

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY

EILEEN QUINLAN

selected texts & press

EILEEN QUINLAN

How does a photograph exist? How does it interpellate the viewer, and why? What about its aura—both imbued and infusive, ever so present and yet retractive? What is this *thing* trying to say? Eileen Quinlan is interested in the false transparency of the photographic image: it's not a window, but a mirror. Her work presents an opportunity for contemplation, accompanied by an interruptive alienation: the mechanics of presenting and consuming images, or the social and ideological sitedness of the artist's hand, surface from the deep recesses of the substrate.

"My work is about a lot of things," Quinlan says. "Aging, sexuality, mortality, parenting, environmental collapse, mass murder and guns, macrocosms and microcosms, the domestic, feminism, motherhood and mother artists, making do, confinement, misogyny, available means, lifestyles, access, the internet as the source of all things (appropriation) and how that ties to limits on time and access, art historical allusions, advertising — 'brands' both artistic and commercial — touch, tactility and ghosts, analog and digital, authenticity, screens and distraction (an opiate of the masses), destruction via war and through consumption/pollution, violent attacks on film and IRL, the sysphian/entropic, making unseen forces visible, the privileging of sight..."

Quinlan's experimental process unfolds through a limited set of materials and brute repetition, probing and demystifying the circumstances of each image's creation. It insists, by extension, on the constructed nature of all photographs. As such, the constructions themselves run the photographic gamut from the quasi-pictorial to the semi-abstract, from evidentiary document to expressive collage. The regime of the image materializes in its full heterogeneity, only to recede again under its own weight.

Quinlan's early series, such as *Smoke & Mirrors* and *Night Flight*, restage display materials—mirrors, lights, textiles, and support structures—in disorienting configurations that verge on abstraction. Produced using the most common tricks of the commercial photography trade, the sets are staged around a nonexistent product; they are straightforward tabletop still-lives, manipulated neither in the darkroom nor through digital craft, though they often appear otherwise. In the following years, the artist also took yoga mats, luridly lit and shot in close-up, as the subject of a series that gestures toward contemporary manifestations of self-maintenance through regimes of diet, exercise, and spirituality. Abstract non-space intrudes upon the surface of several prints through cascading layers of manipulated emulsion.

For *Curtains*, her third solo exhibition at Miguel Abreu Gallery, Quinlan presented a body of black-and-white photographs comprised of new portraits, re-photographed portraits of the same subjects from years prior, and near-total abstractions. The photos were patterned by crocheted and printed textiles that reference, respectively, the handmade and the mass-produced, both of which are mirrored in Quinlan's hybrid process. The prints are textured with scratches, tears, fingerprints, and ruptures located on the surface of the negative itself, the latter introduced by way of experimentation with the pocket of processing chemicals that accompany each sheet of 4x5 Polaroid film. The result is a complex layering of material and temporal indices that gradually reveal themselves upon extended examination.

Recently, Quinlan's works have shifted towards more existential concerns, reckoning with the digital and, in turn, telegraphing the anxiety around screens. In *Mind Craft*, Quinlan interrogated the systems of technique and content in photography: the landscape, the nude, the selfie, and the scan were presented in succession, blurring the binaries of black and white and color, digital and analog. What emerged was not only the screen as a place of projection and absorption, but also the sheer ubiquity of the photographic image. For *Too Much*, Quinlan staged a multi-panel scanner work and a decade's worth of Polaroids together. Culled from her previous series and works, the Polaroids—staged into grids—allude to her works and play with the notion of serial reproducibility of the editioned photograph. Apposed besides one another, the two materially distinct processes disintegrated the image and laid bare the photograph's *dispositif*.

Eileen Quinlan (b. 1972, Boston) earned her MFA from Columbia University in 2005, and had her first solo museum exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston in 2009. Her first survey show, Wait For It at the Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf, was held in 2019. Quinlan's work was recently included in Artist's Choice: Amy Sillman—The Shape of

Shape, Museum of Modern Art, New York (2020), *Objects Recognized in Flashes*, a major group exhibition curated by Matthias Michalka at MUMOK, Vienna, alongside Michele Abeles, Annette Kelm, and Josephine Pryde (2019), *Passer-by* at Lafayette Anticipations, Paris (2019), *Picture Industry: A Provisional History of the Technical Image, 1844–2018* at the LUMA Foundation in Arles (2018), *VIVA ARTE VIVA*, the 57th International Art Exhibition, Venice Biennale, curated by Christine Macel (2017), and *Always starts with an encounter: Wols/Eileen Quinlan*, produced by Radio Athènes and curated by Helena Papadopoulos at the Museum of Cycladic Art in Athens (2016). Previously, Quinlan participated in *Image Support* at the Bergen Kunsthall, *What Is a Photograph?* at the International Center for Photography, New York, and *New Photography 2013* at the Museum of Modern Art, along with group exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Hammer Museum, *White Columns*, the *White Cube Bermondsey*, the *Langen Foundation*, *Mai 36*, *Marian Goodman Gallery*, *Andrea Rosen Gallery*, and *Paula Cooper Gallery*, among others.

Quinlan's work is in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, CCS Bard Hessel Museum, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, Pinault Collection, Aishti Foundation, Beirut, MIT List Visual Arts Center, Boston, Institute of Contemporary Art / Boston, Ackland Art Museum, Henry Art Gallery, Seattle, Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, V-A-C Foundation, Moscow, mumok, Vienna, Kunstpalast Düsseldorf, FRAC Normandie Rouen, Brooklyn Museum, and The Art Institute of Chicago.

The artist's first monograph, *Good Enough*, was published by Osmos Books in 2018, while *Always Starts with an Encounter: Wols—Eileen Quinlan*, was published by Radio Athènes and Sequence Press in 2019. Her seventh solo exhibition, *The Waves*, was held at Miguel Abreu Gallery in March 2023.

ARTFORUM

Eileen Quinlan

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY | ELDRIDGE STREET



Eileen Quinlan, *Spin Cycle Set (Wedding List)*, 2023, ink-jet print on mirror and aluminum frame, 40 1/4 × 30 1/4 × 1 1/2".

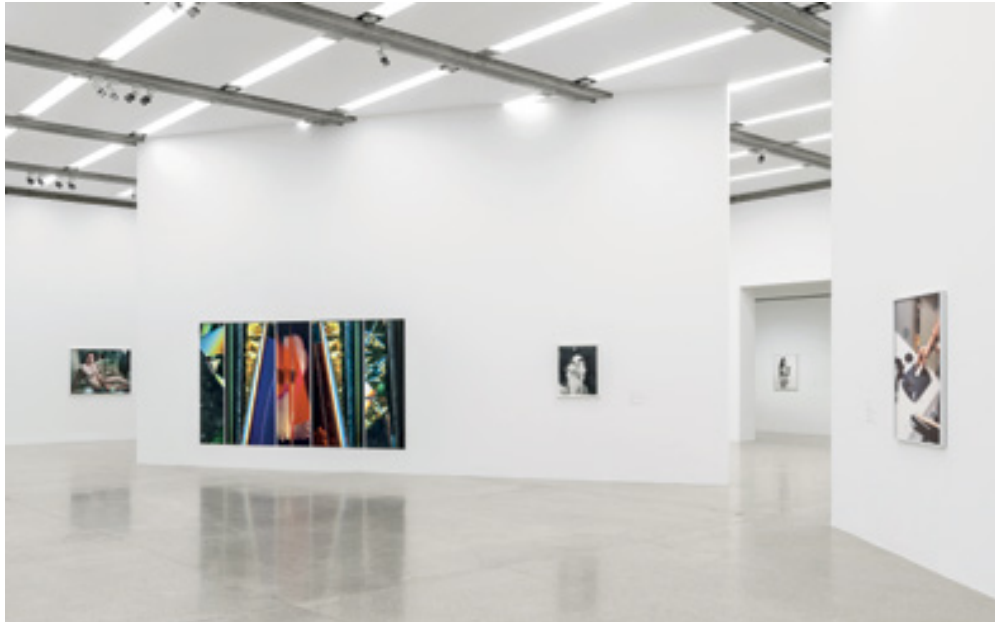
Cool blues and vivid oranges, the colors of seas and sunsets, offered moments of sumptuous splendor in Eileen Quinlan's "The Waves," an elegantly austere show of eighteen primarily abstract photographs. The works, printed on aluminum-framed mirrors, seemed lit from within, allowing for subtle interactions between spectator and subject. Interested in photography's power to seduce, with an emphasis on disrupting passive viewing—aspects the artist has explored, through a Brechtian lens, over the course of some twenty years—Quinlan here had folded these long-standing concerns into a pleasure-filled dreamscape. The concepts underlying the artist's earlier projects seemed to have been metabolized into a set of images more heuristic than didactic, harnessing the medium's capacity for luscious beauty.

The pieces on display here, with their uniform scale (roughly forty by thirty inches) and spacious installation, allowed for discrete viewing experiences, intimate, one-on-one interactions. Quinlan seemed to be exploring the ways in which images resolve and cohere, utilizing, via analog and digital processes, a variety of materials such as found internet footage, commercial videos, expired film, and pictures of her own nude body. Five works, including *Spin Cycle Set (Wedding List)*, 2023, from one of the artist's new series, feature dramatic stills of cresting and splashing water culled from a surf video that Quinlan rephotographed, solarized, and manipulated in Photoshop. (The artist calls her series "sets" because the word *set*, in scientific terms, refers to a succession of ocean waves.) In contrast to earlier investigations that incorporate more referential imagery—including a group of 2016 works that feature news photos documenting the aftermath of terrorist attacks in Paris and Palmyra, Syria, that occurred the previous year—these pieces are more nebulous, elusive. The reversal of dark and light, echoing the play between positive and negative inherent to analog photography, in combination with the mirrored surface produced stunning moments of hydrokinetic energy. Elsewhere, two cameraless images from the 2023 "Swipe Set," made on discontinued Polaroid Type 55 large-format film, evidenced Quinlan's ongoing experiments with chance and control (the medium is unpredictable because of its expired chemistry). The film, which Polaroid stopped making in 2008, failed to disengage from its packet during the exposure period and yielded purely chemical compositions full of silvery smears, streaks, and pools, calling to mind metallic Color Field paintings.

Quinlan's images stand independently as strong formal declarations, but, pulled together, they reveal their relationships to one another to be primary. In a 2018 interview, the artist said she thought about her work "syntactically." Quietly evocative as an installation, this show brought up questions regarding the fugitive nature of subjective experience. In past projects, Quinlan emphasized formal, technical, and conceptual rigor. Yet the art that resulted from this approach always felt hampered by her fastidious handling. By not making declarative statements about the state of the world in this presentation, she opened herself up to a way of creating and understanding images in which nothing is as cut and dried, or as solid, as it may have once seemed. And from this rich amorphousness, something quite powerful arose.

— Margaret Ewing

FOTOGRAF



Objects Recognized in Flashes.
Michele Abeles, Annette Kelm, Josephine Pryde, Eileen Quinlan
curated by Matthias Michalka
Mumok, Vienna
16. 11. 2019 – 6. 9. 2020

Although at first glance it might seem like the four artists featured in the *Objects Recognized in Flashes* exhibition at Vienna's Mumok are linked by an interest in the methods of advertising and product photography in the context of fine art, it is in fact a deeper reassessment of the essence of photography that forms the foundation of this show. This is apparent not only from the artists' restrained responses to questions on this topic, published in the exhibition catalogue, but also from the reprinted contextualizing essay by Juliane Rebentisch, "The Abyss of the Photographic Surface", written in 2016. In this essay, the German philosopher develops the concept of the French thinker François Laruelle, according to whom photography does not possess a natural or cultural character, and so we cannot attribute either objectivity or constructedness to it. According to Laruelle, we have to break with older theories of a phenomenological or semiotic orientation and not infer the essence of photography only from its relation to the world. While photographs do always portray some object, this object's manner of appearing on the photograph is entirely different from our normal experience. In a photograph, for example, we can distinguish the figure from the background, but these are oppositions pertaining to the object depicted. The photograph, by contrast, allows "makes everything it represents exist on a strictly 'equal footing,'" which is why it is a "positive and irrevocable chaoticizing of the Cosmos", reducing the world to an "infinite surface of singular materialities".¹

It does not follow from these propositions that advertising and product photography are not an important source of inspiration for the exhibiting artists. In every case, however, these photographs are significantly nudged towards the Laruelian "vision-force". Eileen Quinlan, for instance, initially spoke of her series *Smoke and Mirrors* (begun in 2004) as "product photography

without any products". It featured smoke rolling through structures of mirrors illuminated by studio lighting. It all looks a lot like backgrounds commonly used in advertising shots. However, once the artist rid them of the fetishized products, these photographs act as enigmatic still lifes in which surface and space collapse into themselves along with everything corporeal and non-corporeal. The same can be said of the photographs in which Quinlan works with yoga mats. Through deformation and maximum zoom, she rids them of their original function, so this is not a portrayal, but she does not deny them their materiality. The same is true of her newer photographs in black and white. Although they were created by photographing over older personal and found images, the intentional damaging of the negatives transformed the resultant images into degraded material surfaces. For several photographs, the British artist Josephine Pryde used similar mirror structures to those employed by Quinlan at around the same time. Unlike her American colleague, however, she also included small objects such as lighters, chains and knitting needles. By mirroring them, she achieves a spatial disorientation which ultimately also leads to a flattening of the picture. The surface is thematized explicitly in her well-known cycle of photographs of hands touching the screen of a mobile phone. Through a precise choice of depth of field, these photographs lose the advertising aesthetic, instead bringing up questions about the relationship between visibility and tactility in a situation in which we relate to images through touch when using mobile devices.

