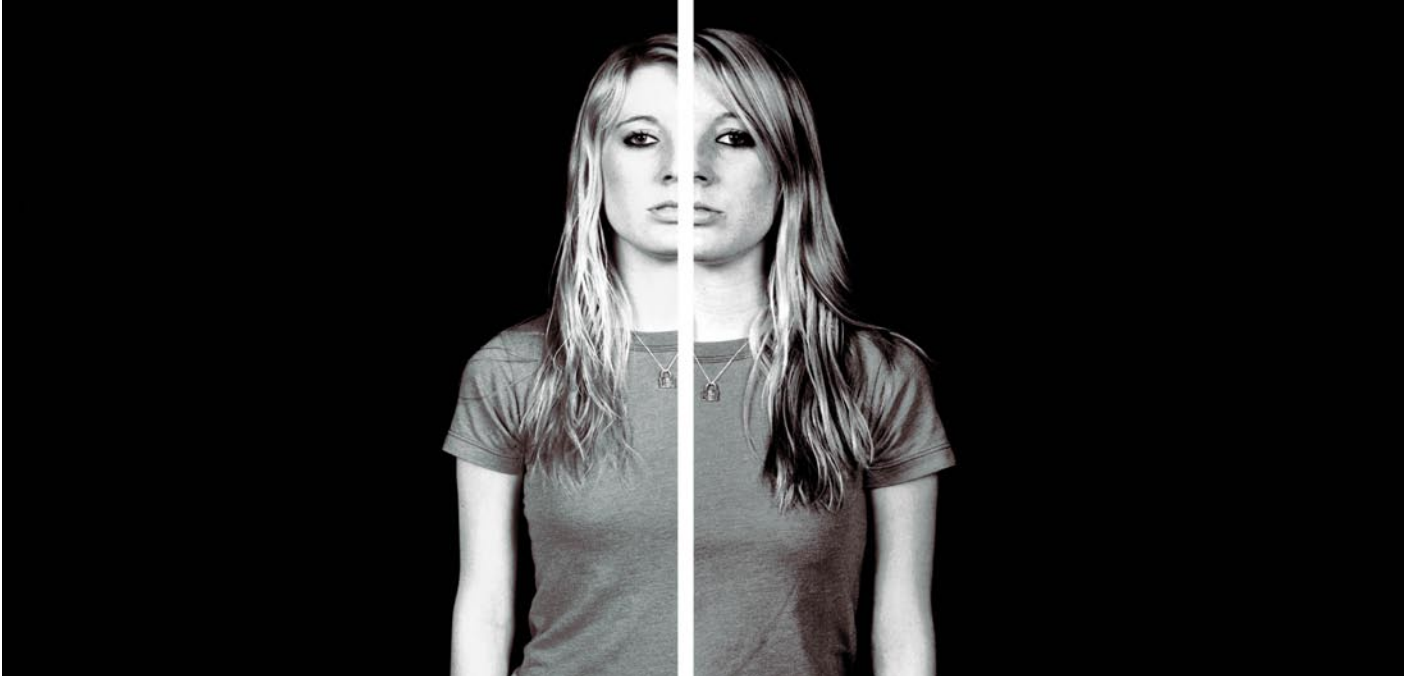
left: Alyssa Barrineau
Untitled
2007, Gelatin silver print
6.25 x 7.25 inches



Participating schools are represented in *Collaborations IV* by up to four students chosen by the photography teachers at each school. These students meet biweekly under my direction to collectively create and execute an exhibition of their photographic work. Students are encouraged to interact during these meetings by critiquing each others’ work and collaboratively making decisions about issues related to the program and the exhibition.

During the first meeting, the students participate in a roundtable brainstorming session about the focus of the exhibition. The students then vote on a theme that they find fits their style. Each student interprets the chosen theme to create a cohesive body of work and to tie everyone’s work together for the exhibition. This year, the students chose “Identity/Façade”, a topic that emphasizes the portrait and architectural subjects prominent in the students’ work.

