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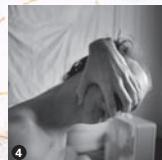
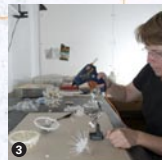
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Contributors

1. **Chas Bowie** is a Portland-based writer specializing in photography criticism. Formerly the arts editor of the *Portland Mercury*, Bowie recently launched *That's a Negative* (thatsanegative.com), where he writes at length about contemporary and historic photography.

2. **Ragan Cole-Cunningham** is Director of Exhibitions and Education at the Contemporary Art Center of Virginia. She is the National Art Education Association's 2008 Southeastern Art Educator of the Year/Museum Division and Virginia Art Education Association's 2006 Art Educator of the Year/Museum Division.

3. **Leigh Anne Langwell** was born in Victorville, CA and earned her MFA from the University of NM in 1998. She has been awarded the John D. Phelan Award for California-born and the Santa Prize for Photography. Langwell has also worked as a medical photographer, technical editor and graphic artist, and adjunct lecturer at the University of NM.

4. **Will Michels** received an architectural degree from Pratt Institute in 1991. Later, Michels was the project architect in charge of restoring the Battleship TEXAS. Over the last 15 years, he has photographed a variety of subjects and is currently working on a series of salted paper print portraits. Michels resides in Houston and works at the Museum of Fine Arts, teaching young aspiring photographers.

5. Dr. **David L. Jacobs** is a Professor of Art at the University of Houston. His recent novel, *Green Gator Blues*, is a woefully linear narrative.

6. **Toby Kamps** is the Senior Curator at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston.

7. A widely published sociologist, **Tracy Xavia Karner** is the Director of the Interdisciplinary Visual Studies Program and an Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Houston. Karner writes primarily on photography, visual methodologies and social construction of the self.

8. **Risa Puleo** is the Assistant Curator of American and Contemporary Art at the Blanton Museum of Art, University of Texas at Austin.

9. **Ariane Roesch** received her BFA from the University of Houston in 2007. Her work has recently been exhibited at tmp.deluxe in Berlin, Germany and WallSpace Gallery in Seattle, WA. Roesch recently co-curated the exhibition, *Mechanical Perception*, with UH Alumni from the Photography/Digital Media Program. www.arianeroesch.com/

10. **Anne Wilkes Tucker** is the Gus and Lyndall Wortham Curator of Photography at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

11. **Madeline Yale** is the Executive Director & Curator at Houston Center for Photography.

12. **Nancy Zastudil** is the Program Manager for the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Center for the Arts at the University of Houston. Zastudil moonlights as a curator and is co-founder of Slab, an exhibition method that collaboratively facilitates projects and events.



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Copy Editor
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Antonio Manega, Gazer Design

Printing
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For details about membership or advertising, contact Houston Center for Photography:

Houston Center for Photography
1441 West Alabama, Houston, Texas 77006
Telephone: 713.529.4755
Fax: 713.529.9248
E-mail: info@hcponline.org

Visit us online: www.hcponline.org

Executive Director and Curator
Madeline Yale

Executive Assistant
Leigh Boone

Education Coordinator
Rachel Hewlett

Program Coordinator
Jason Dibley

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cover:
Ariane Roesch (Houston, TX), 2008



In this Issue



New discussions do not come from squeezing art into old labels and definitions. Rather, artists shift and blend these definitions, creating new disciplines and new venues for thought. Many artists call their work photography, although they don't use a camera. Technology and tools like Photoshop feed interdisciplinary proliferation

as more and more artists recognize that they are no longer constrained by a single medium. While the idea and practice of blending disciplines is hardly new, the word "interdisciplinary" has recently been given a lot of cache. It is unclear whether academics and critics need a new hero, or just a new way of looking at art.

This issue features articles that look at these interdisciplinary approaches to photography and the photographic studio process. Using photography as a foundation or means of presentation, the artists presented in this issue use performance, sculpture, and science to create innovative and compelling art that breaks out of conventional labels and forces us to think. In *Photographic Knowing* by Tracy Xavia Karner she addresses the question of interdisciplinary as a philosophy uniquely embraced by the University of Houston Visual Studies program. Ragan Cole-Cunningham reflects and explores ideas about the terming of interdisciplinary work through examples of several artists in her essay, *Interdisciplinary Approaches to Photography: Ramblings on Interpretation and Self-Reflexive Practices*. The artist portfolios by Leigh Anne Langwell and Ariane Roesch exemplify the idea of crossing disciplines to create a new way of working with photography.

Leigh Anne Langwell makes small sculptures and then uses them to create haunting large-scale photograms and installations that engulf a space with oversized references to body and biology. Langwell's background as a medical photographer has obviously impacted the way she looks at her art and process – her images look as though they could be of cells or sperm and eggs, but instead, they are images of sculptures made in the studio and manipulated through the photogram.

Ariane Roesch reverses Langwell's process by taking images and photographs and transforming them into sculptural objects. Roesch reappropriates an image from media such as 1950's advertising, literally cutting and sewing until she has physically rebuilt the image into something visually and conceptually new. Her reinterpretation is playful, colorful, and bursting with beautiful textures. Roesch created new pieces specifically for this issue of *SPOT*; you can cut out and frame them for yourself.

In refusing to box art into a single discipline, we invite the historical and contemporary context of multiple genres into the interpretation and analysis of a work. Hopefully the distinction and terming of this work as interdisciplinary will expand our dialogue and appreciation of the work, allowing viewers to discuss not only the photographic qualities, but also incorporating ideas about other genres appropriate to the work. The term, interdisciplinary, may or may not be a new hero, but it is definitely one way to tackle the expanding dimensions of the art world.

Mary Magsamen

Guest Editor, Fall/Winter 2008-9 *SPOT*

Mary Magsamen is a visual artist working collaboratively with her husband Stephan Hillerbrand on photography and video projects. Mary is the Curator at the Aurora Picture Show and she also teaches part-time at the University of Houston.

WHAT'S HAPPENING at HCP!

HCP is more than just a place about photography, it is an institution where inspiration is found, connections are made, and ideas are exchanged. Since the last issue of *SPOT*, HCP has had the great fortune to celebrate with new friends and old. Here are a few recent events, along with new ones to mark your calendars.

► Last issue, I shared with you news about John Cleary's passing. In honor of his legacy of fostering photographic connoisseurship in the Houston area, we named our new library the **John Cleary Library** on June 28th, 2008. Friends, family, and community joined the occasion, including John's sister **Ann Cleary Maroney**, son **Russell Andrews**, John Cleary Gallery director **Catherine Couturier**, and friends **Mary Virginia Swanson**, **John Parsley**, **Marty Carden**, and **Burt Nelson**.



Crowd Gathers for John Cleary Library Naming Ceremony
Photo by Rachel Hewlett



John Cleary Library Naming Ceremony
Photo by Rachel Hewlett



Jason Dibley, Program Coordinator



SPIN4: Lens Libs, Friday, July 25, 2008, 8pm-11pm
Photo by Maria Ciepel

► In keeping with our tradition of revelry, local visual and performing art space **DiverseWorks** partnered with us for our fourth annual **SPIN** friend-raiser on July 25th, 2008. Fifteen area writers, critics, and artists created satirical text for giant "**Lens Libs**" games that were transcribed from floor to ceiling at HCP. The result was an interactive visual spoof on sponsor **Penguin Group's Mad Libs**. Party goers were invited to fill in text blanks with photographs.

In attendance were HCP's longtime Program Coordinator

Ebony Porter and her partner Dustin Smith, who introduced us to their new baby, Iris. Ebony is now a full-time mom but keeps in touch - she serves on HCP's Publications and Exhibitions committees. **Jason Dibley**, a photographer who most recently managed the darkroom at University of North Texas in Denton, joined us this summer as her successor. Jason has quickly become an invaluable member of the staff!



Ebony Porter, Dustin Smith, and Iris Smith at SPIN4: Lens Libs
Photo by Sopheavy Tan



Marilyn Davenport (Houston, TX)
Three Standing, Three Fallen, 2008
Taken November 2008 in East Houston

► Shortly after HCP began the new fiscal year, **Hurricane Ike** hit the Gulf Coast. The photographic community helped us observe the impact by participating in our online exhibition entitled **Picturing Ike**; a look at what happened before, during, and after the storm.

right: Tom Baril, *Lisanthus*, 1998
Photogravure, A/P, Courtesy of the artist



left: O. Rufus Lovett (Longview, TX)
Pauline, 1989
Inkjet Print
15 x 15 inches
Courtesy of the artist



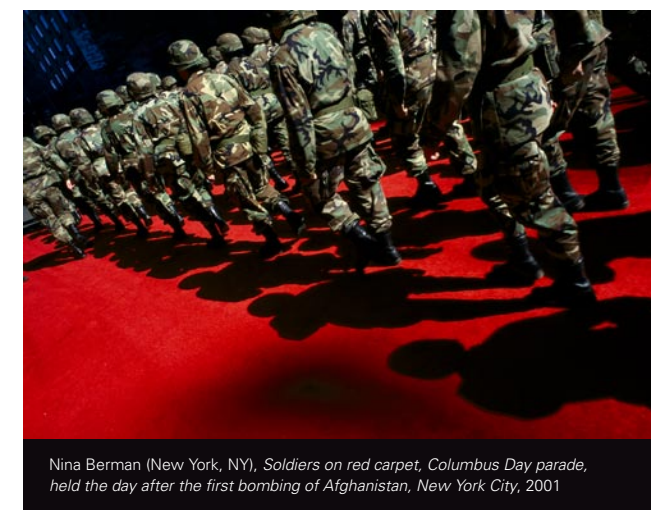
► HCP hosts its **2009 Print Auction** event on Thursday, **February 12th** at the **Junior League of Houston**. **Rick Wester** will auction off works by noteworthy photographers including **Alex Webb**, **William Clift**, **Julie Blackmon**, **Keith Carter**, **Cara Barer**, **Robb Kendrick**, and **Tom Baril**. Support HCP's worthy endeavors by attending the event and please bid generously! Following the auction, please join us on Friday, **February 27th** from 6-8pm for the opening of **Beauty Knows No Pain**, featuring the work of distinguished Texas photographer O. Rufus Lovett and his classic images of the **Kilgore Rangerettes** drill team alongside emerging artist Leah DeVun's portraits of young Houstonians dressed as Hannah Montana. The exhibition officially begins at the **Museum of Fine Arts, Houston** at 6pm on **February 26th** with the screening of **Elliott Erwitt's** 1972 documentary about the Rangerettes from which our exhibition adopts its title, ensued by a high kicking performance by the Rangerettes themselves!

► Twice a year, HCP participates as a non-profit partner in the **Bayou City Arts Festival**, an event conducted by local arts organization **Art Colony**. Over 7,000 kids visited the Creative Zone during the weekend of October 18th; many children made cyanotypes with HCP staff and volunteers.




Bayou City Arts Festival, Downtown
Photo by Rachel Hewlett

► Concurrent with *Beauty Knows No Pain*, HCP will host the exhibition **Unite and Untie: Contemporary Conflict in the Middle East**. Participating artist **Nina Berman** will introduce and screen the feature-length documentary "Purple Hearts: Back from Iraq" (2005, written by Berman and directed by Roel van Broekhoven) at HCP on Saturday, **March 14th** at 7:30pm. In collaboration with Houston's **Aurora Picture Show**, Ms. Berman will speak to HCP and Aurora audiences on Sunday, **March 15th** at Aurora's monthly Salon.



Nina Berman (New York, NY), *Soldiers on red carpet, Columbus Day parade, held the day after the first bombing of Afghanistan, New York City, 2001*

► Later this year, please join us for the Fellowship and Membership exhibitions. Artists and photographers: don't miss **HCP's Membership Call for Entries** deadline - we are accepting submissions from February 1st to April 10th! **Katherine Ware**, Curator of Photography at the New Mexico Museum of Art in Santa Fe will jury the exhibition. Please see the advertisement on page 21 of this issue. **Special thanks to HCP Members** for sharing your successes with us. Send your news on exhibitions, publications, awards, and press coverage to info@hconline.org and we'll post it on our **Members' Bulletin Board!**

There are many newsworthy bits that didn't make it to this list. However, you can always find out what's happening at HCP on our web site (www.hconline.org). We invite you to sign up for e-newsletters as well; to join please send an email to info@hconline.org. 