If Quinlan and Pryde rebelled against the product aesthetic through a specific approach to the flatness of photographic backgrounds, the other two artists achieve the same result by exploring the objects depicted. In her early works, Michele Abeles captured compositions created following the model of computer



and phone screens. On her photographs, we are confronted with stones, fragments of figures and richly patterned textiles, all framed by fields of color filters, reminiscent of pop-up windows in internet browsers. Later, she enhanced this method by shooting her photographs displayed on touchscreen tablets whose surfaces were with dew or painted over. It is perhaps the last featured artist, Annette Kelm, who has the closest affinity to the methods of product photography. She captures her subjects from the central perspective on neutral backgrounds. She then subverts the status of usual depictions by composing photographic series: an example is a collection of photographs of a paper model of scales whose various positions alert us to the non-existence of a weight, or dollar bills on cattails, whose various values along with the characteristic shape of the natural “cigars” which cattails resemble refers to the rise and fall of both nature and the economy.

After all, even though Annette Kelm is unique among the artists featured in systematically creating photographic series, the rhythm of the exhibition linking the work of all four photographers on the basis of related motifs and forms only serves to enhance the exhibition. The repeating motifs (mirroring structures; rhombus-shaped compositions; rich textures; fragments of human bodies and industrial products) not only make the photographs part of the Laurellian “infinite surface of unique materialities”, but also leads us to explore the “vision-force” through their distance from the reproduction of reality.



1
François Laruelle, *The Concept of Non-Photography*, 2nd, rev., bilingual ed., New York: Sequence, 2012, pp. 52-53.

p. 75, installation view, Michele Abeles, Annette Kelm, Josephine Pryde, Eileen Quinlan, works from left to right by Michele Abeles, Eileen Quinlan, Michele Abeles, photo Klaus Pichler © mumok

p. 76, Michele Abeles, ›201/202‹, archival pigment print on dibond, 92 x 122,8 cm, 2019, courtesy of the artist and 47 Canal, New York

Josephine Pryde, ›Who Were You?‹, C-Print, 60 x 44,5 cm, 2016, courtesy of the artist and Galerie Neu, Berlin

Annette Kelm, ›Money Tree‹, archival pigment print, 95 x 66,5 cm, 2015, courtesy of the artist and KÖNIG GALERIE, Berlin/London

Sie will VERWIRRUNG stiften

Eileen Quinlan bricht systematisch mit den Konventionen des Marktes wie der Museen. Aber vielleicht rettet sie damit ein umkämpftes Medium für die Kunst: die Fotografie

Fotografie kann vieles sein: Bild, Objekt oder Produkt. Die meisten Fotos des Alltags sind Produkte. Penibel inszeniert von professionellen Werbefotografen, warten sie auf Bildschirmen und Mobiltelefonen, in News Feeds und in U-Bahnhöfen auf unsere Reaktionen. Überall schwirren sie herum, und obwohl wir sie auf unseren Screens wegwischen können, können wir ihnen nicht entkommen. In der Dauerschleife wartet schon das nächste Bild ungeduldig darauf, gesehen zu werden. Diese Fotos wollen nur eins: verführen und Parfüms, Sofas, Sneaker oder Sonnenbrillen vermarkten.

VON VIVIEN TROMMER

Natürlich sind wir längst Teil des Systems und haben mit Instagram und Facebook den Geist des perfekten Marketings verinnerlicht. Auch wir sind zu erfolgreichen und weniger erfolgreichen Influencern unserer Community geworden. Tagtäglich teilen wir quadratische Bilder von Dingen, Orten und Menschen, die wir mögen. Aber was produzieren wir da eigentlich?

Nun ist die Frage nach der Substanz der Fotografie keineswegs neu. Sie begleitet die Fotografie seit ihrer Geburt – und das ist immerhin fast 200 Jahre her. Dass sie an Aktualität nichts verloren hat, halt in Eileen Quinlans Ausstellung „Wait for It“ (Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen in Düsseldorf, bis 31. August) so unaufhörlich nach, dass man ihr kaum entweichen kann. Aber warum? Bei Quinlan fallen alle gewohnten Definitionen von Bild, Objekt und Produkt ineinander. Rigoros testet sie die Bestimmungen des Mediums aus. Greift auf analoge Techniken zurück wie Mittel- und Großbildkameras. Nutzt den Polaroidfilm Typ 55, der Positive und Negative auswirft, und defekte Flachbretts Scanner.

Nach dem Studium 2005 entschließt sie sich, ausnahmslos im Atelier zu arbeiten. Mit Spiegeln, Farbgeles, Lichtspots und Repro-Stativ fotografiert sie

wie New Yorks erfolgreiche Produktfotografen. Nur hat sie weder ein Produkt, noch entwirft sie ein Narrativ. Sie bezeichnet sich kurzerhand als „still life photographer“. Aber es genügt Eileen Quinlan nicht, einfach nur Bilder zu entwerfen. Sie interessiert das Fotografische, die Zirkulation von Fotografien, ihre mediale Rezeption und das Distributionssystem der Kunst.

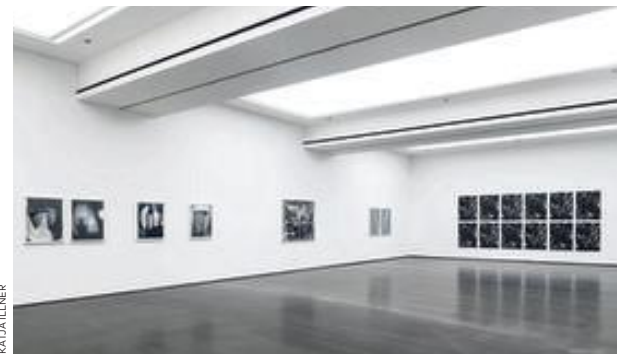
Im Jahr 2006 erklärt sie eine Fotografie in einer Fünferauflage zu einem verkäuflichen Gesamtwerk und nennt es einfach „The Full Edition of Smoke & Mirrors # 24A“. Zehn Jahre später das Gegenteil: Das Scannerabbild „Mind Craft“ (2015) ist in unendlicher Auflage verfügbar. Es wird auf Nachfrage produziert. Erworben hat es bisher nur ein Sammler für einen Preis von 20.000 Dollar. Glücklicher Besitzer eines Originals? Die Verwirrung, die Quinlan stiftet, scheint zu wirken.

Es ist ein Coup des Düsseldorfer Kunstvereins, das Werk der 47-jährigen, in Boston geborenen Quinlan endlich nach Deutschland zu holen. In der Fotostadt Düsseldorf, die von den mächtigen Bildwelten von Andreas Gursky, aber auch von Thomas Ruff, Candida Höfer oder Thomas Struth geprägt ist, entwickeln Quinlans Bilder eine unglaubliche Dringlichkeit. Sie verführen nicht, sondern zerlegen vor unseren Augen das Wirkungssystem von Fotografie. In den Vereinigten Staaten ist Quinlan bereits in allen renommierten Sammlungen vertreten, vom MoMA über das Metropolitan Museum bis hin zum LACMA in Los Angeles. 2017 wurde sie von der Kuratorin Christine Marcel zur Biennale von Venedig eingeladen. Mit Galerien wie Miguel Abreu (New York) und Campoli Presti (Paris/London) arbeitet sie seit Jahren zusammen.

Fragt man Miguel Abreu, dann hält er die Entwicklung Quinlans für progressiv und nachhaltig. Zwar hätte die Öffentlichkeit viel zu verdauen gehabt, bei der Komplexität, mit der sich ihr Werk über die letzten zehn Jahren entwickelte, aber ihre Einzelausstellung in Düsseldorf und eine kommende Beteiligung



Naturdokumentation oder Stilleben? Fotografie oder Objekt? Eileen Quinlan, „After Winter“, 2004–2010



Blick in die Ausstellung „Wait for It“ im Düsseldorfer Kunstverein

an einer bedeutenden Fotoausstellung im Mumok (Wien) festigen ihren Ruf – und ihren Markt. Abreu will daher ihre Präsenz auf internationalen Kunstmes- sen intensivieren. Auch auf dem Sekundärmarkt ist Quinlan zu finden, etwa bei Auktionen von Philipps und Sotheby's. Hier kursieren vor allem ihre abstrakten Stilleben wie „Smoke & Mirrors # 97“ (2006) oder „Cock Rock“ (2011). Die Schätzwerte liegen bei bis zu 6000 Dollar. Die Galerie handelt die Fotografien zwischen 7000 und 20.000

Dollar. Für die zwölfteilige Arbeit „Twinned Mitsouko“ (2008–2015) werden 100.000 Dollar verlangt.

Bei der Erfolgsgeschichte will es nicht recht passen, dass Quinlans letzte institutionelle Einzelausstellung im ICA in Philadelphia eine Dekade zurückliegt. Aber vielleicht hat sich das Warten auch gelohnt? Das Werk ist in den letzten Jahren differenzierter, beinahe politisch, feministisch und persönlicher geworden. Neuere Arbeiten wie „Mass Killings“ (2016) versammeln

gefundene Online-Fotos, die Einschusslöcher in Fensterscheiben zeigen. Sie zeugen von den grausamen Attentaten in Norwegen und Paris. Silbergelatine-Drucke wie „Good Enough“ (2015) zeigen Quinlans reifen Frauenkörper, den sie mit einer kleinen Digitalkamera im Badezimmer aufnahm. Frontal presst sie ihren Schambereich und ihre Brüste gegen die Glaswand der Dusche. Die Wassertropfen stehen noch auf dem Glas. Eine Reflexion des Gegenlichts zeichnet sich im Hintergrund ab. Aber Quinlan bleibt nicht beim Körperbild. Sie zeigt die Materialität der Fotografie – ihr Wesen –, die Fotografie als Objekt. Dafür lässt sie den Zufall walten. Digitaldrucke fotografiert sie wieder ab, verändert die Lichtverhältnisse oder greift mit Entwicklerlösung und Stahlwolle ihre Polaroids an. Diese Bilder wollen so gar nicht den vom männlichen Blick geprägten Repräsentationen von Weiblichkeit entsprechen, die man aus dem Alltag so gut kennt.

Vielleicht ist die Vergänglichkeit des Materials das Reizvolle? Ein „gutes“ Bild genügt der Künstlerin gerade einmal als Ausgangsmaterial für einen erweiterten Arbeitsprozess. Die Bildoberflächen werden beschädigt, zerkratzt, mit Fingerabdrücken versehen, manch-

mal werden sogar zentrale Bildmotive komplett gelöscht. Für „Another Failed Portrait“ (2013) hat sie die Chemiekapsel eines unbelichteten Polaroidfilms auslaufen lassen, bevor sie ein Porträt ihrer Zwillingsschwester erneut abfotografierte. Quinlan macht das operativ-technische Gemachtsein sichtbar, wehrt sich gegen Marktängigkeit, stellt der Werbefotografie eine fühl- und spürbare Materialität entgegen. Was zählt, ist das Spannungsverhältnis zwischen Bild und Abbild.

Ausgestellt und verkauft werden ihre Werke als Silbergelatine- oder Digitaldrucke, große Abzüge ihrer Polaroids oder Scannerbilder. Aber Quinlan wäre eben nicht Quinlan, wenn sie nicht mit den Konventionen brechen würde, die sich in ihr eigenes Werk einzuschleichen drohen. 2018 zeigte sie in ihrer New Yorker Galerie Miguel Abreu auch ihre Polaroidpositive. Nun stehen die Originale aus ihrem Zehn-Jahres-Archiv zum Verkauf. Quinlan stellt die systematische Frage nach der Bedeutung von Fotografie. „Für mich sind die Geschichten das Problem“, sagt sie dem Künstler Walead Beshty im Interview. Ihre Suche endet nicht mit dem Bild, sondern beginnt da, wo Bilder zu Objekten werden.

ARTFORUM



Eileen Quinlan, *The Otter*, 2016, gelatin silver print, 25 x 20".

DÜSSELDORF

Eileen Quinlan

KUNSTVEREIN FÜR DIE RHEINLANDE UND
WESTFALEN

Grabbplatz 4

May 18–August 11

Eileen Quinlan's photographic work, of which this exhibition selects from roughly a ten-year period, shows the artist's consistent return to material experimentation and clear investment in lens-based processes of imagemaking. Contrary to its title, though, "Wait For It" is impatient to start. Already hung outside the gallery space are twenty unframed black-and-white photographs of yoga mats. With their soft folds paying reference to Judy Chicago's vaginal

abstractions in *The Dinner Party*, 1974–79, the series "Christina," 2012, is also where the camera lens meets the texture of vinyl, emphasizing the haptic in Quinlan's work and serving as a reminder of how photography, through pure light and shade, lends itself to this particular merger.

On a far wall, the twelve framed mirrors of *Ghost Grid*, 2016, reflect the surrounding space back into a familiar modernist structure. Here, the grid is less the domineering art-historical presence it secured in the last century than an apparition of sorts, as suggested by its title. While voiding the pictorial image, this work reaffirms a spectral quality rife in Quinlan's practice—from the spiritual in daily exercise to the illusionism of staging—that can be traced back to early spirit photography and, more recently, to David Askevold and Mike Kelley's "The Poltergeist," 1974–79.

The mirror image appears elsewhere, too. Suggesting a move toward a biocentric consideration of the subject, portraits of the artist's twin sister (*Lady* and *Sister*, both 2013) are shown together with low-res images of a fox's head and a swimming otter (*The Fox* and *The Otter*, both 2016). If Quinlan's photographic work is recurrent, it shows not just an ongoing dedication to the medium, but also a consistent return to personal reflection and subjective concerns. Whether this is implied by a yoga mat or her own body pressed up against a shower cubicle (*Good Enough*, 2015), Quinlan repeatedly pushes forth surface contact.