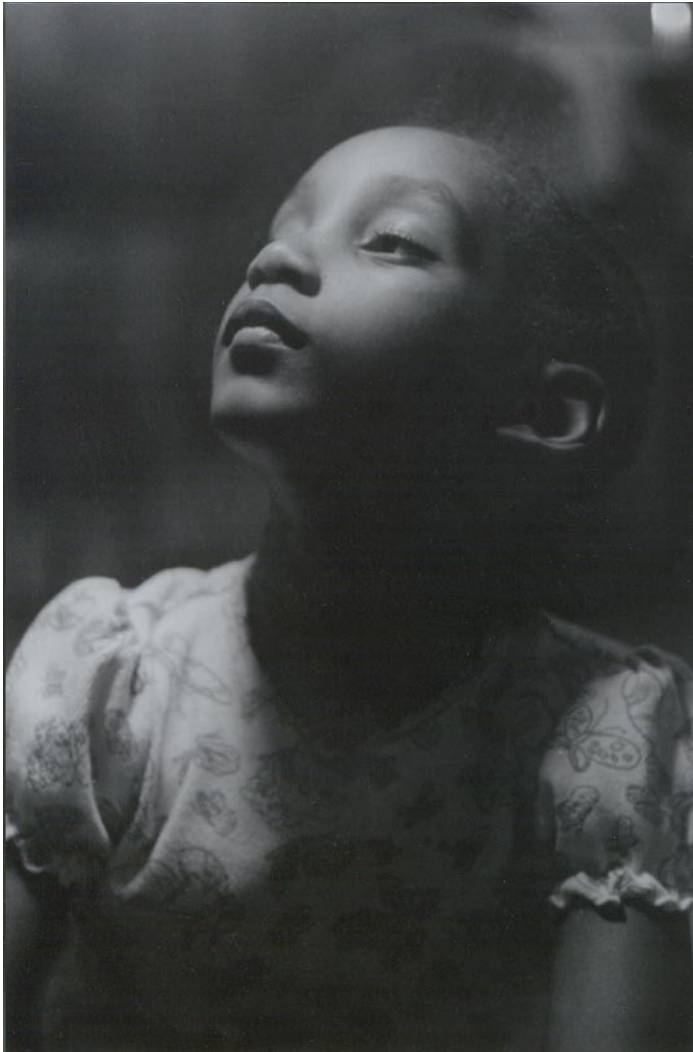
In addition to producing work to be exhibited at HCP from April 28 – June 3, 2007, students work together on various gallery and curatorial aspects of the exhibition. After breaking into smaller groups, behind-the-scenes tasks such as framing, installing, curating and writing press releases are distributed among the students. Field trips and other activities are planned to supplement the students’ knowledge about this large-scale project. Each group also meets with a professional in their field for advice and guidance in order to fulfill their group assignment. The *Collaborations* program culminates in a group exhibition that the students help install. The artists are also encouraged to participate in the opening reception for the exhibition and, occasionally, artist talks. 



Lizzie Musker
Double Emily
2007, Gelatin silver print

below: Christal Bobb
Get my good side
2007, Gelatin silver print
9 x 7 inches

below, left: Cruz Crawford
Jefe
2007, C-Print
11 x 14 inches



COLLABORATIONS IV (continued)



above, left: Celeste Pizzini
Illumination
2007, C-print
16 in x 20 inches



above, right: Caitlin Brown
Baby Up Above
2006, Archival inkjet print
11.5 x 9 inches

SPIN 3 TXT Me L8r

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FRIDAY AUGUST 24, 8-11 PM

Entrance Fee:
\$6 for Aurora and HCP members, students, and seniors
\$10 non-members

Music by sound artist Stephen Orsak
Open bar

Co-curated by Aurora Picture Show and HCP, *Txt Me L8r* explores the potential for distributed creativity through the use of cell phone technology. Participants will use their camera phones to complete assignments text messaged to them and upload their results to a photosharing site which will be video projected as slideshows in HCP's galleries during the exhibition. Combining crowdsourcing with networked communication, *Txt Me L8r* invites artists and the general public alike to adapt new technologies for spontaneous, geographically-dispersed collaboration. Have a cell phone with a camera and want to participate? On July 9th, we'll send out an e-news with further instructions. The first 24 respondents are guaranteed to be in the exhibition!

Sign up to receive HCP e-news! Email info@hconline.org.