All the best to you for 2009!
Madeline Yale, HCP Executive Director & Curator

Interdisciplinary Approaches to Photography:

Ramblings on Interpretation and Self-Reflexive Practices

by Ragan Cole-Cunningham

*We might say that Photography is unclassifiable. Then I wondered what the source of this disorder might be.*¹
— Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*

What is an *interdisciplinary* approach and how were these approaches visible and viable as to raise new issues in the realm of photography, specifically? In contemporary works we find photographs that emulate paintings, albeit historic or modern, and hyper-realistic paintings depicted from photographs that are entirely intended to look like photographs, as a way of creating a *trop l'oiel* effect for the viewer. Certainly in the new millennium there are many combinations that employ Internet-based media and video technology, as well as performative and documentary means. I looked up *interdisciplinary* online and found numerous definitions which only provided more food for thought.

In Mansilla and Gardner's *Assessing Interdisciplinary Work at the Frontier. An Empirical Exploration of 'Symptoms of Quality'*, the authors define interdisciplinary study as, "Work that integrates knowledge and modes of thinking from two or more disciplines. Such work embraces the goal of advancing understanding (e.g., explain phenomena, craft solutions, raise new questions) in ways that would have not been possible through single disciplinary means."²

This broad understanding in conjunction with photography brought me to think of a lecture provided by author Francette Pacteau where she discussed an image of Sigmund Freud in his study. The easily recognizable photograph of Freud was compositionally beautiful and while the photographer who took the picture was a coined "documentary photographer" and not "artist," Pacteau discussed the image in correlation to Roland Barthes' concepts of the *studium* and *punctum* from his notable work *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. As Pacteau brought light to various attributes of psychoanalytic theory, Barthes and the formalities of the photo itself the image, while fascinating, found various layers of meaning through her interpretation and the questions developed through the groups dynamic in relation to the photograph. Does this voiced collective denote an interdisciplinary approach strictly through Pacteau's presentation and participatory viewership versus the photographer's process or intent? Was the intersection of photography, psychoanalysis and operative semiotics not an interdisciplinary approach to photography, though solely based on the analysis and conversation around the topic, and not necessarily provided by the photograph itself? I am sure that is not what the editors of *SPOT* had in mind, though interpretation undoubtedly becomes the most integral and free-based interdisciplinary approach to art in general.

I digress; rather, I believe I am supposed to write on contemporary artists who are using Avant Garde techniques as interdisciplinary approaches to photography. That is, those who use new practices and concepts that push the boundaries of photographic material to reveal cunning and baffling surprises for a novice viewer while impressing those photographers and worldly art folks who have tracked changes in the medium for decades.

While flipping through pages of *Art in America*, *Art Papers* and *Art Forum*, one notices a particular bent on more self-reflexive and documented performance-based photography as interdisciplinary trope. As the topic of "interdisciplinary approaches," especially in contemporary art making, becomes a huge subject to tackle, I will focus on self-reflexive properties amongst photographers of more recent renown and how these reflexive identities are revealed through interdisciplinary technique.

Suntek Chung, an artist out of Richmond, Virginia, lends interesting dialog to the idea of interdisciplinary approach, not only through technical prowess, but conceptual thought. An interdisciplinarian, if you will, Chung began his career as a sculptor, securing degrees from Virginia Commonwealth University, Yale and participating in the prestigious Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. While initially intrigued by power tools and metal, Chung turned to making performative pieces as the sculptural attributes lent a theatrical vibe. From here the artist investigated photography as a way of documenting his happenings in conjunction with his sculptures, and today he interweaves all of these disciplines within his art-making process.

In his work *Suburban Fury*, Chung creates a staged set complete with a glimpse of vinyl-sided house, a lawn with gridded plugs of grass, and features himself as a Rambo-type lawn man prepared to do battle. Commando-style positioning of the main male character, who hoists lawn mower, rakes, leaf

following page:
Suntek Chung (Richmond, VA)
Suburban Fury, 2005
Cibachrome print on aluminum
40 x 57 inches
Courtesy of the artist and
Samson Projects Gallery (Boston, MA)



blower and weed whacker above his head, provides an absurdist portrayal to those who both relish and loathe the responsibility of homeownership. Through the depiction of an everyday occurrence and heightened by theatrical positioning and sculptural arrangement, Chung provides a humorous spin on the idea of Man versus Nature.

The photo itself looks as if it jumped out of the pages of a Lowe's® lawn and garden brochure. Slick, pop colors attract the eye while the costume worn by Chung brings us back to some sort of bizarre 1950s scene. Black tube socks secured by garters, long cigarette filter, fishing cap and high-belted waistline might remind us of a grandfather out tackling the yard, but Chung confuses this by constructing a character and scene all too contemporary. The shiftiness of time becomes an interesting point of reflection along with the serious Samurai-like positioning of the character in combination with the mundane occurrence of something such as a dandelion.

Artist Robin Rhode develops self-reflexive interdisciplinary approaches through performance, drawing, film and photography. The artist, a South African who spends time at home and in Berlin, and who is getting a lot of attention recently, uses photography to document various wall-drawn happenings. In *Monument to the Chairman*, 2008, the artist provides 25 photographs which document a chess game taking shape. Initially two pawns, black and white respectively, flank the ends of a table drawn directly on the wall with charcoal. Rhode stages the moves of the players until the table is stacked with drawn pawns, leaving us with a kind of architectural cityscape.

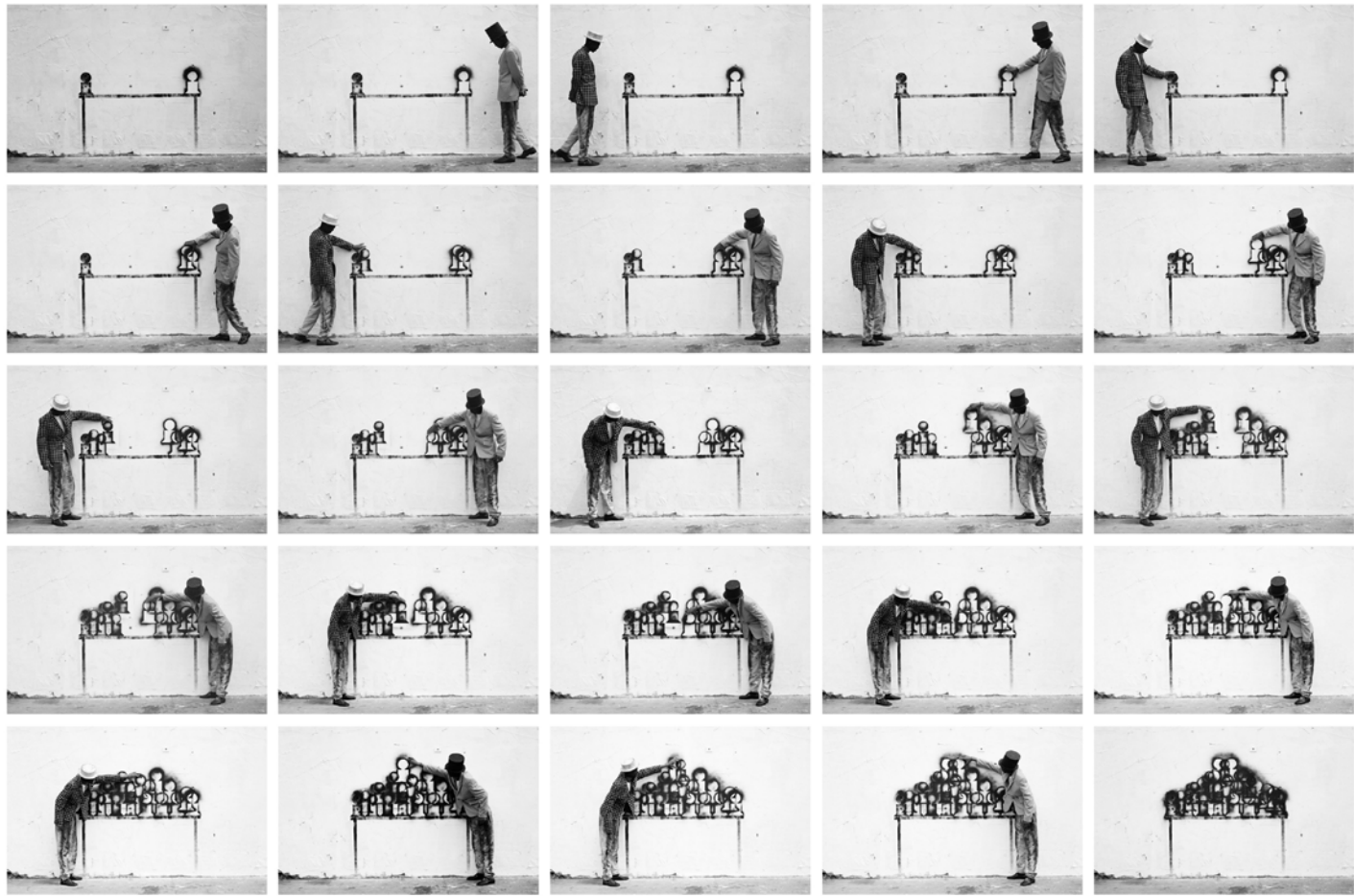
Each player wears either a black or white top hat and we imagine a vagabond-type meandering from one side of the table to the next plotting their course of action.

Rhode's conceptual score is one that reveals power, structure and mimesis. The shape of the pawn mimics Russian architecture, more specifically churches from the early 1900's which point to Rhode's interest in Russian Constructivism in relation to social discourse and the Supremacists in terms of geometry and mathematics.

Described by some as one of the most prolific photographers in the UK, Julia Fullerton-Batten creates small-scale model environments where life-size female, teenage models hover and interact. Fullerton-Batten essentially has two careers – one as a fashion and advertising photographer and the other as fine artist. She began her career as an assistant for *Vogue* and in 2000 started her professional career by shooting for big ad agencies.

In her "Teenage Stories" series from 2005 the artist showcases various scenes depicting teenage girls in dreamlike scenarios constructed with miniature buildings, cars, people, etc. This series raises issues of adolescent anxiety of feeling simultaneously in and out of place. Some of her skinny teens are comfortable in their spot, while others are met with catastrophe.

More recent work such as *Cafeteria Girls (standing)*, 2007 and *Mirror*, 2008 leave the miniature models behind, opting rather for cold, sterile, "real" spaces. *Cafeteria Girls* depicts a series of young girls standing at cafeteria lunch tables. Approximately 15 characters adorned in the same outfit, holding the same handbag and all coifed with blonde wigs, look up to paintings of white men, which



right:
Julia Fullerton-Batten (London, UK)
Bike Accident, 2005
C-type print
Courtesy of the artist

below:
Julia Fullerton-Batten (London, UK)
Mirror, 2008
C-type print
Courtesy of the artist

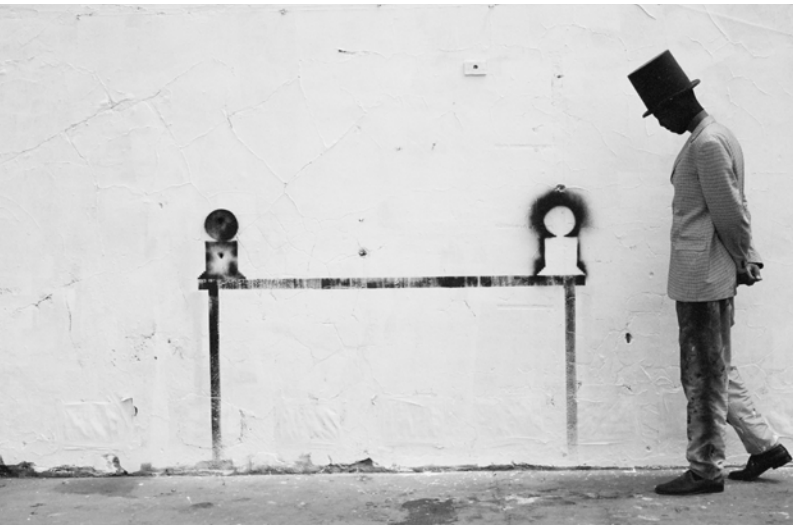
previous page, top:
Robin Rhode (South Africa)
Monument to the Chairman, 2008
25 digital pigment prints
mounted on 4-ply board
18 x 27.75 inches (each panel)
Courtesy of the artist,
Perry Rubenstein Gallery (New York, NY),
and White Cube (London, UK)

previous page, bottom:
Robin Rhode (South Africa)
Monument to the Chairman, 2008 (detail)
25 digital pigment prints
mounted on 4-ply board
18 x 27.75 inches (each panel)
Courtesy of the artist,
Perry Rubenstein Gallery (New York, NY),
and White Cube (London, UK)




may possibly be former Deans or Presidents of a proverbial school. The image certainly raises ideas of male patriarchal structures, conformity and control. Highly organized and sharp, there is no warmth in the photo and one suspects the wrath of bureaucratic school leaders who churn out robots.