— Saim Demircan

Eileen Quinlan

Between Substrate and Sublimate

BY THOMAS MCDONOUGH

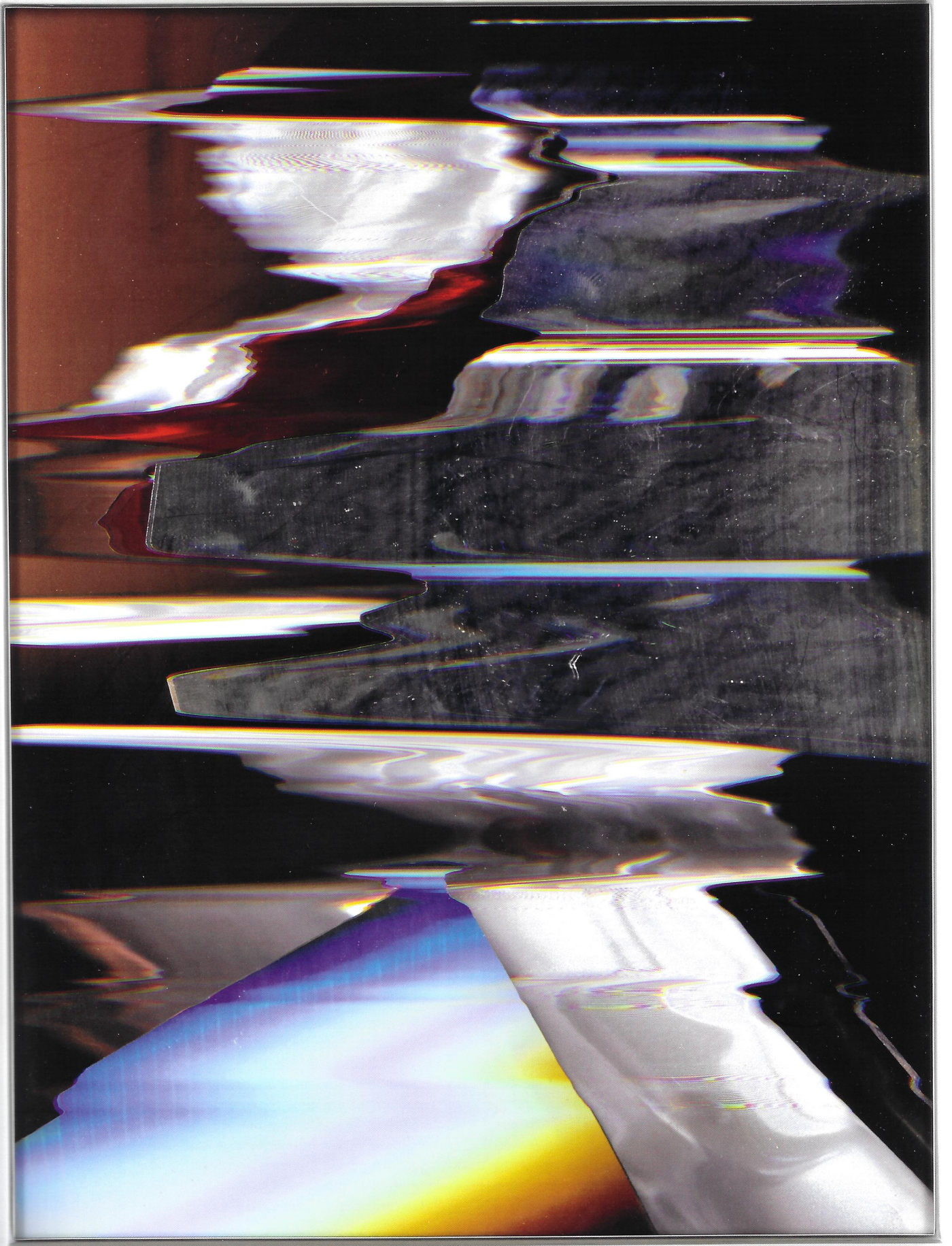
While studying for her visual arts MFA at Columbia University School of the Arts in the early 2000s, Eileen Quinlan became fascinated by spirit photography—images of ghosts, auras, ectoplasm, and other occult phenomena that proliferated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Such an interest was not uncommon at the time, as witnessed by The Metropolitan Museum of Art's authoritative exhibition of 2005, *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult*, which assembled a wide array of seldom-seen photographs from public collections and private archives. One suspects that this rather widespread focus on spirit photography had its roots in more than simple antiquarian curiosity or a taste for the eccentric: it allowed, perhaps, a displaced means to reconsider the ontological status of the photograph at a moment when its truth claims were the subject of some anxiety as the full advent of the digital regime seemed to place them under distinct threat. Within this debate, spirit photography in its very constructedness offered some signal reassurances: as Tom Gunning has argued, "faking [the] photograph has a long history and was always possible given the processes that intervene or shape the indexical process as it becomes a picture [but] the practice of faking or counterfeiting can only exist when true coin of the realm exists as well. Rather than denying photography's truth claim, the practice of faking photographs depends upon and demonstrates it."

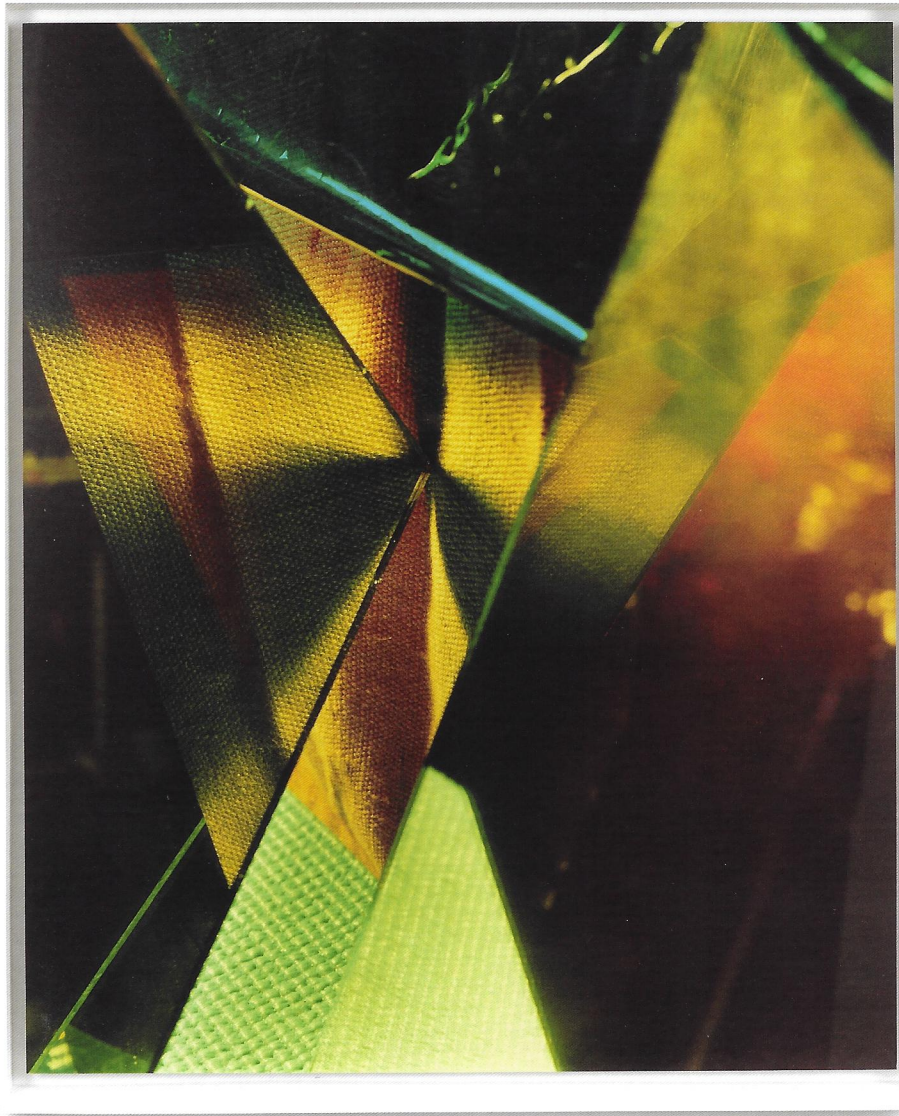
After some experiments with her own versions of spirit photography, which she deemed unsuccessful, in 2004 Quinlan began the extended series she called "Smoke & Mirrors", in which she used medium- and large-format cameras to capture curls and clouds of smoke reflected in arrangements of tilted mirrors, lit by studio strobes and colored by reflections bouncing off materials like Mylar or aluminum foil. These were basically tabletop still lifes, constructions staged in the studio for the camera; as she repeatedly emphasized, they were analogue images and not subject to any darkroom manipulation—"stubborn enigmas," as Kristen Jones in *frieze* called them, for the eye and mind. The influence of the formalism of a Jan Groover or Barbara Kasten is apparent, although now pushed toward the ontological dilemmas of the present. The title directly references the materials used in their construction, while also signaling their engagement with contemporary questions around the truth claims of photography. In a 2009 interview, Quinlan said of the "Smoke & Mirrors" works that they "allowed me to telegraph their subject matter as both stubborn fact and sleight of hand. The imperfections they bore (settling dust, a scratch on the surface of a mirror) and an undeniably photographic rendering of the smoke that curled its way toward the heat of a modeling lamp, were necessary in order to tether them

to the things in front of the lens, away from a painterly or subjective reading."

The techniques Quinlan mobilized in these works had their roots in commercial photography. Upon moving to New York in 1999, a few years after completing her BFA at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, she worked as an assistant to Jack Miskell in his studio on lower Broadway, working with him on product shoots for clients such as Dove, Clinique, and L'Oréal. As she told Walead Beshty in a 2009 conversation, "most of the things that I do in the studio—the ways that I set up pieces of foam or even the mirrors I use—come directly from that way of shooting." Her basic setup, a few lights, a few colored gels, a small table, and 2x2-foot mirrors from Home Depot, were more or less the materials of the commercial photographer. Indeed, even her palette and lighting closely echoed those found in stock photography or advertisements for perfume or liquor. "Product photography without the product" was one way she described her efforts in these years. Her play with photography's truthfulness was, in other words, staged on the grounds of the equally unstable nature of the commodity fetish—or rather, upon the theatrical codes deployed to ensure the fetish's successful functioning. (Here I am reminded of the underappreciated work of Frank Majore, who in the early 1980s explored precisely these seductive strategies of the advertising image.) Although she would quickly be taken up by art-world advocates for an "abstract" photography—a version of the zombie formalism haunting painting in these same years—Quinlan has rightly resisted that rubric; the references to commercial photography embedded in these works insist instead on a particular social / ideological sitedness, "so that the work isn't understood as purely formal, as being untainted by my time and experience," she has explained.

"I was thinking about alienation in a Brechtian sense," Quinlan told Beshty, "about revealing what was at work in the process of viewing, of constructing meaning within a photograph." Much has been made of her concerns with the photograph's "materiality," with the photograph as a "substrate" for the image, with the question of the "image support." While these are undoubtedly central terms in her practice, the reference to Brecht might remind us that her works are at least as concerned with the photograph as *sublimate* as they are with the photograph as substrate. Or, to put it more bluntly, they are as much about materialism as materiality. By "sublimate," I am thinking of the passage in Marx's *The German Ideology* in which he deploys this chemical process to describe the production of ideological superstructures: "The phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process,





Black Friday, 2011

which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises.” Morality, religion, and, yes, art, are like chemical products obtained by sublimation, that is, by the transformation of what is solid into something vaporous—for Marx, the process by which humanity’s material production and intercourse is transformed into its thinking and the products of that thinking is well-nigh physical. For Quinlan, the photograph necessarily hovers in the space between “sublimate”—alienated, ideological, phantomlike—and “substrate.”

This is not a dynamic internal to the artwork alone. From early in the production of “Smoke & Mirrors,” Quinlan recognized that mobilizing “alienation in a Brechtian sense” would entail more than a concern with what occurred within the frame of the individual photograph; the “frame” would in fact have to encompass the cultural and economic system within which it circulated. Beginning in 2006, she selected certain examples of this series for exceptional treatment: rather than displaying the photograph as a

singular work, she would exhibit the entire edition (conventionally, five prints and an artist’s proof) together and sell it as a “unique” work. First attempted in a group show at The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts in Chelsea early that year (with *The Full Edition of Smoke & Mirrors* #88, 2006), this strategy would become widely known when she included *The Full Edition of Smoke & Mirrors* #24A (2006) in a solo show at Sutton Lane in London later in 2006. As she explained to Beshty, “in that piece I was looking for a way to encourage people to focus less on the image and more on the distribution form itself, the construct of editioning. . . . I wanted to make it clear that my struggle didn’t end with manifesting an image, but extended to grappling with photographs as objects.” Quinlan has periodically continued to question the conventions of reproduction and display in her work, exposing the artificial scarcity imposed by the market for photography by displaying all exemplars of an edition side-by-side as a single piece, or even combining two sets



New Directions #2, 2010

together into twelve-panel works, as in *Backdrop and Bandit* (2008), for example, or *Double Charlie* (2015). In the 2009 conversation with Beshty, after she explains her rationale for such works, he speaks of an opposed logic, that of the open-editioned work; seven years later, her winter 2016 exhibition at Miguel Abreu included *Mind Craft* (2016), a large-format color c-print in an unlimited edition—a print will be made for each collector who purchases it. If the full editions exacerbated the logic of scarcity imposed on the fine art photograph, *Mind Craft* plays with that promise of value, acknowledging its potentially infinite reproducibility. On an adjacent wall hung *Ghost Grid*, twelve mirrors stacked vertically in a 4 x 3 arrangement like phantoms of her earlier interventions, and reminders of her longstanding tools of the trade.