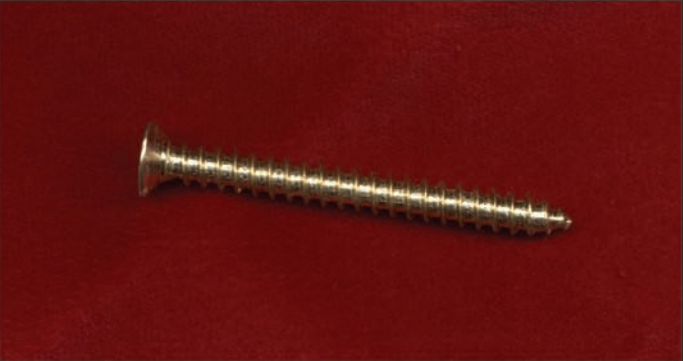


Kyungmi Shin
Response to the question, "What does sleep look like?" Motorola L6

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Book Review

"We've gotta help somebody, we gotta give a portion of what you know, of what you have, to the other fellow. This world is fixed so your brother is tied to you- can't go to heaven without him, got to carry him along with you. You can't love God until you love your fellow man. I don't see no color, I love everybody. If I got an enemy, I don't know it."

— Ivory "Pie" Steward



Patsy Cravens

Leavin' a Testimony – Portraits from Rural Texas

University of Texas Press, 2006

303 pps.

\$34.95

review by Ebony Porter

As a guide paddles you down a river, illuminating the ways the water breathes and undulates, pointing out its dangers and tranquilities, its silent bends and sudden curves, she isn't able to tell you what you'll experience on that river, nor what you'll take with you. Patsy Cravens is that guide, taking us into an area of south central rural Texas, into the simple, yet vibrant land of Colorado County—so named for its location on the Colorado River. She guides the reader towards both foreign and familiar ground through her photographic portraits, her delicate observations, the life stories of her subjects and her narratives—which are insightful responses to these people and places.

Entry into a small rural Texas town may come with its predictable small town characters, but you'll be amazed at what is inside the memories of these people, as well as the ways they choose to remember.

Weaving the memories of her own childhood in the same county with those of her subjects, Cravens creates a synthesis between the curiosities of an outsider, and an insider's inquisitiveness to some things foreign. These testimonies are a catalogue of visual storytelling, an emotional platform that ebbs and flows between revelations of disturbing race relations, the strengths of church and faith, the hardships of rural farming—of love, leaving and loss, and of course, the libraries of family histories.

These stories entertain the spirit, and are narrated by the rolling dialect of the land. The testimonies are powerful, moving, animated, and feel for

example, as if you're sitting with Lillie Williams on her front porch, a woman who Cravens calls both "feisty" and "sassy."

As she relays her love of work outside, Lillie Williams remembers, "In the spring of the year, when the cotton was comin' up, why, that time I'd get to bust middles. Take a mule or a horse and put him to the plow, and go down that middle and bust that middle. And after a while, and always like that, it'd come a-poppin' open, the bolls. It'd be just like you see popcorn. Open, open, open—then my time had done come. Oooohh – I'd be so glad when I'd see that cotton openin' up, I wouldn't know what to do."

And her portrait is that of a sassy woman (see the image on the front cover), hand on her hip, a clothes pin keeping her cotton dress pinned, her mouth curled into an inviting grin, the lines on her face telling of years outside, working in the unforgiving sun. Her eyes sparkle into Cravens' lens. But while this book is the culmination of others' testimonies, it is a great leap of introspection on Cravens' part. We all learn something about ourselves from another's story and from these stories, Cravens has learned much. To keep the dialogues rolling, she delivers anecdotes from her life on the land, sharp tongued observations and facts that tie all testimonies together. She opens a dialogue into "the system of silence, secrecy, and white privilege," which she felt as a child in this segregated community. She was often hushed and silenced when asking good questions, and only later, learned of the community's complicated, prejudiced climate.

From the curiosities kept as a young girl Cravens has found the courage to re-enter her community with wonderment and exploration, to go into the homes of people who had been quite separate from her in the past. She has somewhat miraculously bridged all the gaps and has made these people her dear friends. Her patience and diligence, her tape recorder and camera, leave a brilliant volume of testimony, both through oral history and through her beautiful photographic documentation. Without the openness and trust established between Cravens and her friends, without their resiliency and a dialogue to set a few things straight, these testimonies would still remain silent.

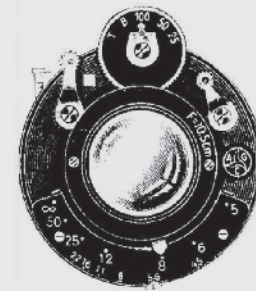
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