In *Mirror*, Fullerton-Batten toys with minimalist composition and space as her main female figure, situated in a hallway, jumps in the air with her head down. A mirror is placed at an angle on the ground reflecting another interior area across the hall. The curved hallway, body positioning of the subject and stark environment are perplexing. The image is crisp and clear with very few shadows. One imagines this space an area for a photo shoot or an emptied space of wealth and prestige, but what about the woman? She confuses us by being the only living thing in the space. What about the mirror? It merely reflects back what we might already



perceive as existing on the other side. These problematized areas of Fullerton-Batten's works are what make them interesting. The lighting is artificial as if from a stage set, not a true space and her characters are, despite their physical activities, lifeless.

These self-reflexive approaches to photography become just one example of interdisciplinary approach. Photographers use an array of devices and combinations to alter their objects, from toying with a character's costume or a staged set design, to utilizing Photoshop and Quark software programs, to painting directly on the photograph or printing on various surfaces. Contemporary photographers continually experiment to find ways to alter images and present something new and fresh. We can cite many examples of these *interdisciplinary* approaches to photography dependent on how we define the term and either based on technique or process, or how the viewer or critic, interprets or projects on to the object.

Regardless of approach, nowadays photographers seem to find dialogic interest in and through indexical analysis and creative scenario. This juxtaposed questioning plays similarly to realistic and abstract applications within painting and linear and abstract thought in regard to art in general. One hopes, as with most artists, that photographers investigate a subject and determine the best conclusions as to how to specify an idea or set of ideas for a viewer. The approach taken is simply a means to an end. 

1 Barthes, Roland, trans. Richard Howard, 1981. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. New York, Hill and Wang.
2 Harvey, L., 2004-5, *Analytic Quality Glossary*, *Quality Research International*, <http://www.qualityresearchinternational.com/glossary/>.





Tim Lee's *Untitled* (Alexander Rodchenko, 1928), 2008


by Toby Kamps

Tim Lee (Vancouver, BC)
Untitled (Alexander Rodchenko, 1928), 2008
 4 C-prints
 6 x 9 inches each image
 Edition of 5 + 2 AP
 Courtesy of Cohan & Leslie (New York, NY),
 Lisson Gallery (London, UK), Johnen & Schöttle (Cologne, Germany)

Tim Lee describes himself as a performance artist whose audience is the camera. Based in Vancouver, British Columbia – home to conceptually oriented photographers like Rodney Graham, Jeff Wall, and Roy Arden, whom he counts as mentors and friends – Lee poses and performs for humorous, deadpan still and video images layered with historical allusions and cross-cultural references. He uses rudimentary trick-photography and video editing techniques to cast himself as hockey great Bobby Orr scoring a legendary goal for the New York Islanders, to accompany himself on all three parts of an intricate Beastie Boys tag-team rap, and enable his untrained hands to play pianist Glenn Gould's intricate "Goldberg Variations." Full of formal and conceptual inversions and art- and social-history savvy, Lee's works use equal doses of absurdity and logic to build on the artist's not-quite-mainstream Korean-Canadian identity as well as the legacies of aesthetic and athletic pioneers as diverse as rocker Neil Young, comedian Steve Martin, pitcher Ted Williams, and artist Dan Graham.

In *Untitled (Alexander Rodchenko, 1928), 2008*, a new work comprised of a grid of four black-and-white photographs of hands holding an antique Leica I camera aloft, Lee draws on a typically diverse set of interests – in this case the work of early twentieth-century avant-garde artist Alexander Rodchenko (1891–1956) and contemporary camera advertisement imagery. Rodchenko, a Russian Constructivist sculptor, photographer, and graphic designer active during the Bolshevik Revolution, used the new, portable 35mm format to enliven and estrange familiar subjects – from portraiture to street scenes – by shooting them from dramatic angles. Lee has long been fascinated by Rodchenko's creative restlessness and his acrobatic, askance views, and believes the Russian artist created a new, "unproper" perspective – a nonrational, nonlinear outlook on the world. To further the connection to Rodchenko's dynamic handheld photography, Lee asks that the images – framed in a revolutionary red – be periodically rotated ninety degrees counterclockwise on the wall. Lee also says the work was inspired by what he regards as an obvious yet ignored "sleight of hand" – that the images of cameras in their advertisements are obviously not taken with the camera being advertised. To reconcile these disparate stories, Lee rigged a Rube-Goldbergian system of tilted mirrors to allow him to use the Leica to take a picture of itself. The resulting images, culled from hundreds made with this device, are both honest self-portraits of a camera by the same camera and self-aware allusions to Rodchenko.

In the digital age, making a work in which one of the earliest 35mm cameras meditates on itself seems like a nostalgic act. The four photographs of the uplifted Leica, enlarged from small portions of negatives for a grainy, high-contrast immediacy, seem like they could be taken from an agitprop poster advertising Russian director Dziga Vertov's legendary 1929 experimental film *The Man with a Movie Camera*, which reveled in film's ability to evoke the energy of modern life. However, Lee downplays any sentimental readings of the work, preferring to discuss formal aspects like the inverting effects of his mirrors and the "acrobatic" quality of the images, which show all angles of the camera.

Even if Lee does not, Oskar Barnack, inventor of the Leica, would certainly see something celebratory in these four images. After all, it was Barnack's camera, ancestor to the millions of digital snapshooters in pockets around the world, that forever changed the ways we document ourselves and our worlds. That Lee uses a camera as the subject of a playful and self-reflexive study of machine, eye, and art is yet more proof of photography's indispensability as an aesthetic and intellectual tool. 

Angilee Wilkerson

No Mountains, No Waterfalls

January 17- February 7, 2009



Released Pigment Print 30x30

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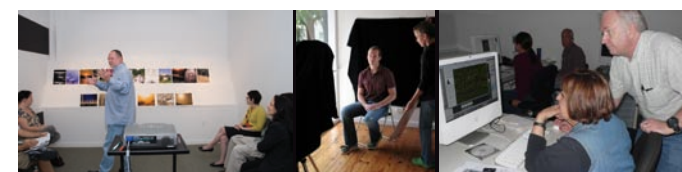
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VIEWFINDER:

New Images from Texas Artists

by Risa Puleo

For this third installment of the *New Talent in Texas* series, presented jointly by the Houston Center for Photography and FotoFest, fellow curator Arturo Palacios and I selected a group of fifteen artists from across Texas. Photography and its inherent properties (light, lens, image) is the primary medium of some of the artists, while others use photography as a tool, picking up a camera when it suits the conceptual and material needs of their ideas. In this preview of *Viewfinder: New Images from Texas Artists*, these artists present their most recent photography-based work. Their images tell us as much about the medium of photography – its role in our lives and the possibilities it presents for art-making – as they tell us about the people, objects and moments they represent.



BEN AQUA, AUSTIN

Planet Earth has been destroyed by an underground cult of cyberterrorists and corrupt world figures! We may not be there yet, but in *Business Deals in the New Future*, Ben Aqua anticipates how old habits will continue after the dust from the apocalypse has settled. Staged in the wreckage of a collapsed building, Aqua's vision of the future draws from the visual syntax of editorial fashion photography, where the illogical contrivances of set, costume and behind-the-scenes art direction coalesce into a fiction presented as reality. In Aqua's other series, titled after each photograph's sitter, he reexamines the genre of portraiture, claiming that the environments one constructs and the accoutrements with which one surrounds oneself create a greater understanding of a person and his or her image.



ZEQUE PEÑA, EL PASO

The *Sound Killers* depicts characters that Zeque Peña developed for and were inspired by the band Zechs Marquise. Peña's heavily stylized characters are visual mashups of the suspenseful narratives of graphic novels and Italian neorealist. Costume and setting were improvised to evoke the tenor of the music. While the narrative of the album is ambiguous, Peña's images establish the characters in a cinema of sound.

BEAU COMEAUX, DALLAS

A sense of foreboding and psychological tension lingers in Beau Comeaux's photographs. Perspective, focus, light, and color are manipulated beyond our everyday experience, transforming real buildings and environments into stage props for a fantasy of the artist's construction.



2. Ben Aqua (Austin)
Business Deal, 2007/2008
From the series
Business Deals in the New Future
Archival inkjet print
20 x 30 inches
Courtesy of the artist

3. Zeque Peña (El Paso)
Marfretor, 2007
From the series
Sound Killers
LightJet print
36 x 24 inches
Courtesy of the artist

4. Beau Comeaux (Dallas)
Institution, 2007
Lambda Print
43 x 49 inches
Courtesy of the artist
and Marty Walker Gallery,
(Dallas, TX)

5. Piotr Chizinski (Lubbock)
USA/TX/LBK/High Proletariat/76, 2008
From the series
The Living Room Scale Project
LightJet print
30 x 40 inches
Courtesy of the artist

6. Buster Graybill (Huntsville)
Get'n Groceries (#0627), 2007
From the series
Get'n Groceries (again)
LightJet print
42 x 56 inches
Courtesy of the artist

7. Rebecca Carter (Dallas)
My Own Backyard, 2007
From the series
Landing on the Moon
Inkjet Print from video still
40 x 60 inches
Courtesy of the artist

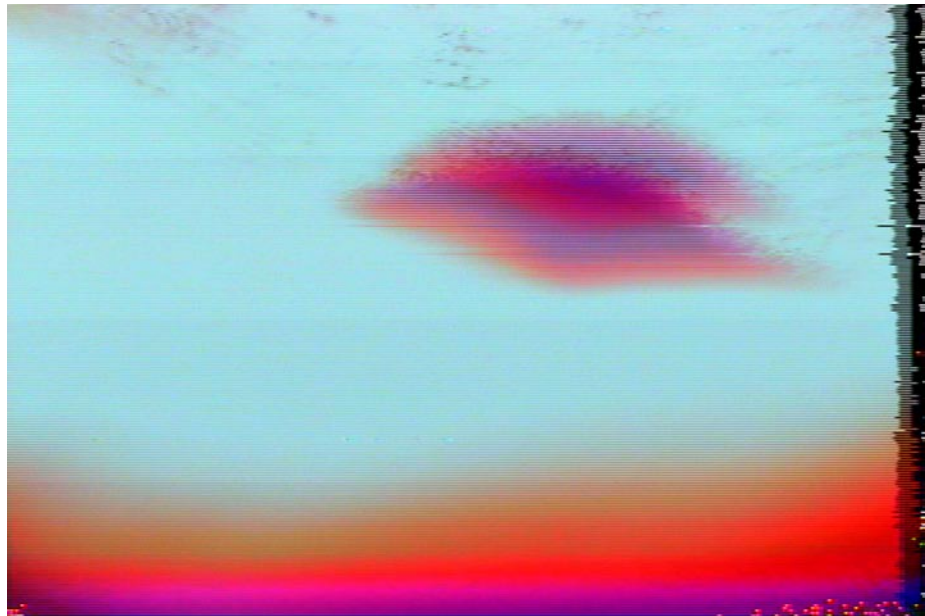
PIOTR CHIZINSKI, LUBBOCK

The Living Room Scale Project is a photographic investigation of the American class system. Operating on the assumption that class in the United States is determined not by birth or education as understood historically, but by consumer purchasing power, Piotr Chizinski examines the two largest classes in American society – the proletariat or working class and the middle class. For Chizinski, living rooms function as showrooms for our purchases. A composite panoramic image taken from the vantage point of the front door offers a glimpse into a environments constructed by a purchasers that reveal their interests and lifestyles. Using his own pseudo-scientific methodology, Chizinski attaches positive or negative values to the objects found in a participant's living room to evaluate his or her socio-economic status as well as Chizinski's own class biases.



REBECCA CARTER, DALLAS

For her project *My Own Backyard*, Rebecca S. Carter expands the possibilities for herself as an image maker by introducing other subjectivities into the process. After outfitting her cat with a "cat-cam," a camera attached via a special suit to the cat's body, Carter's feline participant is free to roam about the backyard. Glitches in transmission between cat, camera and receiver create images with psychedelic colors and pixilated abstractions. Carter's images offer glimpse of another world hidden in our everyday surroundings, which are revealed in a new and unexpected way.



BUSTER GRAYBILL, HUNTSVILLE

Using a motion-activated infrared surveillance camera that records his actions in minute intervals, Buster Graybill documents himself skinning a deer in his driveway in this examination of the intersections of urban and rural culture, high and low art forms, and the socioeconomics that separate these many worlds. Although Graybill primarily constructs large-scale sculptures and installations, for this project he chose new photography-based technology because it is used with increasing frequency in stores and city streets as a means of preventing crime as well as a means of scouting prey while deer hunting. The urban and rural uses of the surveillance camera collide in *Get'n Groceries*, a project that shifts between photography and documentation of Graybill performing his rural roots in front of the camera.