For even as her work has evolved, mirrors remain a significant element. Some of her most striking recent work, such as *Monument Valley*, *Twin Galaxies*, *Agro*, or *Goo World*

(all 2016, and all named for video games or gaming services), has been made using a flatbed scanner across which she slides mirrors, which reflect back the scanner's light into the lens, producing strange distortions, iridescent smears, staggerings, and flares. These are not so much "imageless" photographs as ones in which the disintegration of the image itself is presented and the underlying technology is laid bare. Their peculiar beauty was forecast one year earlier in her *Fried Sensor* (2015), her first work using a (broken) scanner; a critic described how the "gaze finds no traction" in such a work, which seems right if by "gaze" we mean the search for some echoing intelligence in the object of our attention, some mirroring of our own look. Quinlan instead gives us the nonhuman lens of the scanner, a troubling new vision that displaces our expectations of the photographic image and presents us instead with this field of "aleatory eventfulness"—the term is Barry Schwabsky's—poised precisely between sublime and substrate.

BATONS AND BARRIERS

A PORTFOLIO BY EILEEN QUINLAN

In these speculographs, an invented term that derives from the Latin for "mirror drawing," hands hold rallying, punishing batons, fences create distance and halt movement. Some of these photos were made by two flatbed scanners having sex—or maybe just chatting: They lay on top of each other scanning simultaneously, talking stridently at once, just like everyone seems to do in public these days. I'm thinking about the echo chamber we create when we don't challenge our perspectives, and how our words can fly around the globe in minutes while, in physical space, doors, barriers, and fences are repeatedly erected to prevent movement; to keep people from leaving bad situations and finding better ones. Everywhere I look, materials have become symbolic. I can't see a piece of gold foil without thinking about ostentatious luxury and the trauma of precarity. The gilded penthouse, the emergency blanket. It's like Echo and Narcissus, stuck in their cursed loops. She can only finish other people's sentences; he can't see beyond himself.

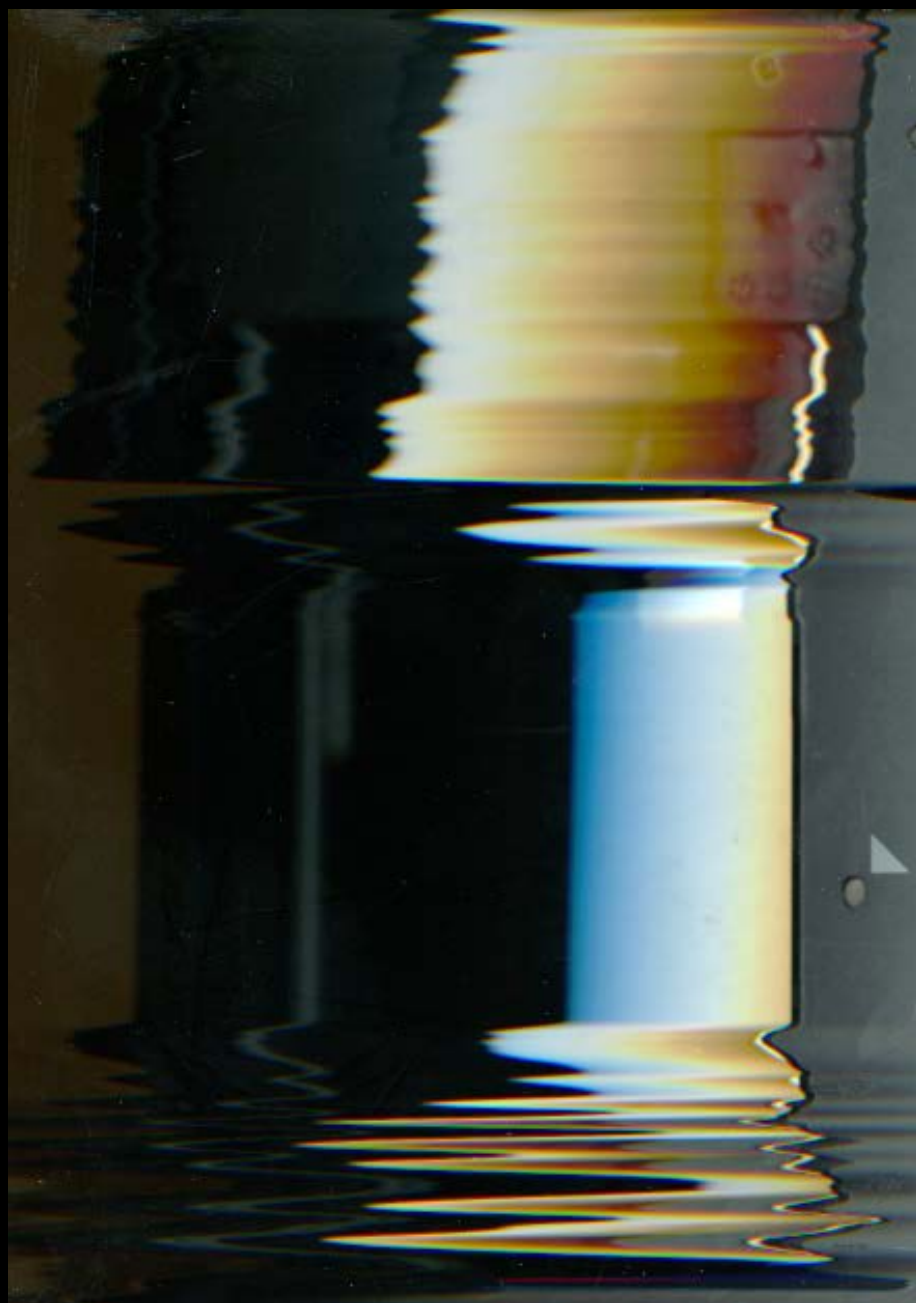
ALL IMAGES: EILEEN QUINLAN, CAMPOLI PRESTI GALLERY, LONDON AND PARIS, MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY, NEW YORK

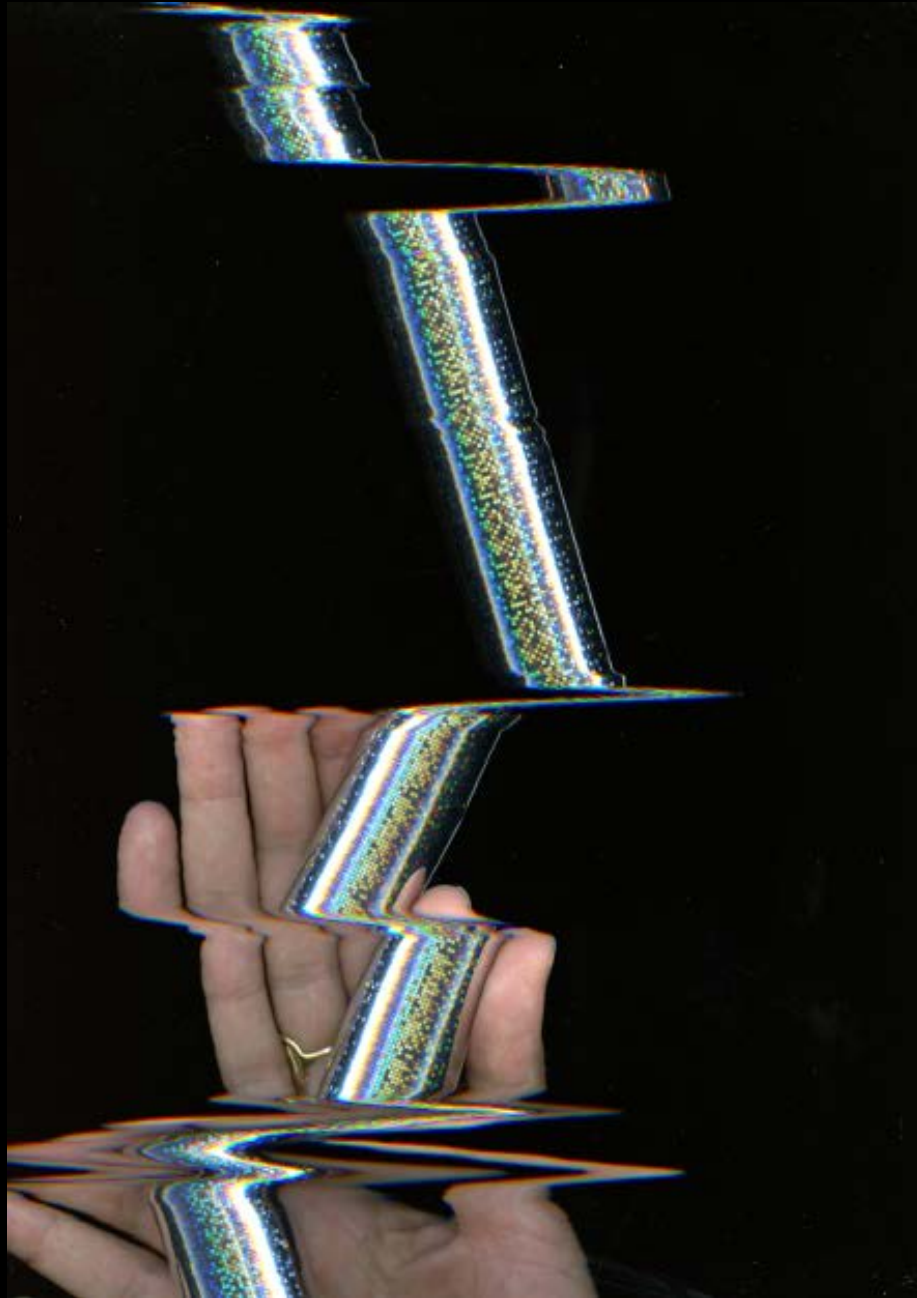


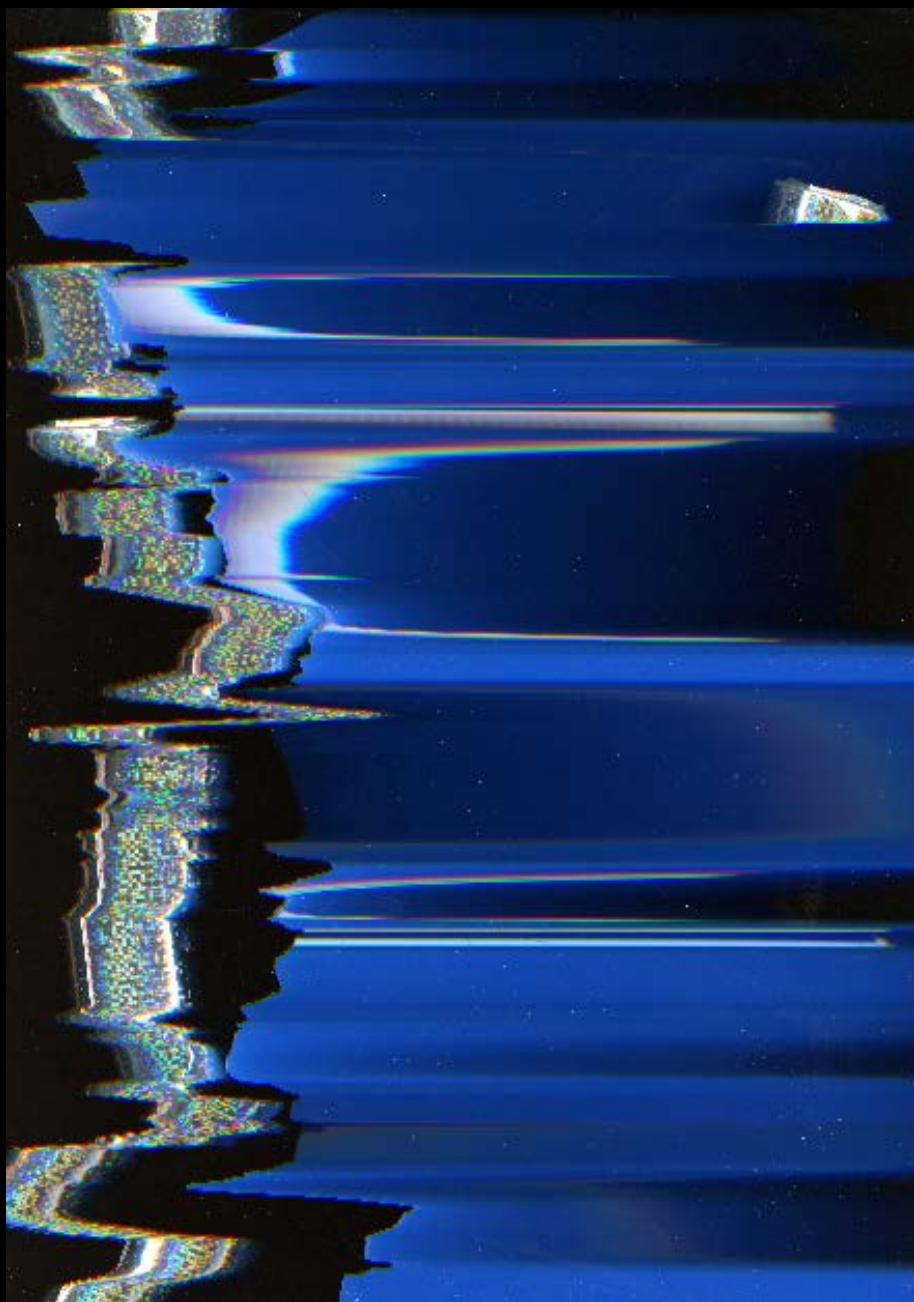




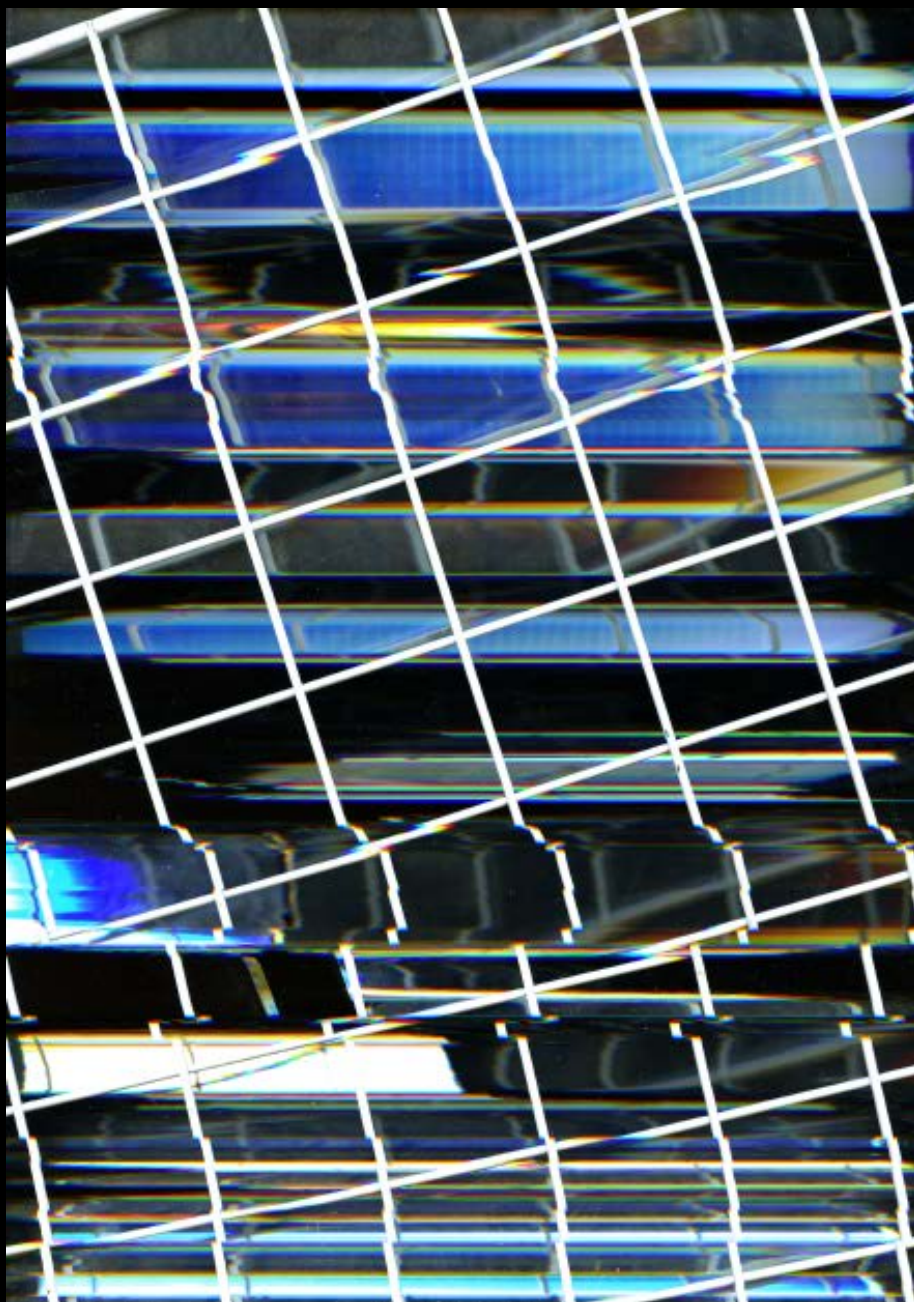


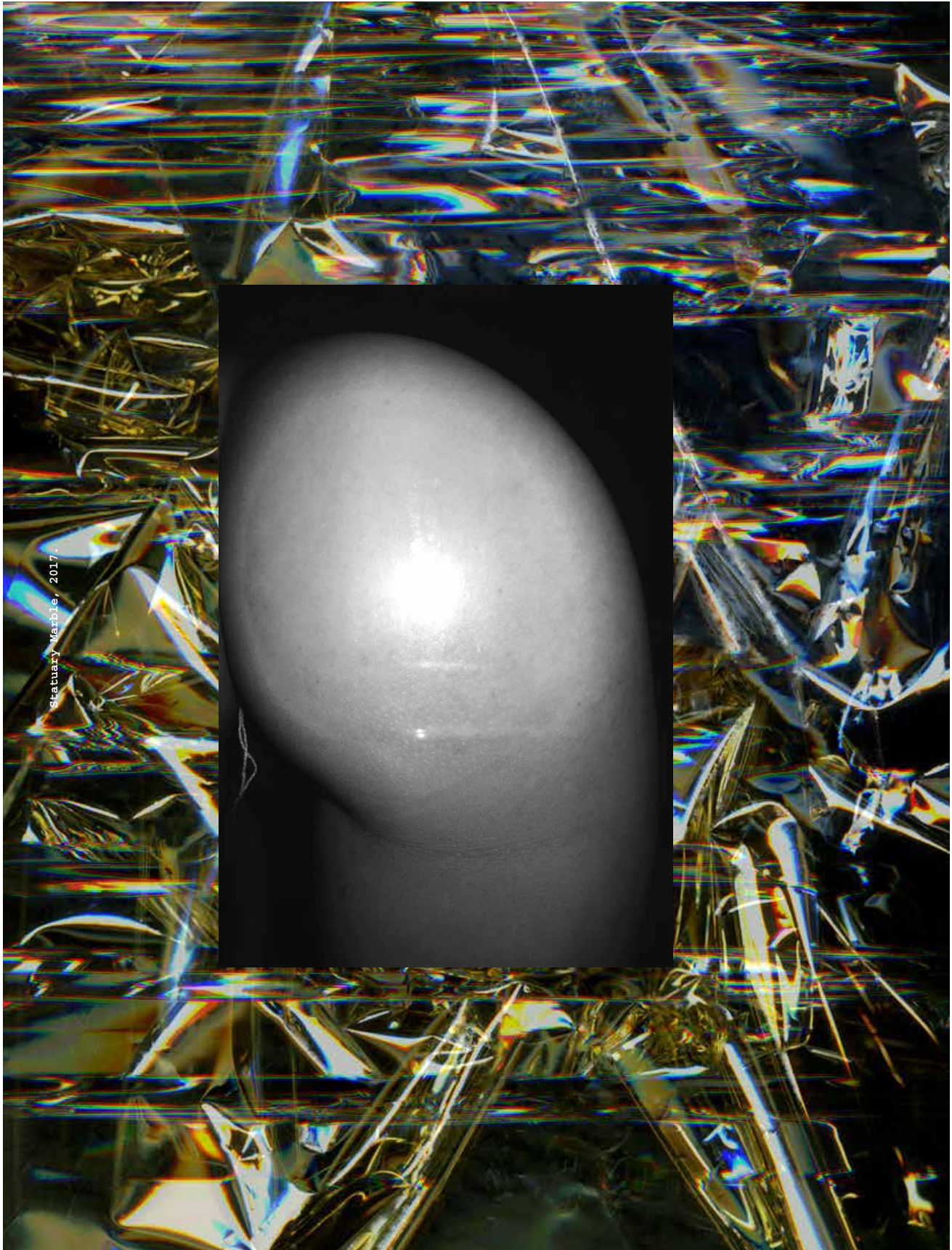












BROCOCO



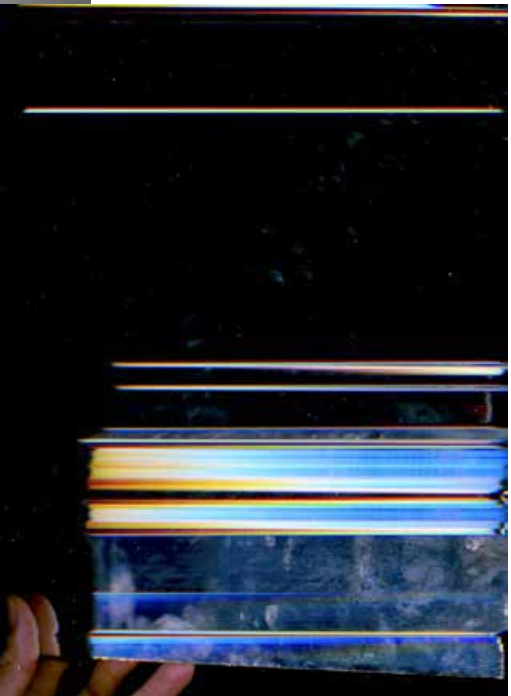
Smoke & Mirrors #18, 2005.

Gold, Marmor, Männlichkeit: In den Bildern, die die US-amerikanische Fotografin Eileen Quinlan für Monopol zusammengestellt hat, glitzert die alte, jetzt wieder sehr aktuelle Hybris der Macht. Nichts beunruhigt diese Oberflächen so sehr wie die unergündliche Präsenz des Körpers

Marred Social Development, 2017.



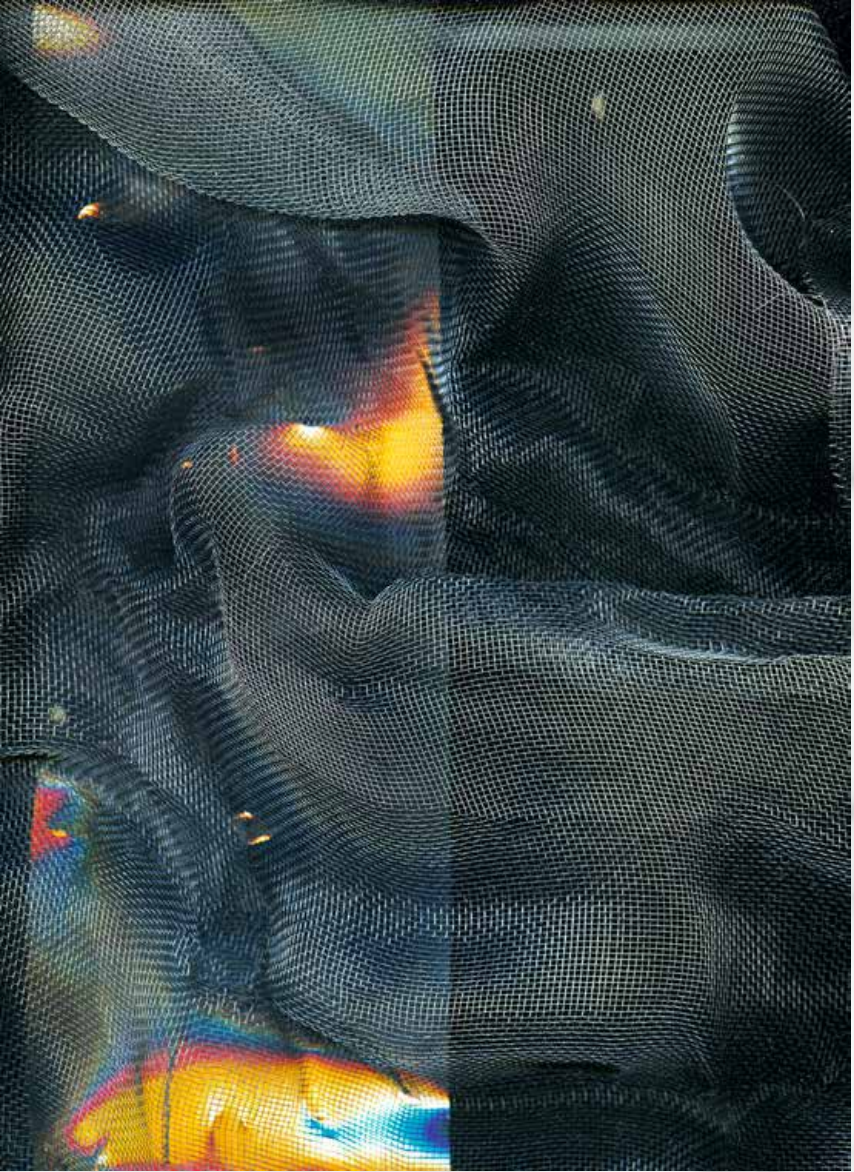
clockwise from top: Statuary Marble #2, 2017. Scribbleonaut, 2015. Sandbox (Homs), 2017.



Atlantian Liner, 2015.