8. Anna Krachey (Austin)
BW Horsehead, 2008
From the series *Land/Landscape*
Gelatin Silver Print
14 x 11 inches
Courtesy of the artist

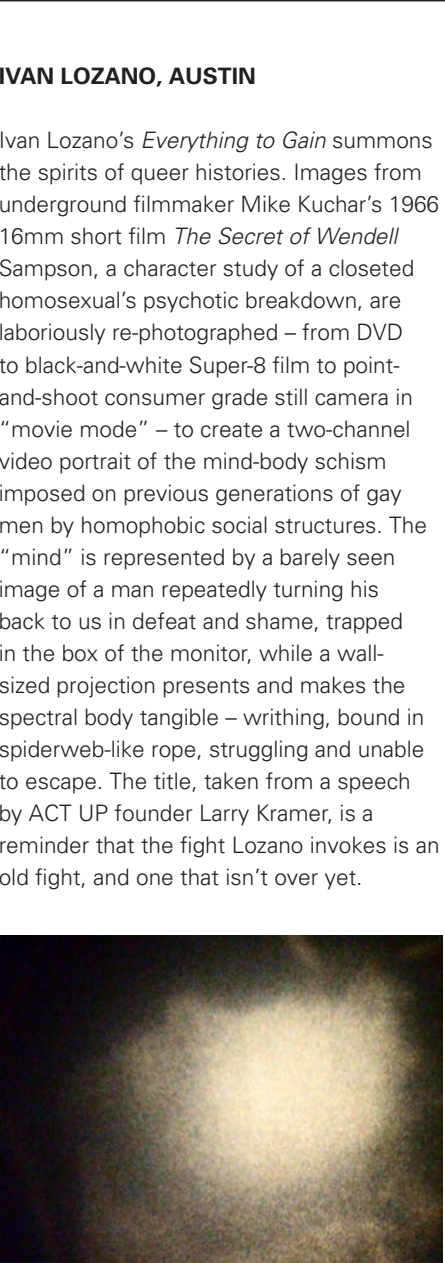


8

ANNA KRACHEY, AUSTIN

For the past few years, Anna Krachey has been exploring the ways in which the digital age has changed photography. In an era when picture phones and computer-based slideshow programs eliminate the need to spend time and money, making a print is an investment of material value. Krachey often turns to eBay, a repository for the sale of amateur photographs, for inspiration. In the exhibition is a display of photographs of photographs and photographs of objects Krachey purchased on eBay related to horses and horse memorabilia. Comparing the valuation systems of the horsing industry with that of the online auction site, Krachey reinvests material value into objects once so hard-won and prized – blue ribbons and trophies that have been sold to the highest bidder – by rephotographing and reprinting them.

9. Ivan Lozano (Austin)
Everything to Gain, 2008
Video projection, TV set, DVDs
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

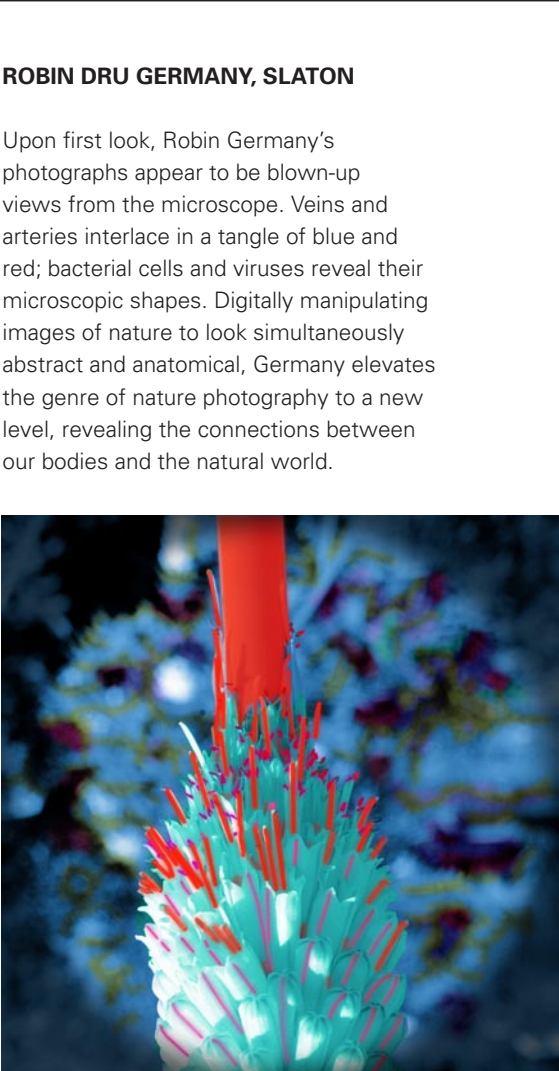


9

IVAN LOZANO, AUSTIN

Ivan Lozano’s *Everything to Gain* summons the spirits of queer histories. Images from underground filmmaker Mike Kuchar’s 1966 16mm short film *The Secret of Wendell Sampson*, a character study of a closeted homosexual’s psychotic breakdown, are laboriously re-photographed – from DVD to black-and-white Super-8 film to point-and-shoot consumer grade still camera in “movie mode” – to create a two-channel video portrait of the mind-body schism imposed on previous generations of gay men by homophobic social structures. The “mind” is represented by a barely seen image of a man repeatedly turning his back to us in defeat and shame, trapped in the box of the monitor, while a wall-sized projection presents and makes the spectral body tangible – writhing, bound in spiderweb-like rope, struggling and unable to escape. The title, taken from a speech by ACT UP founder Larry Kramer, is a reminder that the fight Lozano invokes is an old fight, and one that isn’t over yet.

10. Robin Dru Germany (Slaton)
Blue Necrosis, 2007
From the series *A Difficult Nature*
Archival Inkjet Print
24 x 24 inches
Courtesy of the artist



10

ROBIN DRU GERMANY, SLATON

Upon first look, Robin Germany’s photographs appear to be blown-up views from the microscope. Veins and arteries interlace in a tangle of blue and red; bacterial cells and viruses reveal their microscopic shapes. Digitally manipulating images of nature to look simultaneously abstract and anatomical, Germany elevates the genre of nature photography to a new level, revealing the connections between our bodies and the natural world.

11. Justin Parr (San Antonio)
Still images from *Portrait of the Artist as a City*, 2008
Video made from 9000 digital still images
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

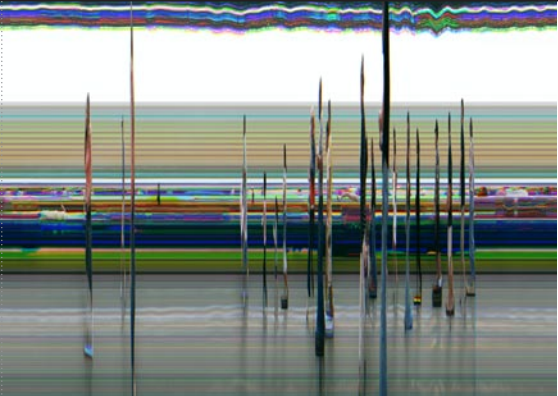


11

JUSTIN PARR, SAN ANTONIO

Using a digital camera, Justin Parr shoots a sequence of images of places and people in his hometown of San Antonio as fast as his finger can release the shutter. He then compiles these still images into a video sequence. Because of the inability of the digital camera to save images at the rate that Parr takes them, the film moves backwards and forwards in time. Parr composes a soundtrack, which is not synched to the video, using the same method. At times, the soundtrack poetically matches the scenes captured to tell a compelling tale of a place through the eyes of one its inhabitants.

12. Ansen Seale (San Antonio)
Attenuation, 2007
Lucia Digital Print
36 x 50 inches
Courtesy of De Santos Gallery (Houston)

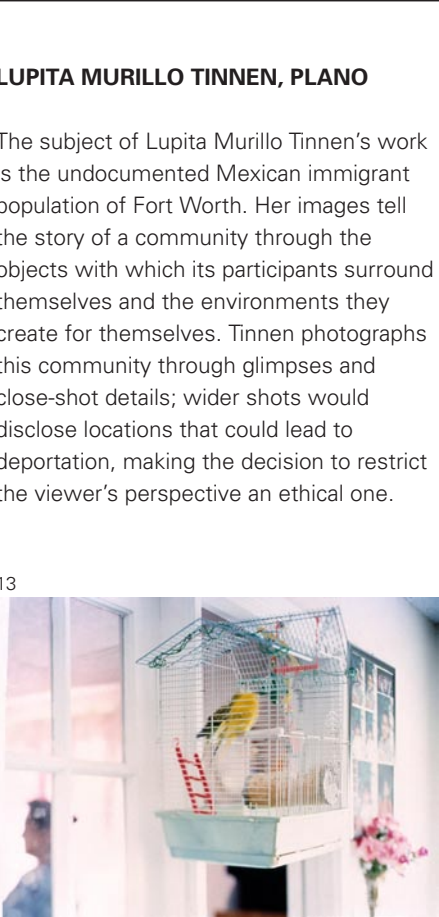


12

ANSEN SEALE, SAN ANTONIO

Ansen Seale does not manipulate his photographs. A digital slitscan camera of his invention captures the passing of time in a single exposure. A scene framed within this camera is imaged over an extended period of time, with objects inserting themselves into the data stream at different speeds and directions. Still objects are blurred, while moving bodies are rendered clearly. Instead of capturing an image of reality as we see it, Seale and his camera record a hidden reality in which vectors of movement and the passage of time are visible.

13. Lupita Murillo Tinnen (Fort Worth)
Pajaritos, 2004
From the series *Looking Inward*
C-print, 16 x 20 inches
Courtesy of the artist



13

LUPITA MURILLO TINNEN, PLANO

The subject of Lupita Murillo Tinnen’s work is the undocumented Mexican immigrant population of Fort Worth. Her images tell the story of a community through the objects with which its participants surround themselves and the environments they create for themselves. Tinnen photographs this community through glimpses and close-shot details; wider shots would disclose locations that could lead to deportation, making the decision to restrict the viewer’s perspective an ethical one.

14. Emilie Duval (Beaumont)
Il Est Dangereux De Se Pencher Au Dehors, 2004
Video, 4:04 min.,
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Pascal Vanhoecke (Paris)

15. David Waddell (Houston)
The Order, 2008
DVD stop motion animation
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

16. Eduardo Xavier Garcia (Austin)
Pata de Perro, 2007
Digital Video, 2:26 min.
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist



14

EMILIE DUVAL, BEAUMONT

Journeys, both literal and emotional, are the subjects of Emilie Duval’s videos. In *Between Borders*, Duval examines the duality between desire and reality in the immigration process. *Il est Dangereux de se Pencher au dehors* shows the ways of a child in different spaces and represents a passage from childhood to adulthood. Both pieces evoke the consciousnesses of their subjects, immigrant and child, through successions of poignant images.



15

DAVID WADDELL, HOUSTON

Two works by David Waddell update flip-books and stop-motion animation for the digital age. In *iPleasure for Commuters* Waddell produces creatures from household objects, then photographs these creatures in nature. The still images are uploaded to an iPod, which allows the viewer control of the speed and order the images play. The elaborate scenes and objects in *The Order* were all composed within a two-and-a-half by two-and-a-half foot space using common and disposable household items. Crafting and composing thousands of still images into a meticulously choreographed ballet, Waddell creates all the special effects by manipulating the apparatus of the camera.

EDUARDO GARCIA, LAREDO

Personal in experience, yet universal in its themes, Eduardo Garcia’s video *Pata de Perro* explores the challenges of hardships both physical and emotional. In this video, composed of stills of medical scans, Garcia accentuates the colors and sounds that exist in trauma, with the understanding that trauma does not discriminate.




16

Sage Sohier: Perfectible Worlds

by Madeline Yale

Intrigued by the often fanatical nature of some hobbyists' diversions, Massachusetts-based photographer Sage Sohier began the series *Perfectible Worlds* shortly after 9/11/01. Sohier's environmental portraits demonstrate a curious sense of wonderment: the simple yet seductive gratification of collecting, the nostalgic fabrication of miniature worlds, and the seemingly obsessive desire to perfect or transform oneself. What Sohier describes as "private passions and obsessions" speak about a larger topic: how we console ourselves in an imperfect world.