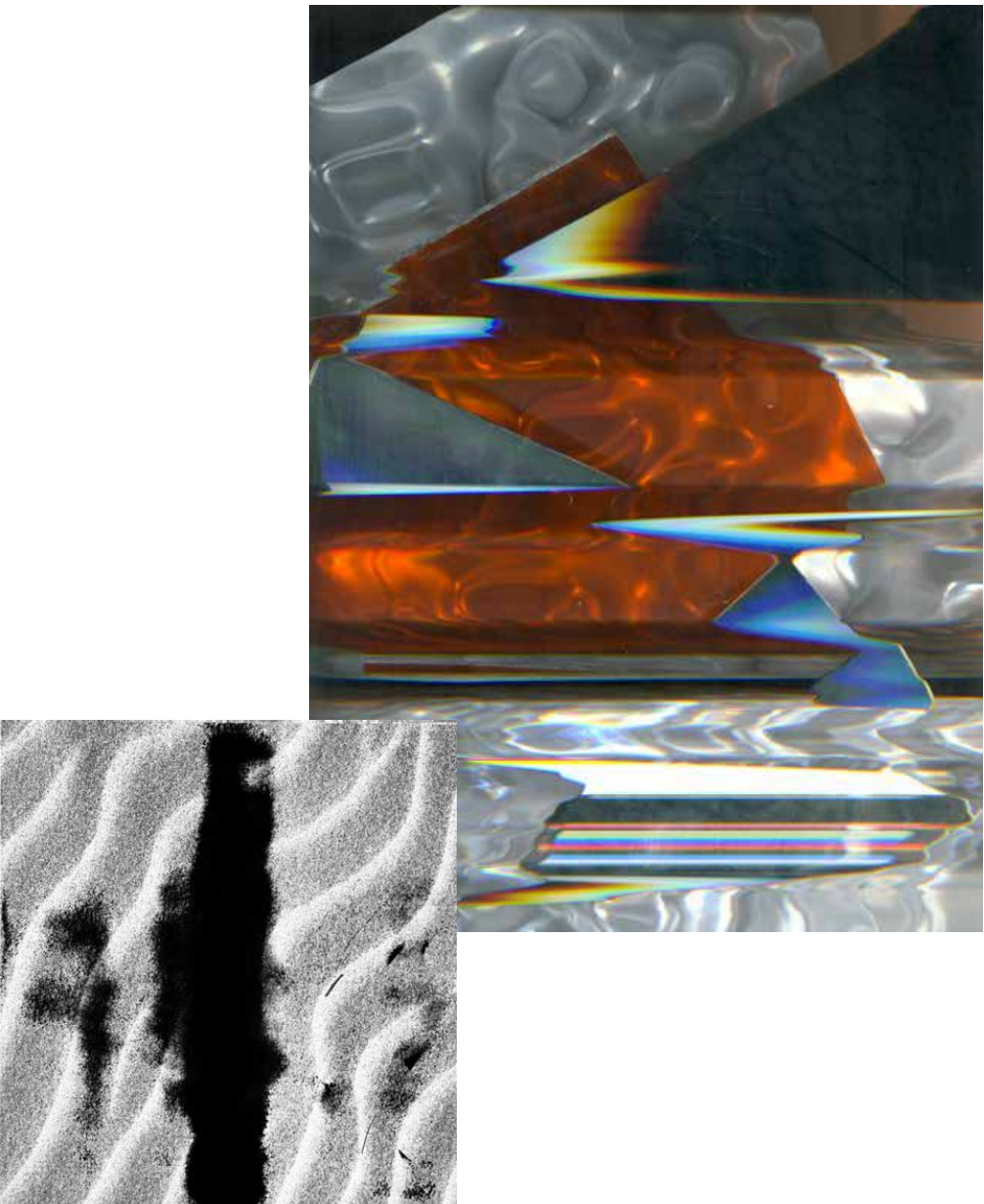
Galaxy S7, 2017.





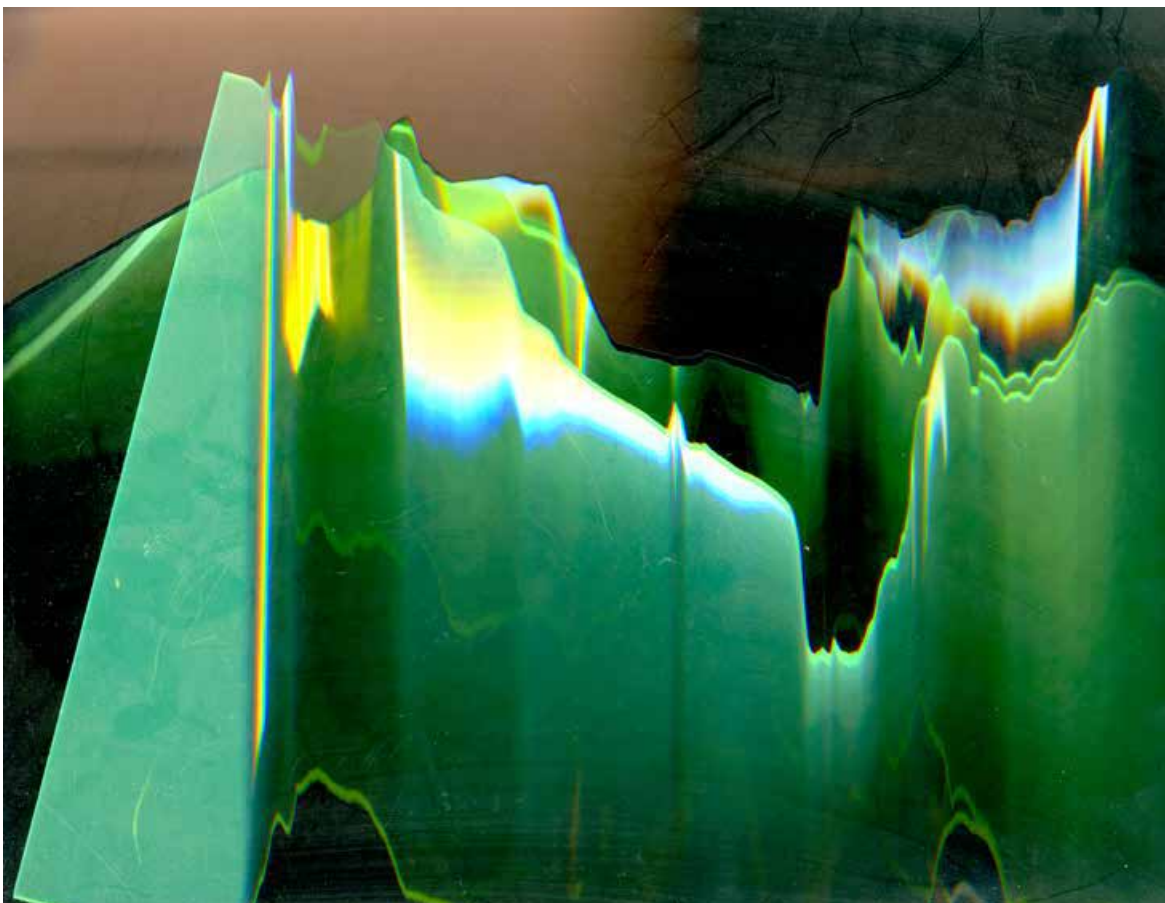
clockwise from top left: My Nightmare, 2017. Wayland Wood, 2015. Intallevison, 2017

Woolly World, 2015 (the color image) . Paradox Basin, 2017.



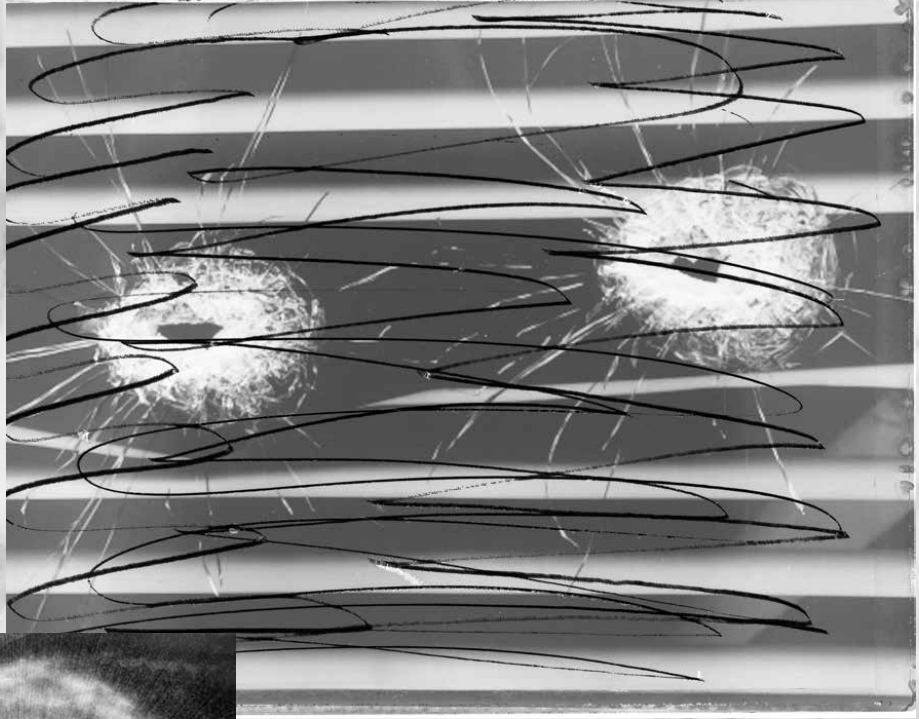
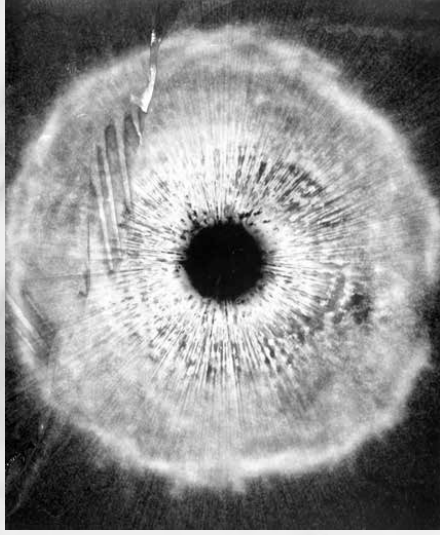
Solarized Fun Bag, 2017.

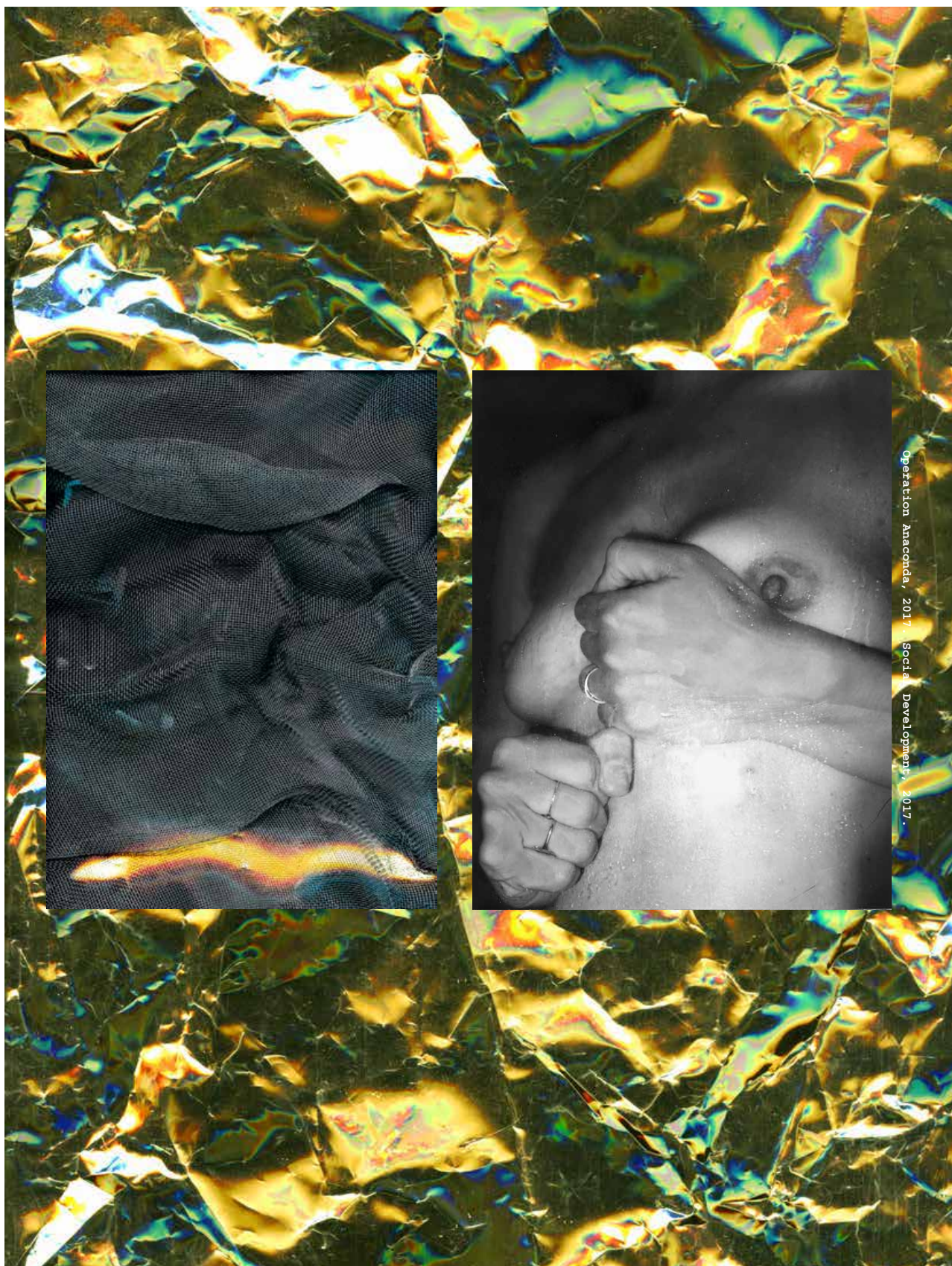




Green Graph, 2015.

down from top: Aftermath, 2017. An Aperture, 2017. Luigi's Nightmare, 2017.







ON

Eva Respini

DEFIANCE

Experimentation as resistance

APERTURE 100

Sara VanDerBeek,
Concrete Forms, 2015
Courtesy the artist and
Metro Pictures, New York



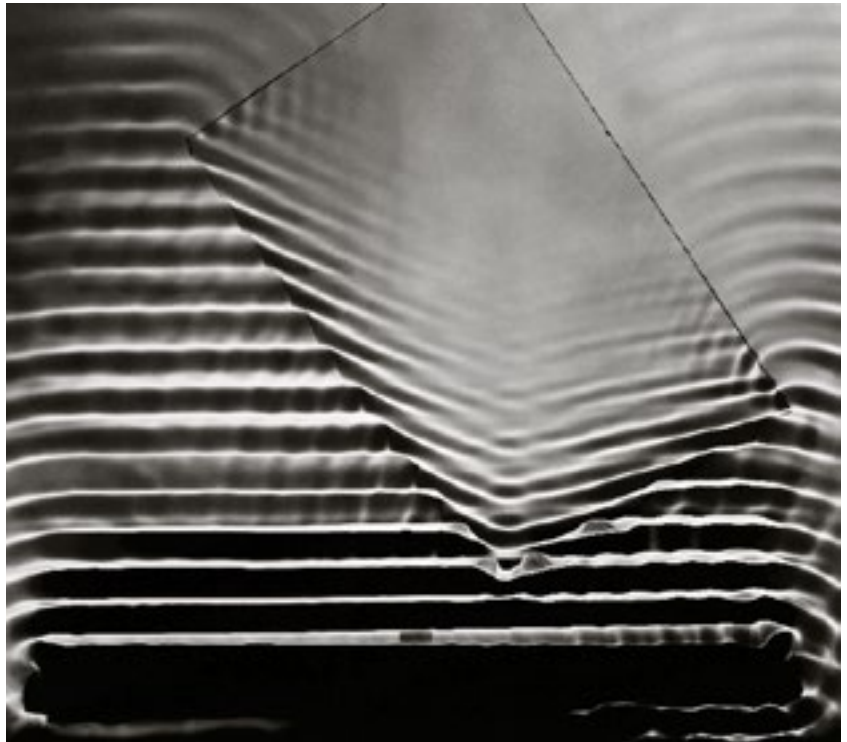
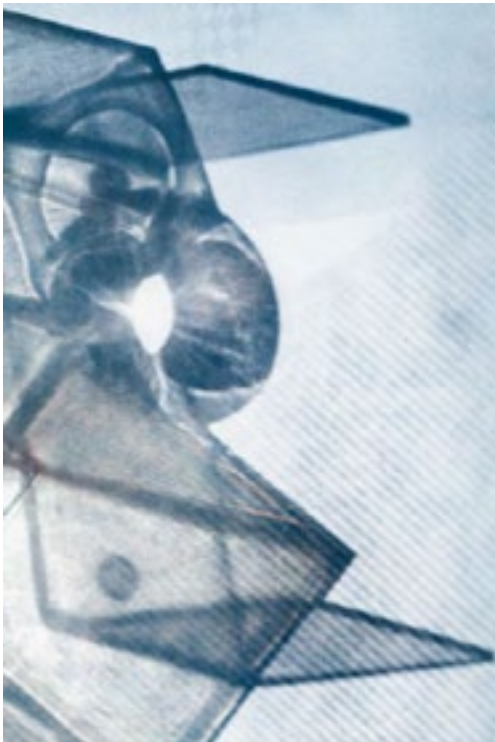
Below, left:
Miranda Lichtenstein,
Last Exit, 2013
Courtesy the artist

Below, right:
Berenice Abbott, *Water
waves change direction*,
1958–61
© Berenice Abbott/
Getty Images

In 1971, Linda Nochlin famously asked in the title of an essential essay, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” Lamenting the meager representation of women in art, she declared: “There *are* no women equivalents for Michelangelo or Rembrandt, Delacroix or Cézanne, Picasso or Matisse, or even, in very recent times, for de Kooning or Warhol.” In the heated debates of second-wave feminism, these dialogues were crucial and vital, and were essential to creating a more pluralistic narrative of art in the twentieth century. But those conversations rarely included photography—or film, or architecture, or design, for that matter—art forms that were *other*.

Photography is now our lingua franca—it is the dominant medium of our image-saturated era. Over the last half century photography has joined the ranks of painting and sculpture in the art market and the museum (this May, for instance, the newly expanded San Francisco Museum of Modern Art dedicated an unprecedented 15,500 square feet to photography). Recent years have also seen a spate of women-only exhibitions, including the Centre Pompidou’s 2010 *elles@centrepompidou* featuring works from their collection, the Musée d’Orsay’s *Who’s Afraid of Women Photographers? 1839–1945* (2015–16), and *Revolution in the Making: Abstract Sculpture by Women, 1947–2016* (2016) at Hauser Wirth & Schimmel in Los Angeles.

Despite exhibitions to further the visibility of women artists, many museums have fallen short of presenting balanced and diverse programs. In 2007, the Museum of Modern Art came under fire for its lack of female representation in its permanent galleries, with critic Jerry Saltz tallying a pitiful 3.5 percent of the art on view from their collection as being by women. But his numbers reflected displays from the collections of painting and sculpture only, not the collections of architecture and design, drawings and prints, and photography, where there were more works by women on view (although still not 50 percent). As a curator working at MoMA at the time, I was acutely aware of the imbalance, but dismayed by Saltz’s limited (and retrograde) view of art. In fact, MoMA was in the midst of organizing *Pictures by Women: A History of Modern Photography* (2010–11), an exhibition (of which I was a cocurator) that surveyed the history of photography with some two hundred works by women. This is all to say that even in the early twenty-first century, photography is still *other*.



This century has witnessed a boom of women artists investigating the possibilities of the photographic medium in new and exciting ways. Artists such as Liz Deschenes, Sara VanDerBeek, Eileen Quinlan, Miranda Lichtenstein, Erin Shirreff, Anne Collier, Mariah Robertson, and Leslie Hewitt all defy the dominant idea of a photograph as an observation of life, a window onto the world. While each artist possesses her own aesthetic language and artistic concerns, as a whole, their practices represent a look inward—to the studio, still life, rephotography, material experimentation, abstraction, and nonrepresentation. Driven by a profound engagement with the medium, these artists have created a dynamic domain for experimentation that has taken contemporary photography by storm.

It's certainly risky to create a binary of "traditional" photography, which claims an indexical relationship to the world, versus the avant-garde tradition that considers the properties of photography itself: its circulation, production, and reproduction. As curator Matthew S. Witkovsky notes, "Abstraction ... is not photography's secret common denominator, nor is it the antidote to 'traditional' photography." Recent scholarship has gone a long way to recuperate, and problematize, the status of experimental photography within photographic discourse. Nevertheless, throughout photography's history, the avant-garde tradition has been considered an "alternate" to the dominant understanding of photography. Can an argument be made that women have found fertile ground in the underchampioned arena of nonconventional image making? Have the historic marginalizations (of photography, avant-garde experimentation, and women artists) contributed to the vitality we see today? Can working against photographic convention, in a medium that is still sometimes considered *other*, be viewed as an act of defiance? It's also challenging to make an argument based on gender (or race, sexuality, geography), since men have undoubtedly made accomplished work in the avant-garde tradition. Do we still need to discuss gender? Do we need exhibitions of women artists to shine the spotlight on underrecognized practices?

I think so. At the time of this writing, Hillary Clinton has clinched the Democratic nomination for president, but the threat to reproductive rights and women's scant representation in boardrooms and in government confirm that there is still much work to do. In the arts, there is marked gender inequality. Last year *ARTnews* cited the paucity of solo exhibitions dedicated to women in major New York museums (and for women of color, it's even more dismal), and a 2014 study, "The Gender Gap in Art Museum Directorships," by the Association of Art Museum Directors, reports that female art museum directors earn substantially less than their male counterparts. While there has been some progress since Nochlin's rallying cry, the artists of this generation are more aware than ever of their roles in an imbalanced art world.

Photography has always been hospitable to women, and women have made some of the most radical accomplishments in nonconventional image making. It's a relatively new medium, free from the crushing millennia-long history of painting and sculpture. In its infancy, photography was practiced by scientists and alchemists, not artists. A photographer didn't have to be enrolled in the hallowed halls of the academy; she could cook it up in the kitchen. Victorian England saw the early botany experiments of Anna Atkins, narrative allegories by Lady Clementina Hawarden (featuring her daughters as sitters), and Julia Margaret Cameron's purposeful "misuse" of the wet collodion process to create her signature portraits. The proliferation of mass media and new camera and printing technologies in the early twentieth century ushered in radical collages by Hannah Höch, Bauhaus experiments by Lucia Moholy and Florence Henri, and the modernist compositions of Tina Modotti. Some women worked in isolation, like Lotte Jacobi,



Anna Atkins, *Convalaria Multiflora*, 1854
Courtesy the Getty's
Open Content Program

Can working against photographic convention, in a medium that is still sometimes considered *other*, be viewed as an act of defiance?



Eileen Quinlan,
Monument Valley, 2015
Courtesy the artist and
Miguel Abreu Gallery,
New York

who created her light drawings in seclusion in New Hampshire; others had patronage, such as Berenice Abbott, who was commissioned by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to make pictures of scientific phenomena. The postwar movements of pop art, land art, conceptual art, and performance art significantly incorporated photography—Hannah Wilke, Ana Mendieta, and Adrian Piper leaned heavily on photography, in all its uses. Their work is unfathomable without it.

The experimentation, manipulation, and disruption of photographic conventions of the early twentieth century reached a crescendo in the century's last decades. Art of the past forty years has set the stage for the dominance of contemporary experiments by women today. Since the 1970s there has been a plethora of women working in photography (some asserting they are artists "using photography," *not* photographers), including Cindy Sherman, Sherrie Levine, Sarah Charlesworth, Louise Lawler, Barbara Kasten, Lorna Simpson, Barbara Kruger, and Carrie Mae Weems. These artists share an interest in the status, power, and representation of both images and women within cultural production. They collectively challenge the chief tenets of traditional photography—originality, faithful reproduction, and indexicality. While we now refer to many of the women of this time period as Pictures Generation artists, Sherman recalls, in a 2003 issue of *Artforum*, the unprecedented prevalence of female practitioners:

In the later '80s, when it seemed like everywhere you looked people were talking about appropriation—then it seemed like a thing, a real presence. But I wasn't really aware of any group feeling.... What probably did increase the feeling of community was when more women began to get recognized for their work, most of them in photography.... I felt there was more of a support system then among the women artists. It could also have been that many of us were doing this other kind of work—we were using photography—but people like Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer were in there too. There was a female solidarity.

These women embraced the expansiveness of photography's parameters and have deeply informed, animated, and ultimately liberated the work of the artists who came after.

Recent years have witnessed a generation of women exploring new ground in the photographic medium. I spoke with several of them for this article. Liz Deschenes, whose work sits at the intersection of photography, sculpture, and architecture, is central to current conversations around nonrepresentational photography. Working between categories and disciplines, Deschenes is also deeply rooted in the histories of photographic technologies, challenging the notion of photography as a fixed discipline. Deschenes questions and resists all power structures, including binaries that confine works of art. Photography is frequently reduced to polarized classifications—color versus black and white, landscape versus portrait, analog versus digital, representation versus abstraction. As an educator, she underscores the medium's fluidity by introducing disregarded figures (often women) and so-called alternate histories into her teaching. Deschenes explains:

It does not make much sense for women to follow conventions. We have never been adequately included in the general dialogue around image production. I think women have carved out spaces in photography because for such a long time the stakes were so low or nonexistent, that there was no threat of a takeover. I believe that has shifted with the female-dominated Pictures Generation.

Barbara Kasten,
***Construct XIA*, 1981**
Courtesy the artist;
Bortolami, New York;
and Galerie Kadel Willborn,
Düsseldorf



Miranda Lichtenstein, whose lush images have revived the contemporary still life, similarly cites the influence of the Pictures Generation on her work:

I began working in nontraditional ways with photography because I wanted to push against the images around me (particularly of women). I used collage and alternative processes because it allowed me to transform and control the pictures I was appropriating. I studied under Joel Sternfeld, so “straight photography” was the dominant paradigm, but I was lucky enough to see work by women in the early 1990s that had a dramatic impact on me. Laurie Simmons, Sarah Charlesworth, Gretchen Bender, and Barbara Kruger were some of the artists whose work cleared a path for me.

As Lichtenstein suggests, these women opened avenues for new ways of observing and interrogating the image in today’s culture. In the digital age, where photographs are most often *images* (that is, JPEGs and TIFFs, not prints), Lichtenstein, Deschenes, and others affirm the material properties of the medium and contribute to a more malleable idea of photography within a historical continuum.

Photography’s history and its relationship to sculpture, media, and film technologies are central to Sara VanDerBeek’s work. Through carefully calibrated photographs of her own temporary sculptures, neoclassical sculptures, ancient edifices, and architectural details, VanDerBeek has developed an aesthetic language that deftly prods the relationship between photography and sculpture. In addressing the history of sculpture, she shifts a mostly male-dominated history into a contemporary female realm, where object



and image are leveled. VanDerBeek, whose recent art addresses “women’s work,” remarks:

This sense that there is a quality of impermanence to our progress [as women] leads me to photography. Specifically I’m referring to its expansive and elastic nature, its space for experimentation and its “democratic” nature. Photography has always been open to diverse practitioners and throughout its history it has included the possibility for expression for many who were not easily allowed into other arenas. I think some of this does come from its status as “other,” and perhaps, for me, even more so from its interdependent relationship with mass media and technology.