As our society becomes more complex and individualized, many aspects in our lives are motivated by a fear of the unknown. The photographer divulges how our leisure activities are indicators of the instinct to rationalize this chaotic fear by gaining control of our environments. Many hobbyists conduct their activities in solitude, therefore removing themselves from participating in the larger world. Through these escapist means, some lose all sense of time while becoming utterly absorbed in projects, driven by the desire for and illusion of perfection. 



left:
*Man working on miniature barn,
Shelburne Farms, VT, 2004*
From the series *Perfectible Worlds*
C-Print, 20 x 24 inches
Courtesy of Foley Gallery (NYC)

above:
*Man applying tanning lotion before a
bodybuilding competition, Worester, MA, 2003*
From the series *Perfectible Worlds*
C-Print, 30 x 40 inches
Courtesy of Foley Gallery (NYC)

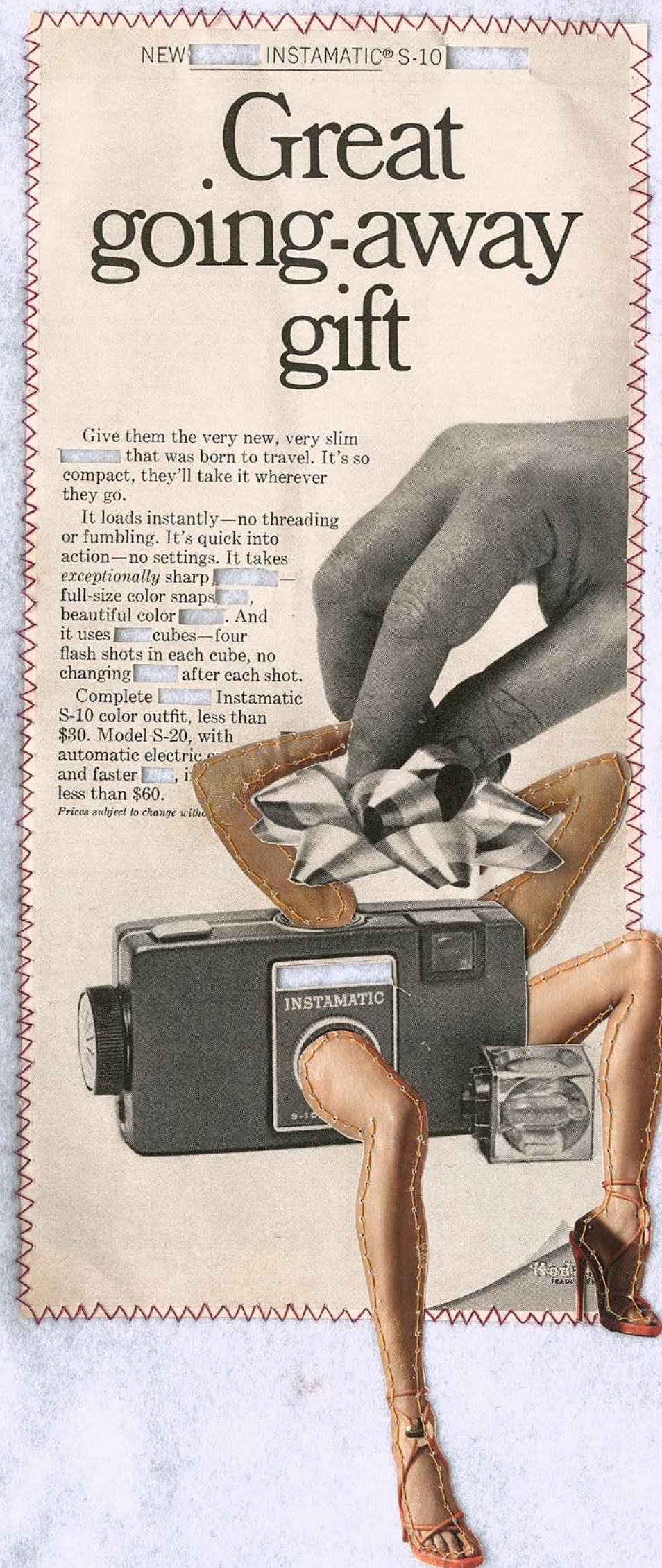
right:
Man with women's shoes, Dorchester, MA, 2003
From the series *Perfectible Worlds*
C-Print, 20 x 24 inches
Courtesy of Foley Gallery (NYC)





above:
Man with horse, dog and ribbons,
 Purcellville, VA, 2002
 From the series *Perfectible Worlds*
 C-Print, 20 x 24 inches
 Courtesy of Foley Gallery (NYC)

right:
Surgeon with molds of hands he has repaired,
 Brookline, MA, 2002
 From the series *Perfectible Worlds*
 C-Print, 20 x 24 inches
 Courtesy of Foley Gallery (NYC)





Ariane Roesch '08

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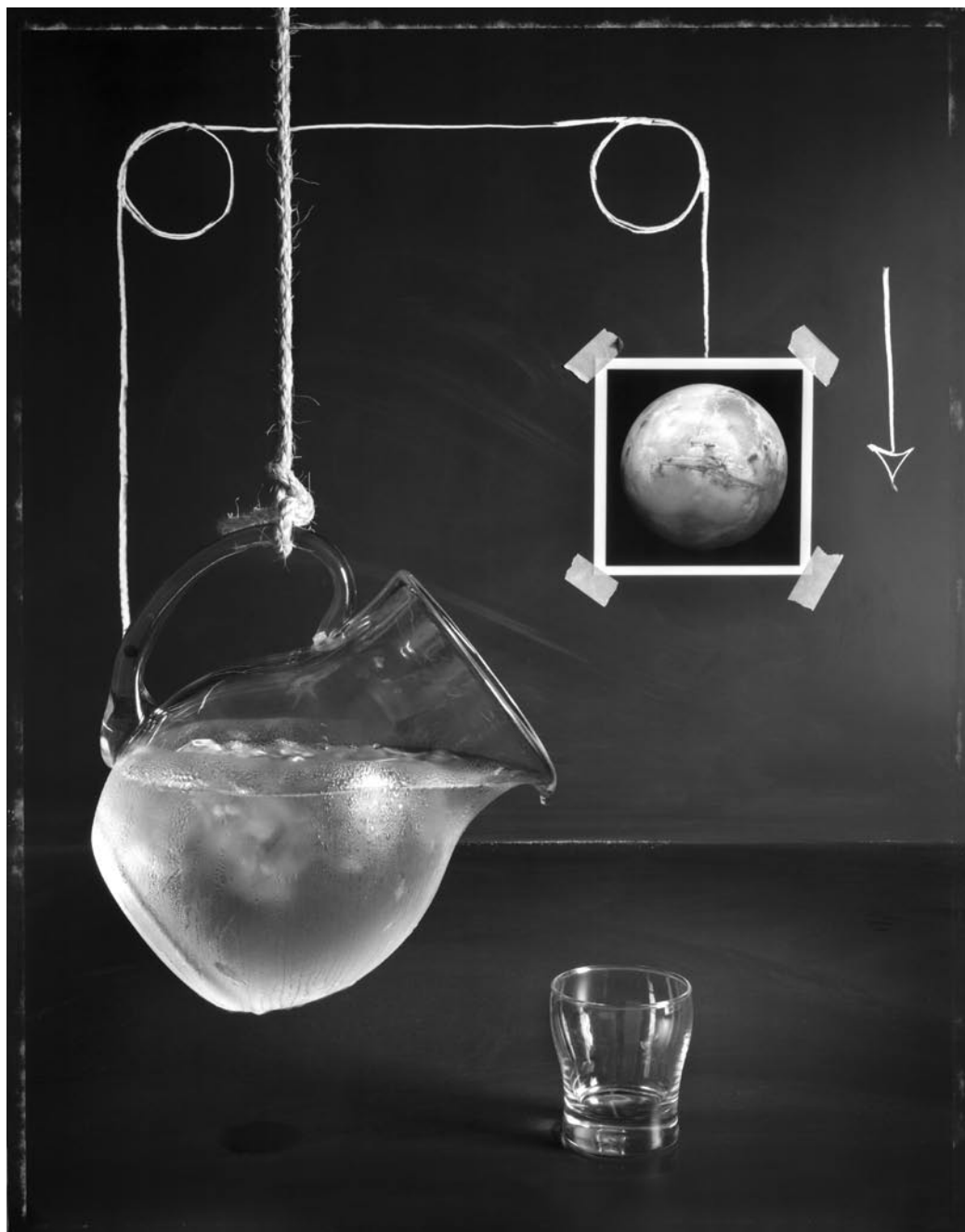
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FOR PHOTOGRAPHY

1. Teresa Ollila (Lafayette, CO)
Helicopter & Birds
2008
16 x 24 inches
Archival Inkjet Print
From the series *Children's Portraits*
2. Yoko Ikeda (Yokyo, Japan)
Kosuge Village, Yamanashi Pref. 2007
2007
26 x 30 1/2 inches
C-Print
From the series *Study in Red*
3. Tami Bone (Austin, TX)
Jitters
2007
11 x 16 inches
Archival Inkjet Print



left:
John Chervinsky (Boston, MA)
Gravity of Mars, 2005
Archival digital print
18 x 23 inches
Courtesy of the artist

right:
John Chervinsky (Boston, MA)
All Watched Over, 2005
Archival digital print
18 x 23 inches
Courtesy of the artist

Photography, from its beginning, has created new ways of seeing our world. Moreover, photographic images allow us all to have a shared visual experience. Previously I have written about photography as the first technologically mediated vision which removes “seeing” from both the physical location of the act (what is in front of the lens) and the initial actor (photographer). The resulting image can then be shared with multiple viewers who were not present, but who can now “see” a landscape they have never visited, people they have never met, and cultures beyond their imagination. Of course, prior to the advent of photographic ways of seeing, the telescope extended our ability to see beyond the physical capacity of our eyes into the cosmos, yet to have this new vision the *viewer* still had to be present, looking through the telescope as it pointed to the stars.

Photographic Knowing

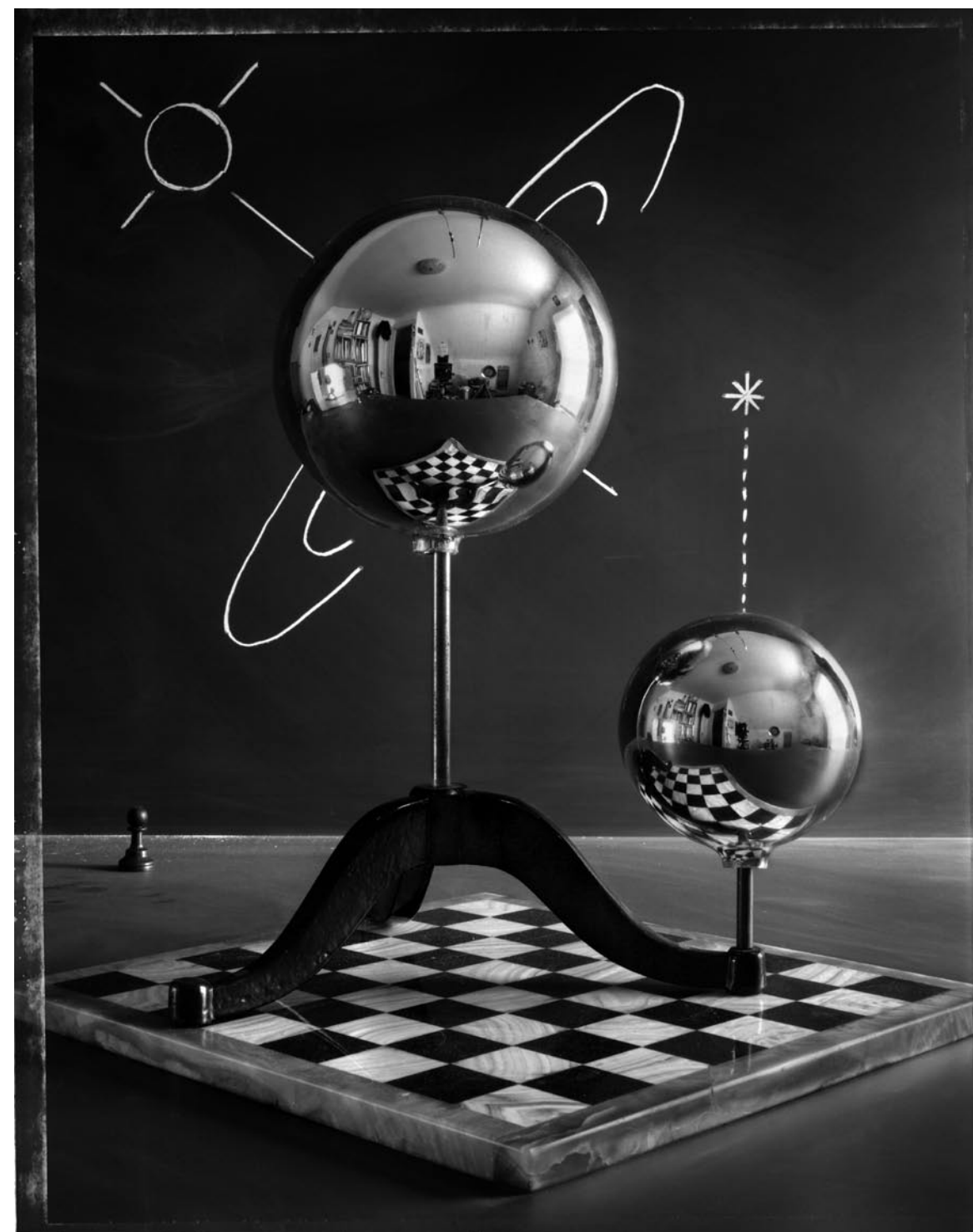
Engaging Perspectives through Photography

by Tracy Xavia Karner

FEATURE

Today we take all of this for granted. We expect to see photographs of stars billions of years old and light years away. MRIs provide views into the recesses of our physical beings and fMRIs allow us to see how our brains function. And while microscopic images provide insight into the infinitesimal aspects of existence, television brings the world to our living rooms and the internet brings it to our fingertips. Technologically mediated viewing – seeing through photographic images – has become the primary way in which we now know our world. Roland Barthes said that “the image...always has the last word.” I argue that the image *has become* the word in contemporary life, and that the photograph *is* the lingua franca of our global society.

Acknowledging the increasing role of visibility in contemporary society necessitates a more informed understanding and awareness of images and their production. Photography – not just as reportage or social documentary, but as a means to contemplate *how* we know our world – can foster insight and pose new questions about our intellectual premises and the visual nature of our world. This is precisely the thinking behind the development of the Visual Studies program at the University of Houston, in which scholars across the curriculum have come together, contributing their disciplinary knowledge to explore the totality of our contemporary visual experience. Previously, visual studies has only been loosely understood as an academic discipline, and has most commonly been





located only within the humanities, practiced by art historians and cultural studies scholars. Though promising in its beginning, such a narrow focus is now inadequate to address the intricacy and ubiquity of our current state of visibility, My colleagues at the University of Houston have championed a broader, more comprehensive Visual Studies program. Its unique approach is based on the premise that visual information overlaps all academic disciplines and thus an interdisciplinary scope is essential for understanding the rich and complicated visual experience of contemporary life – all perspectives are needed to fully comprehend how our visual world is created, understood, morphed, and consumed.

The challenge in building a truly interdisciplinary program is to identify a way in which people from various academic disciplines, each with its own specialized language and research paradigms, can come together. Our program begins with the still image – the photograph in all its complex glory – as a focus for interdisciplinary discussion. In this essay, I will discuss the works of three photographers – John Chervinsky, Jean Miele, and Scott Griesbach – who have created outstanding examples of the kind of interdisciplinary work that fosters insight and poses new questions, both visually and intellectually.

In his series *An Experiment in Perspective*, John Chervinsky offers open symbolic propositions, inviting us to contemplate our ability to see and know our world. Working in black and white, Chervinsky arranges scientific “props” (tuning forks, magnets, pendulums) against a background of perpendicular blackboards interlaced with chalk marks and symbols. The resulting images evoke “scientific” demonstrations and imaginary physics experiments. In “Gravity of Mars,” he plays artfully with illusions of perspective, asking the viewer to ponder the relationship between objects and the individual’s place in the universe. In *All Watched Over*, Chervinsky reflects on chaos and creationism by creating two reflective orbs placed on a chessboard, referencing our solar system and – guided or at play? Are we all watched over or living amidst chaos?


In *The Vintage Series: Scientific Inquiries*, Jean Miele approaches the ambiguities and mysteries of existence. Through photo collage, Miele combines ancient texts and early scientific instruments with images of sea and sky to create poetic visual summaries about

above:
Scott Griesbach (Santa Monica, CA)
Fluke, 2003
Iris print
35 x 24 inches
Courtesy of Bering and James Gallery
(Houston, TX)

right:
Jean Miele (New York, NY)
Where Time Stops, 2007
Archival digital print
8 x 10 inches
Courtesy of the artist

time, harmony, and knowledge. Miele uses these directional tools – maps, compasses, sextants – in ways meant to soothe modern anxiety about the unknown, creating images of “perfection” – perfect places, perfect moments, perfect knowledge. Calm, peaceful, and monochromatic, his work provides a sense of acceptance and continuity through links to the certainty of an imagined past. In Miele’s work, the viewer becomes aware of how the comfort of certainty can be created with hazy barely-there whispers hinting at unknowns. Broader awareness of ambiguities and uncertainties remain just out of grasp in images that become visual maps of exploration and metaphors for existentialism.

Encouraging what he calls critical rebellion, Scott Griesbach reconceptualizes historical events by manipulating appropriated images in *Portraits of Social Practice*. Taking as his subjects the moments of possibility – when discoveries occur and paradigms shift – we see Marcel Duchamp in a hardware store purchasing a urinal, Jackson Pollock riding the winning “dark horse of abstraction” amidst artists of earlier “new” forms of painting, while Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud contemplate alienation and industrialization in a field full of cars and airplanes. Drawing from an awareness of history, philosophy, and the arts, Griesbach is reflexively aware of the how powerfully images communicate. Using technology to overtly play with image construction, his photographic collages re-create imagined moments while at the same time raising substantive questions about notions of progress and knowledge acquisition. Griesbach teases and taunts his viewers, challenging us to visually examine what we think we know and how that knowledge has come to us.

Standing between and among various interdisciplinary approaches to visual knowledge creation, contestation, mediation and advancement, such provocative artists invite viewers into reflexive contemplation about our contemporary image-saturated awareness of the world. In the hands of a renaissance style intellectuals like Chervinsky, Miele, and Griesbach, photographs are indeed the global language for engaging and challenging our perspectives, encouraging reflexive contemplation, and furthering our collective and individual insights. 

Endnote: More about these photographers can be found at www.chervinsky.org, www.jeanmiele.com, and www.scottgriesbach.com. Information about Visual Studies at University of Houston is available at www.visualstudies.uh.edu.




Leigh Anne Langwell

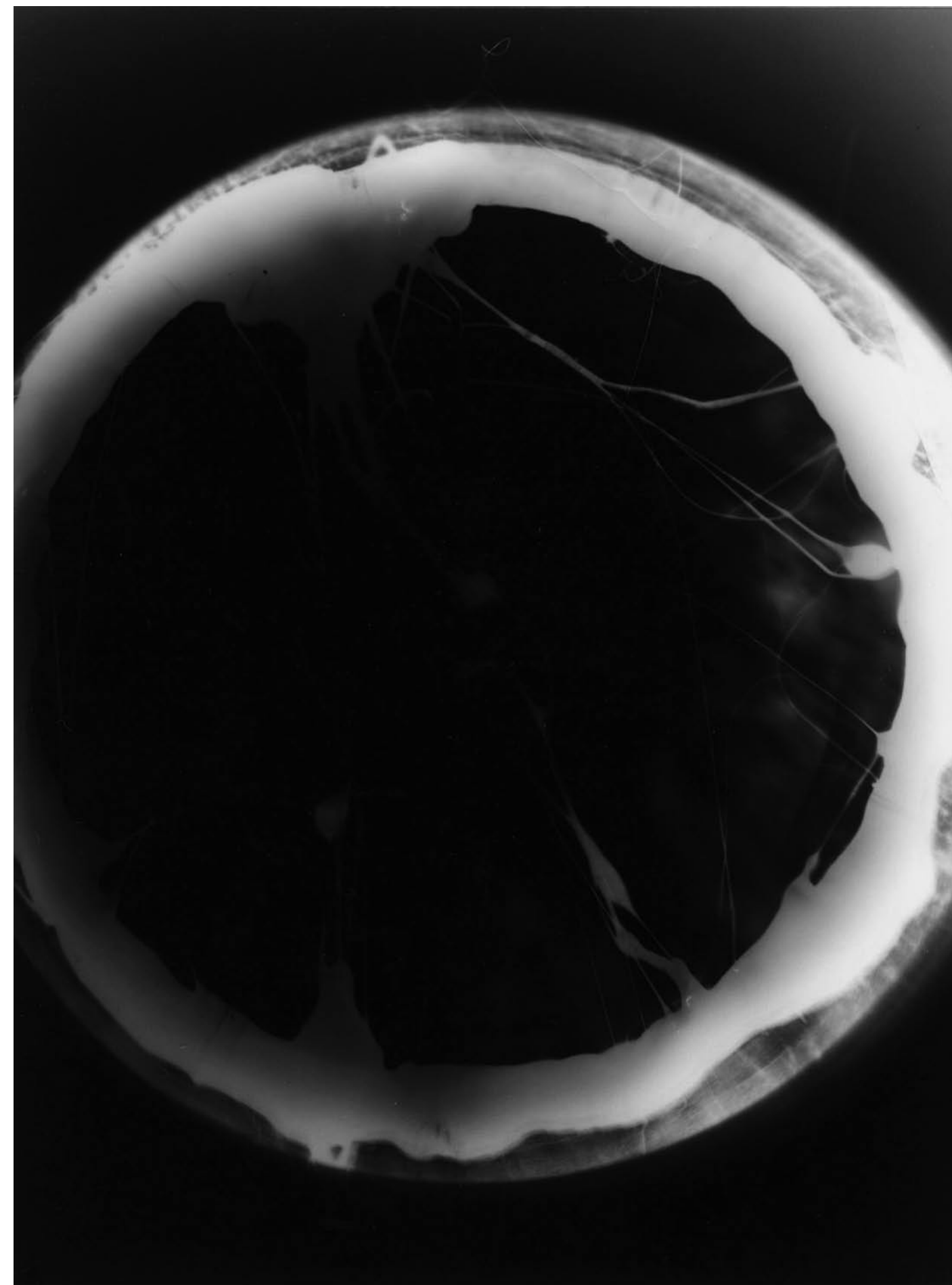


My research for these images began with my employment as a medical photographer over seventeen years ago, and is rooted in the history and visual conventions of medical and scientific imaging.

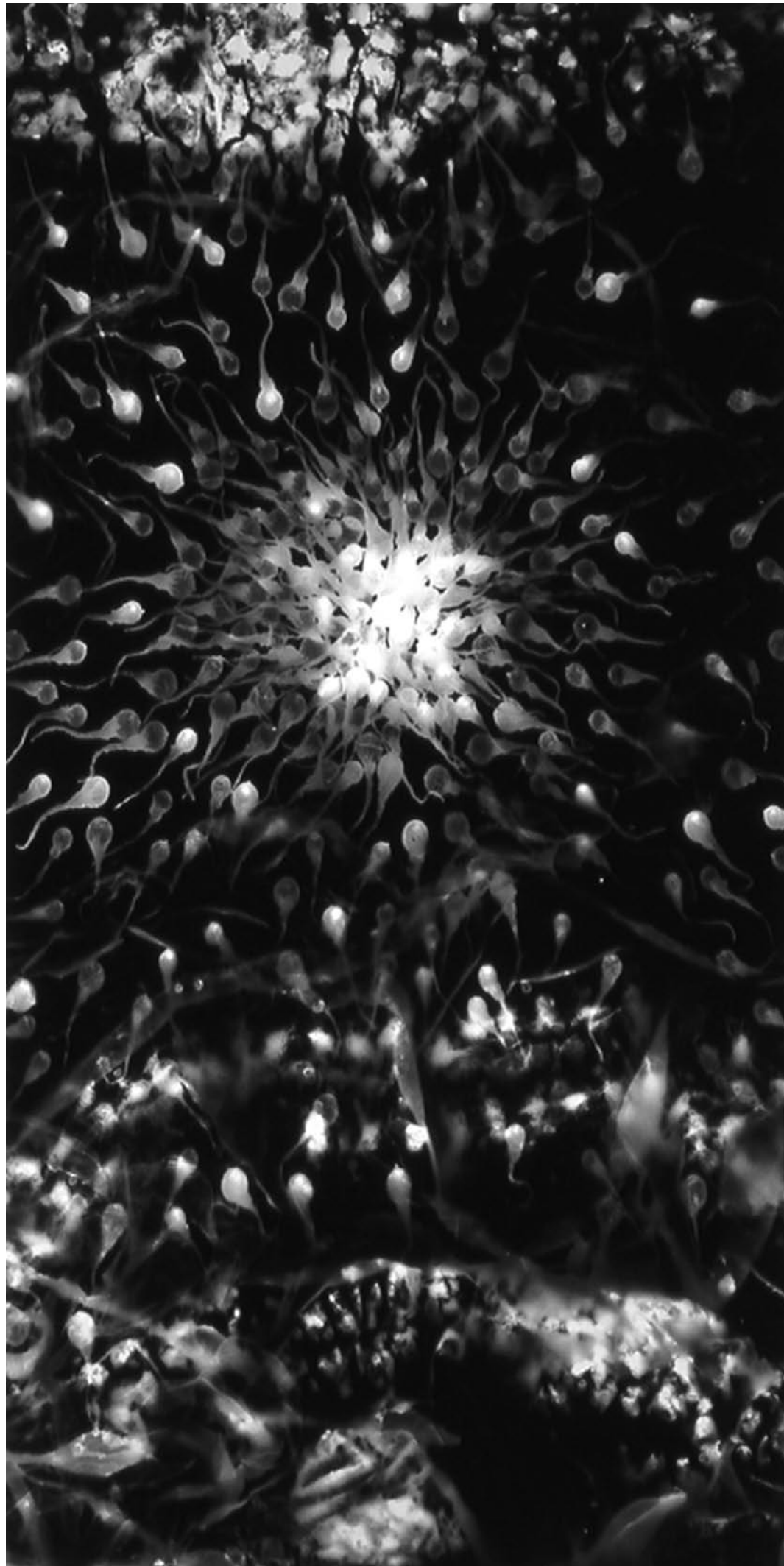
The concept of scale and the creation of intersections between microcosm and macrocosm reside at the heart of this work. I build three-dimensional sculptures out of translucent and transparent materials in my studio and then bring the sculptures into the darkroom and arrange them on a sheet of photographic paper under a safelight. I expose the sculptures and paper to white light from a 10-watt bulb, fiber-optic lights, and electroluminescent wire and then I process the paper in photographic chemistry in the usual way. The image that one sees on the paper is a record of the shadows cast by the objects, their individual transparencies and material characteristics. Like an X-ray or a scanning electron micrograph, more information about the physical subject is revealed in a photogram than can often be seen with the naked eye.

I view my work as a long-term project in continual evolution. The black, reversed photograms speak of the communities, entities and locations inside the microcosm of the body. The positive, or white photograms use highly selective exposure to delve deeper into the imagined molecular and subatomic spaces of the body and to extend further beyond it, into the universe. This is a living body of work in a dynamic process of growth and change. 

above:
Studio Materials
Image courtesy of Christine Chin
2008



Leigh Anne Langwell
Shadow #002, 2005 - 2008
Photogram on gelatin silver paper
5.4 x 4.5 inches
Courtesy of the artist



left:
Leigh Anne Langwell
Dark Field (panel 4 of 5-panel mural), 2000
Photogram on gelatin silver paper
72 x 40 inches
Courtesy of the artist

above:
Leigh Anne Langwell
Shadow #037, 2005 - 2008
Photogram on gelatin silver paper
5.4 x 4.5 inches
Courtesy of the artist


Austin's Arthouse invited Nato Thompson, Creative Time curator and producer, to select works for *New American Talent: The Twenty-Third Exhibition* (NAT23). On view until August 17, 2008, the exhibition is slated to tour until 2010.

As a singular entity the exhibition cites artistic perspectives on happenstance as they relate to collective political, cultural, and social muddles. To this end, the individual works attest to an affinity for negotiating one's relationship to his or her surroundings. Photography gathers at the forefront of these propositions for the second year in a row of NAT's 23 year run.

Several photos depict vast yet undeniably inhabited lands charged with a hint of artificial, slightly suspect conditions: Beau Comeaux's large format series *A-Frame*, *Security*, and *Kudzu*, along with Charles Atherton's lightbox piece titled *The Cabin*, glow with mysterious lighting and ethereal coloring, summoning rumors of off-the-grid living. Margo Geddes's *Lightpole 1* and Lex Thompson's *Snow Boats* allow the seemingly mundane to evince arcane beauty. All beg us to come closer, to peer in the windows and around the corners, ignoring the warning signs.

Other works imagine the secret life of objects. Brooke Berger's *Configuration #1* and *Configuration #4* play on fantasies and notions of escape. #4 depicts a tenderly-balanced stack of water-

damaged harlequin romance novels propped up by a metal rod; #1 shows a neatly stacked pile of dusty black work shoes leading from a cardboard box on the basement floor up to a street level window. Brett Walker's *Coffee Filter Hat*, Alyssa Taylor Wendt's *Byzantium Pause*, and Anna Krachey's pieces *Bearteeth*, *Cupcake*, *Ear*, and *Path* beg for stories to be constructed from their evocative compositions, curious figures, and unexpected imagery. And Seth Lower's multi-media *Raccoon Shirt Coincidence* builds a narrative by linking childhood studio portraiture, an old man at the beach, and somewhat dangerous encounters – a personal story introduced by way of a certain t-shirt.

The artists included in NAT23 are scouting out their literal and figurative position in the world, in spite of evacuated spaces and unusual or unnatural states of being. To them, location and placement are more important than ever. The artists employ us to use their images as a way to test new sites and reconsider existing ones, to pause and examine our own relationships to structures, lands, or people. 

New American Talent: The Twenty-Third Exhibition

Arthouse at the Jones Center, Austin, Texas

by Nancy Zastudil



Brooke Berger (Chicago, IL)
Configuration #1, 2008
Inkjet print
40 x 32 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Arthouse at
the Jones Center (Austin, TX)



World Press Photo

by Anne Wilkes Tucker

with photographer Will Michels

Tim Hetherington (Liverpool, UK)
World Press Photo of the Year 2007
*American soldier resting at bunker, Korengal Valley, Afghanistan,
16 September, 2007*

A soldier of Second Platoon, Battle Company of the Second Battalion of the US 503rd Infantry Regiment sinks onto an embankment in the Restrepo bunker in the Korengal Valley, Afghanistan, at the end of the day on September 16. The valley was the epicenter of the US fight against militant Islam in Afghanistan, and scene of some of the deadliest combat in the region.
Courtesy of *Vanity Fair*

Every April in Amsterdam, World Press Photo announces the winners of holds a contest to determine the best news picture of the previous year. Though the judging often stirs controversy, the legacy of the competition is impressive. Among the past images whose power continues to sustain interest long after any “newsworthy” aspects, many were first recognized by the World Press, including Yasushi Nagao’s photograph of the assassination of the Japanese Socialist Party Chairman, Hector Rondon Lovera’s photograph of a Navy chaplain braving gunfire to aid a mortally-wounded soldier, and Nick Ut’s photograph of children running from a napalm attack in Vietnam.

Chosen from 80,536 images submitted from 125 different countries, the World Press Photo of the Year for 2007 was *Vanity Fair* contributor Tim Hetherington’s photograph of a soldier in Afghanistan sinking onto an embankment in his bunker after a deadly day of combat against militant Islam soldiers. In the dim, somber light of the bunker, the soldier’s expression is shock, and his posture reveals one exhaustion. Will the image last as a picture past the emotions that led to its selection? I have looked at thousands of photographs relating to war in the last two years, and very few deal with that moment after battle when the day’s violence come to consciousness. During the fight, a soldier thinks only of his and his companions’ survival while doing their jobs. It is only later that the danger and the horrors seep in, and Hetherington conveys this moment.

In addition to the selection of the Photo of the Year, the jury of editors and photographers awarded prizes to 59 other photographers from 23 nations in 10 different categories, including people in the news, sports, contemporary issues, daily life, arts and entertainment, and nature. During the weekend and before the awards ceremony on the last evening of the World Press Photo weekend in Amsterdam, each winner presents their work to an audience that includes not only their peers and colleagues, but also some of the most notable newspaper and magazine editors, news agency directors, publishers, and journalists.

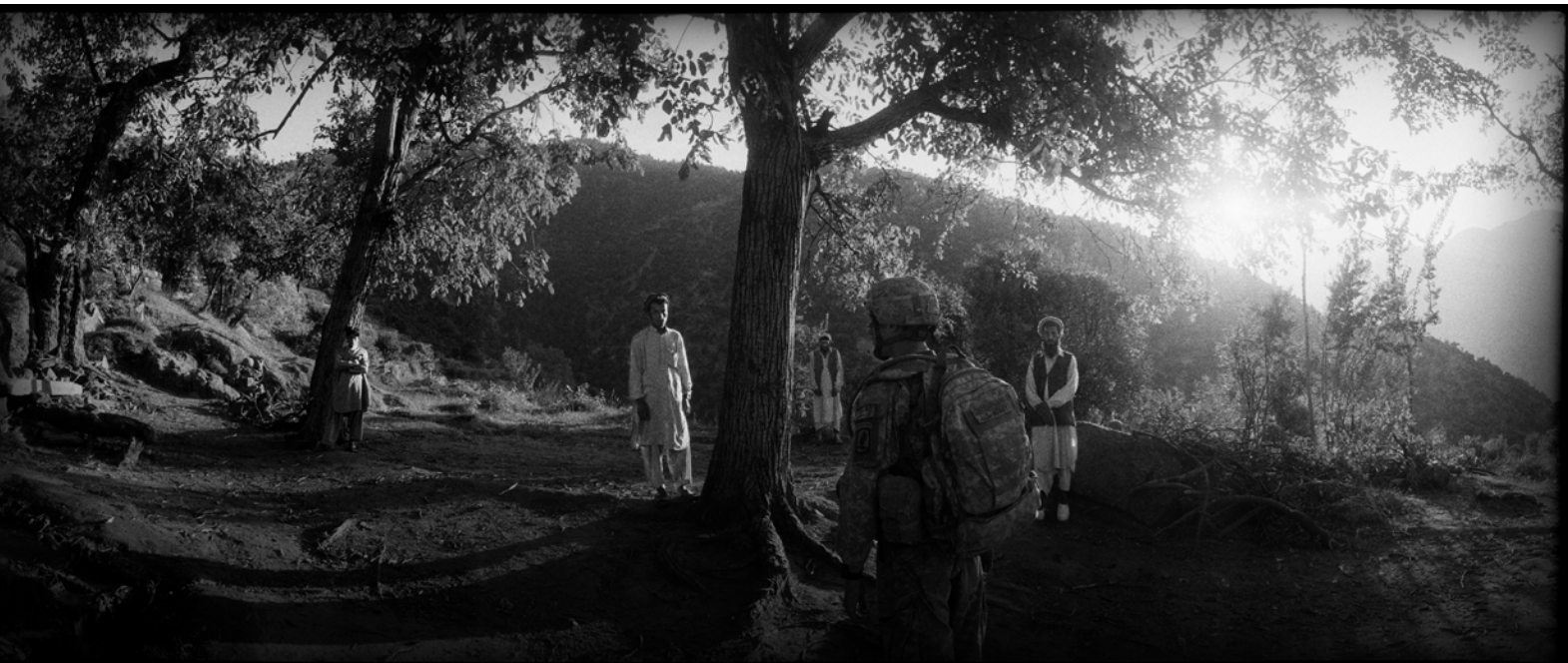
This year World Press Photo initiated a project called “New Stories” as part of its ongoing commitment to training new generations of photographers around the globe. The program gives formal photography training to young, underprivileged photographers from what they deemed the outside “majority world”, that is, countries in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. As with World Press Photo’s Joop Swart master class (initiated in 1994), the emphasis is on developing “human stories,” often ones of courage. Students from the Swart class have gone on to win World Press awards in later years and it is hoped that the new program will also reap strong results.

Discussions at the awards weekend highlighted the rise of the “citizen journalist,” and how the distribution of photographs by citizens is made possible and encouraged by the internet. Of concern for photographers in underdeveloped countries was the fact that slow connections inhibit poorer countries from uploading their work or from receiving images from other nations. Another problem raised in developing the skills of young photographers in “New Stories” was the fact of no historical photographic traditions by photographers from their own countries. Thus photography classes there must use examples of photographs from Western countries that might be used in the classes, featuring lives and issues very different from the realities of the students. The students are encouraged to visualize their own communities, without the exotic slant often imposed by visiting photographers, but with the knowledge of a citizen.

Balazs Gardi (Hungary)
1st prize General News Stories
The Valley, Operation Rock Avalanche, Afghanistan, October, 2007
Men are made to stand at a distance from each other as US soldiers search their village. In October, combined American and the Afghan National Army

forces conducted Operation Rock Avalanche to flush out insurgents from the Korengal Valley and surrounding areas of north-eastern Afghanistan. The Korengal Valley is considered to be the epicenter of US fighting in Afghanistan, and one of the deadliest zones of conflict in the region. Located near the Pakistan border, it was the first part of a former

mujahideen smuggling channel, used to bring men and arms into the country. American military strategists believed that al-Qaeda was trying to revive the route.
Courtesy of the artist and VII Network




World Press instructors are considering how they can help encourage indigenous aesthetics.

There were a handful of non-news attendees such as myself and my colleague, photographer Will Michels. We were there to look at the exhibitions and to interview as many of the war photographers as we could. We asked many of the same questions of each photojournalist, including: Did you ever think you were going to die? Having survived, did you photograph the next day? To the latter two questions, the answers were always “yes” and “yes.” They also acknowledged that one gets more careful as one manages to grow older, but that they realized they might outgrow their luck some day.

Among those interviewed on this trip was Balazs Gardi, a Hungarian photographer who won first place in General News Singles for a photograph made in Afghanistan of a boy who received shrapnel wounds from a rocket during a US air strike. Gardi also won first prize in the General New Stories category for

capturing strife in the same region – the Korengal Valley – where villagers have fought off outside attempts from all sides of the conflict to control them. Fighting in the valley is constant; it is one of the deadliest zones of conflict.

Gardi has covered the conflict in Afghanistan since 2001; the award-winning pictures were made on his third trip to the Valley. Like many of the photographers we interviewed in Amsterdam, Gardi earns money doing corporate work so that he can return to the war zones to work without an assignment from a specific magazine. And, like the other photographers, Gardi acknowledged the dangers of his work. He spoke of skills acquired, such as being able to distinguish types of guns by the sounds of gunfire and learning to evaluate the risks of one’s position based on the capacity of the guns. He also recognized that when one spends time with a specific military unit, it is impossible to remain neutral, though he does try to be objective. “We need to understand,” he said, “what is happening, why it is happening, and how people are coping, both the soldiers and citizens.”

Gardi is not alone in his commitment to the issues. A constant in our interviews was that the photographers were exceptionally well-informed about the situations they were covering. They cited the issues on both sides of each conflict, roots of the conflicts, the names of leaders and their minions, and what they saw as probable future events. Their responsibilities were to capture single images and perceive stories that could convey aspects of what they understood in visual terms. Listening to them, seeing their pictures, and hearing the passion in their voices for what they do, I could only be grateful that, despite the dangers, they were there to bring us stories and information that would otherwise not get to us. 

Will Michels (Houston, TX)
Balazs Gardi with Anne Wilkes Tucker, 2008
Gelatin silver photograph
Courtesy of artist



BOOK REVIEW

West of Last Chance

by Peter Brown & Kent Haruf

by Chas Bowie

West of Last Chance
by Peter Brown & Kent Haruf
W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.,
New York, 2008
256 pp, \$50
ISBN-13: 9780393065725


In *West of Last Chance*, a striking collection of field notes from Houston photographer Peter Brown and Salida, Colorado novelist Kent Haruf, America’s High Plains are equally peaceful and unforgiving lands. Brown’s meticulously crafted landscapes depict the sun-bleached desperation of abandoned homesteads and craggy skeletons of long-dead cottonwoods alongside the lulling romantic breeze of wispy cirrus formations, shimmering pools of cerulean surface water, and the reassuring solace of tabletop horizons and infinite sightlines. Similarly, Haruf’s written vignettes of history, memoir, and prose poetry, flesh out a complex biography of the land that includes scenes of rattlesnakes falling from dirt ceilings as well as Lutheran church suppers of folding chairs, hamburger casseroles, and Kool Aid.

Brown and Haruf met at Houston’s Brazos Bookstore in 1999. Brown had just published *On the Plains*, an affectionate but unsentimental portrait of America’s fly-over states, and Haruf was promoting Plainsong, a novel set in rural Colorado, which read like a narrative reimagining of Robert Adam’s early photographs. Recognizing each other as kindred spirits, Brown and Haruf set off to outposts with names such as Wilderado, Bird City, and Idalou – sometimes together, sometimes separately – to create this artistic document of the plains.

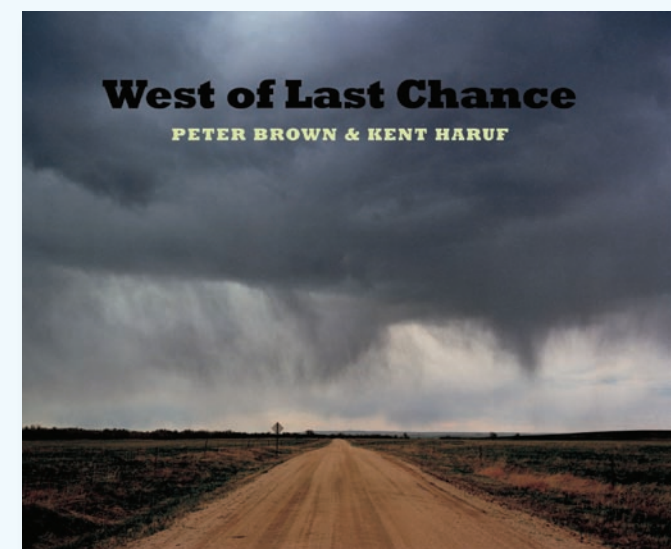
While *West of Last Chance* never set out to be an encyclopedic record of the region, Brown and Haruf create a sort of lyric taxonomy in their subjects: hand-painted signs, pickup trucks, superhighways and gravel roads, Wal-marts, grain elevators, crosses, high school mascots, diners, swallows, post offices, cattle, and mechanics all coalesce into an ambiguous geography of unequivocal alone-ness. In one lonely Nebraska highway scene, Brown presents a suitcase-sized tortoise camouflaged by the baked sandy asphalt of the roadway he

paddles across, a holdover apparition from the Plain’s Paleolithic era.

But more than any natural or social history, the past to which *West of Last Chance* refers is biblical. Haruf’s tiny histories conjure up a merciless system of blinding dust storms, drought, and infestation on these endless seas of plains. The neatly farmed rows of Brown’s crop photographs stretch out into an almost impossible infinity, like a diagram illustrating the principles of one-point perspective. Like the oceans and

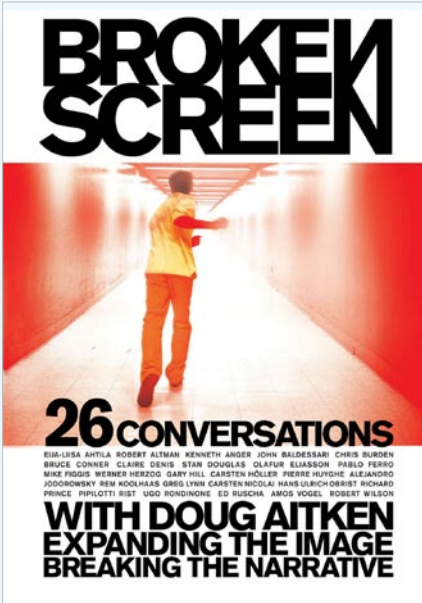
deserts of existential parables, the High Plains of *West of Last Chance* humbly offer themselves as swaths of unadorned absolutism, in which larger truths have the space to reveal themselves. 

Peter Brown (Houston, TX)
Tin Can Diner, Verango, Nebraska, 2005
C-Print, courtesy of the artist and Harris Gallery (Houston, TX)



Broken Screen: 26 Conversations with Doug Aitken

by David L. Jacobs



Broken Screen: Expanding The Image, Breaking The Narrative
26 Conversations with Doug Aitken
Distributed Art Publishers, Inc., 2006
288 pp, \$40
ISBN-10: 1933045264

Over a century ago, psychologist William James coined the phrase “bloomin, buzzin’ confusion” to describe the consciousness of human infants before language and culture begin to do their work. James, of course, was writing long before the mass media and, later, the digital revolution transformed his phrase into a ‘bloomin’, buzzin’ fact of contemporary life.

In *Broken Screen*, 26 Conversations with Doug Aitken, filmmaker Doug Aitkin grapples with this bloomin, buzzin’ confusions with an eclectic array of international artists, filmmakers and architects including John Baldessari, Ed Ruscha, Rem Koolhaas, Matthew Barney, Pipilotti Rist, Olafur Eliason, Werner Herzog and the late Robert Altman. Some of the artists question, if not subvert the dominance of Aristotelian beginnings, middles and ends. As Amos Vogel says, “We need new options because the old-fashioned, straightforward, linear narratives...have none of the real mysteries of existence that we all know to be true in our own lives.” Others use art to reflect the lightning-quick associations born of

consciousness, of minds darting here and there with little discernible logic. Many focus on how the media have intensified fragmentation: the endless flux (and influx) of ads, cell phones, piped music, spam, video games – the cacophony, aural and visual, of everyday life. Unlike generations of earlier artists, many current practitioners hold their mirrors up to nature without discovering or constructing much coherence. Some revel in the ambiguities; others embrace the chaos. For Robert Altman, “the greatest accolade anyone could give me about one of my films is to say, ‘I don’t know what that was about, but man, was it right on.’” The Belgian installation artist Carsten Höller suggests that confusion is “a very productive and beautiful state of mind to me, yet it’s something that we often have difficulty appreciating...It can mean succumbing to a specific form of confusion where you don’t know as much as you did before. Paradoxically, that can be very productive.” These artists explore challenging issues like influence and the meaning of their work without seeking refuge in formalist analysis, matters of technique, or overly arcane theory. As Werner Herzog memorably puts it, “The real question is how you wrestle meaning from film and meaning from life.” Aitken sometimes allows the conversations to digress, which is only appropriate, given his emphatic position on the limits of linear thinking and structure. This spontaneity allows for unexpected flashes of wit and insight, and I am thankful that in later editing Aitken allowed them to stand. Where else would one encounter the eminent stage and opera designer, Robert Wilson, comparing theater to a hamburger, complete with mustard, pickles and lettuce? After Richard Prince riffs on the pleasures of slipping off to the afternoon movies, Aitken shifts the focus back to one of the book’s leitmotifs:

Owning a VCR meant you suddenly had a device of nonlinearity at your fingertips. You could rewind, fast-forward, and pause the narrative, essentially breaking the time signature of the film.

Or here’s Chris Burden, recounting a unique form of photo-retribution:


Chris: When I was in graduate

school at UC Irvine there were these really mean secretaries who were just shitty. I don’t know why, but they were just nasty. I had a little Minox spy camera then, right, and a developing tank at home. I’d take pictures of them surreptitiously and then go home, develop the negatives, chop them up, put them in my breakfast cereal, and eat the negatives.

Doug: No way!

Chris: Yeah! Ha ha. And the next time I saw them and they were mean to me, it felt really good! I was empowered...I’d processed them in a sort of cannibalistic way and somehow it took away their power.

The design of *Broken Screen* deserves special mention. Images by each artist are interspersed within the corresponding conversation, though in a decontextualized fashion (minimal information on the images’ sources appear in an appendix at the end of the book). Sometimes an excerpt from a conversation is splayed across an adjoining page, set at angles and in different fonts. White text on black switches to black on white on the next page. Text sometimes runs over or bleeds into the images, which are arrayed horizontally, vertically, diagonally. Intense, irruptive splashes of color play across the pages. The book is itself a fractured narrative that forces the reader/viewer into a proactive position. What could have been an off-putting series of design gimmicks instead engages the reader’s attention while reinforcing and expanding the themes of the conversations.

Bloomin’ and buzzin’ never looked so good. 

The advertisement for Houston CAMERA Exchange is set against a background of autumn trees. At the top, a red camera-shaped logo contains the word 'Houston' in script, 'CAMERA' in large bold letters, and 'Exchange' in script. Below this, the text 'Houston's Digital Source' is followed by the website 'www.hcehouston.com' in large bold letters. Underneath is the tagline 'Your Premier Photographic Resource Since 1972.' in a script font. In the center, a woman with dark hair is smiling and holding a camera up to her eye. To her left, the text 'NEW & USED PHOTO EQUIPMENT BUY - SELL - TRADE DIGITAL PHOTO LAB' is written in large, bold, red letters. At the bottom, the address '5900 Richmond Ave' and phone number '713-789-6901' are displayed in large bold letters.



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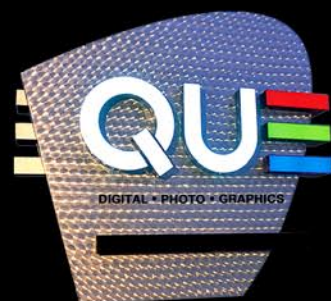


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