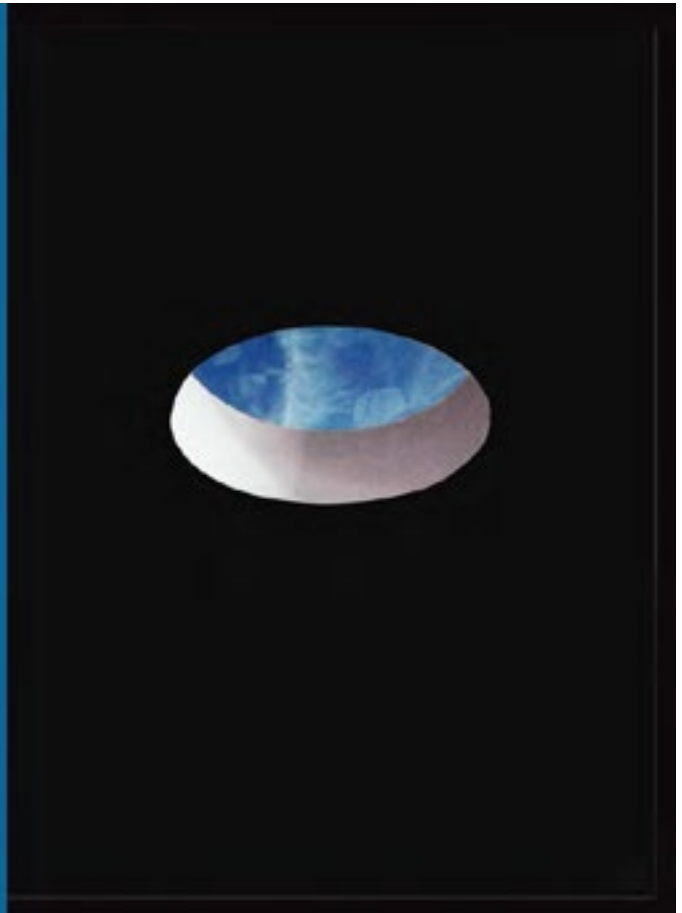
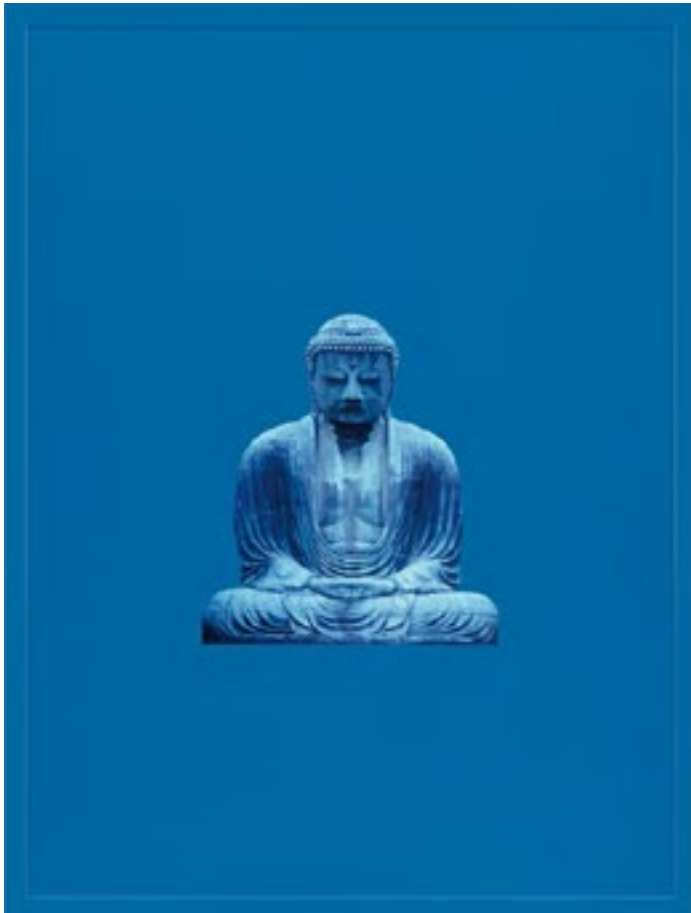
Eileen Quinlan, whose photographs are grounded in material culture, the history of abstraction, feminist history, and, most lately, the ubiquity of screens, cites the predominance of conventional photography curriculums as fomenting a type of resistance:

Photographers have always created constructed, nonobjective, and materially promiscuous pictures. But this history isn’t taught, and if it is alluded to, it’s mentioned derisively. Photography remains a male-dominated field, both in the commercial and fine art sectors, and is saturated with “straight” photographers who supposedly harness the medium’s “strengths,” that is, the ability to sharply and irrefutably record and depict a kind of truth about the world. Maybe women sense that taking unconventional approaches to photography will somehow afford us more room to move? Jan Groover was political when she made abstraction in the kitchen sink. Working with still life, setup, or self-portraiture isn’t only about investigating interior or domestic worlds,

This page:
Liz Deschenes, *Gallery 4.1.1*, installation at MASS MoCA, 2015. Photograph by David Dashiell
Courtesy the artist; MASS MoCA; Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York; and Campoli Presti, London/Paris

Opposite:
Sarah Charlesworth, *Buddha of Immeasurable Light*, 1987, from the series *Objects of Desire*
Courtesy the Estate of Sarah Charlesworth and Maccarone

Recent years have witnessed a generation of women exploring new ground in the photographic medium.



either. Women are more sensitive to the potential for exploitation when we photograph others ... as an artist I am consciously rejecting much I have been taught about pure photography as observation of reality. I understand all photographs to be made rather than taken or found.

Many of these female artists are educators, and in some cases their roles as teachers can be profoundly impactful. Deschenes asserts, "There is no domain within higher photography education that does not have a male authority and history inscribed in its hierarchies, curriculum, alumni, buildings, and more. To attempt to subvert any of that is certainly a political act." Perhaps the most important figure in this regard is Charlesworth. Deeply respected by younger artists (she is cited as an inspiration by those quoted here), Charlesworth created a vital link between her generation and the next. She taught, wrote about, conversed with, and empowered a new generation of artists working in experimental ways, who, in turn, have made community and dialogue central. Through her own groundbreaking work and her strong desire to build community among women artists, Charlesworth established a space for diverse photographic practices to flourish. Her advocacy for the medium and its continuation today by Deschenes, Lichtenstein, Quinlan, Hewitt, and VanDerBeek, who teach at prestigious schools, has unquestionably influenced the course of photographic history and how it is taught.

Like their work, each artist under discussion presents a different viewpoint on photography and so-called experimental practices. However, together they affirm that the medium has always been fluid and resistant to typologizing. Through exhibiting their work, teaching, publishing, and public and private conversations, these artists celebrate the inherently hybrid, pluralistic, and mutable nature of photography, within a robust

space for dialogue, debate, and, I would posit, defiance. As a curator who has worked with many of these figures, I have witnessed artists creating work, meaning, and community in arenas long hospitable to women but outside the mainstream, marshaling a shift from the periphery to the center. Artist Emily Roysdon, in the 2010 catalogue *Modern Women: Women Artists at the Museum of Modern Art*, perhaps expressed it best: artists today are not "protesting what we don't want but performing what we do want."

This essay was inspired by conversations with Liz Deschenes during the preparation of her survey exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston. I am also deeply indebted to a community of women who have met regularly over the past two years and whose conversations, ideas, and friendships have animated and informed my thinking on photography.

Eva Respini is the Barbara Lee Chief Curator at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston.

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS
New York

Eileen Quinlan

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY | ELDRIDGE STREET
88 Eldridge Street, 4th Floor
February 28–April 17

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY | ORCHARD STREET
36 Orchard Street
February 28–April 17

The parade of mysterious photographic works on view in Eileen Quinlan's new show fills both of this gallery's Lower East Side spaces, but also leaves them feeling strangely empty. The pieces are large but not grand, spaced farther apart than what's customary, and, altogether, have an unmooring effect. The potential significance or emotional resonance of any individual image—there's a regal fox, brambly woods, shattered glass, a sexy crotch shot, and many abstractions—is undercut by its puzzling, seemingly random (but clearly calculated) relationship to the others. In the unsettling search for Quinlan's subject matter among these quasi-placeholders, one guesses there's some stock photography in the mix—indeed, the press release confirms it. The shattered glass in *Paris Shot*, 2016, for example, is an image of a restaurant window damaged in November's terrorist attacks that the artist licensed from an agency and rephotographed. She adds her touch during the developing process with a chemical drip, cleaving the spider-webbed form in half.

This is one of many such spattered, flecked, or dripped-on black-and-white prints, left unframed, pinned to the wall like work for an art-school crit. As Quinlan puts contemporary photography—high, low, amateur, user-generated, corporate-controlled—through its paces, she employs the happy accidents of the increasingly unused darkroom. In contrast, the bigger color prints on view, mounted on Dibond and in metal frames, are portraits of the process of digitization itself: streaky nonpatterns made by sliding a mirror across a flatbed scanner at work. While their artifactual, glitchy qualities feel familiar, they're not friendly objects. Quinlan's tough formalism denies us most of what we want from photos, but, in upending rote reactions, she helps us parse the deluge.



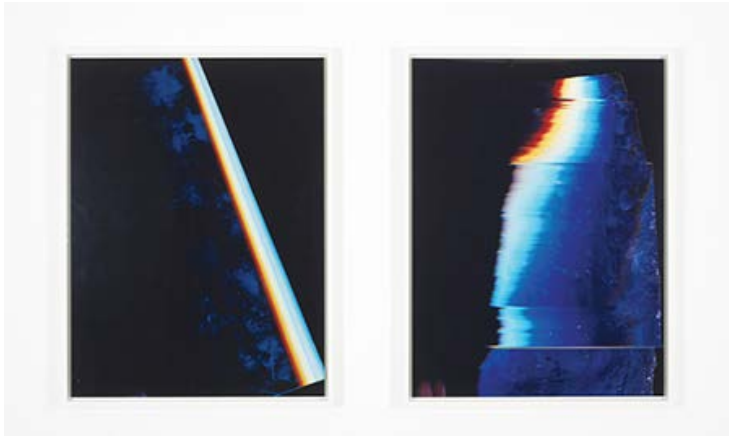
Eileen Quinlan, *Paris Shot*, 2016, gelatin silver print, 25 x 20".

— Johanna Fateman

frieze

Eileen Quinlan

CAMPOLI PRESTI, LONDON, UK



Eileen Quinlan, *Fried Sensor*, 2015, glossy digital c-type prints mounted on Perspex, 102 × 76 cm

Whether you call it ‘new photography’, ‘new formalism’ or, as Aaron Schuman opted for in *frieze* 170, ‘constructed photography’, Eileen Quinlan is exemplary. It’s not that new anymore. Alongside Annette Kelm and Josephine Pryde, with whom she exhibited in MoMA’s ‘New Photography 2013’, as well as Walead Beshty, Lucas Blalock and Mariah Robertson, Quinlan problematizes the idea – bluntly expressed in the curatorial thesis of John Szarkowski’s 1974 MoMA exhibition, ‘Mirrors and Windows: Photography Since 1960’ – that the photograph is either a window onto the world or a mirror that reflects a portrait of the individual who made it. Often, this work exhilarates in sheer surface, marvels at abstraction, obsesses at materializing the photograph as object. Everything that wallows in the digitally extended depth of field favoured by artists such as Gregory Crewdson is gleefully, gauchely pushed to the surface.

Quinlan’s exhibition at Campoli Presti, titled ‘After Hours’, playfully continued the artist’s ongoing attempt to reveal what the photograph is in material terms, while achieving a certain dimensional confusion of external views and abstractions. Concurrently, at its Paris outpost, the gallery exhibited Quinlan’s *Double Charlie* (2015) – a gridded, 12-panel work of scumbled amber-coloured textures comprising two sets of six of the same image, interspersed. *Twinned Mitsuoko* (2008–15) was this work’s equivalent in the London show: 12 harshly lit, contrasty black and white photographs of scrunched mylar, displayed in the same way. *Twinned Mitsuoko*’s date span begins two years before next earliest work on display here, indicating that this perhaps spans the production of each set of six images and their later combination for ‘After Hours’. As such, it furthered Quinlan’s claim for the exhibition as a ‘field’ in which to re-read and revisit pieces made over the past decade. A negation of linear relations,

this reading frames the work as a complex interplay of motivating forces, a configuration of possible events.

Unlike Beshty’s cameraless photograms, Quinlan’s images, taken on large-format camera and Polaroid, depict an external world constructed entirely in the studio. Their measured abstraction rarely goes far enough to lose the grip of established genres such as the nude, landscape, portrait or still life. Yet they do push at the edges of these genres. For example, the black and white diptych *Coming of Winter* (2015) stages a series of vertiginous topological collapses – of inside/outside and scale. Dazzling abstract textures are forensic close-ups of compacted icy stalactites that become, with perceptual readjustment, vast polar wastes.

In *Good Enough* (2015) – a diptych of nudes distorted by vapour, water and glass – the material effects of decomposition are more intriguing than the fragmented body parts. Surface disruptions – white dust flecks or great bruises of leaked light – index Quinlan’s darkroom interventions with the developing film. If, in our habitual viewing of photographs, we suppress our consciousness of what the photo ‘is’ in material terms in order to see what it is ‘of’, Quinlan’s tactility, from laboratory to white cube, darkness into light, is a kind of liberation of material surface. The work flickers, between depth and surface, subject and object.

Recalling an earlier work of Quinlan’s – *Red Goya* (2007) – *Stand-in for Red Goya* (2015) comprises two, white-framed mirrors reproduced at the same scale and dimension. Seen at an oblique angle, these held the south-facing walls’ cobalt grey colour, ossifying into tablets; from other perspectives, they reflected the viewer amid a field of Quinlan’s works. Beyond this wall, in a separate space, was *Twinned Mitsuoko* and, at a right angle to it, hanging on the cobalt grey wall, *Fried Sensor* (2015). Ironically, this diptych’s nebulously flat black ground, cleft by noisy shocks of white light, made using a broken flatbed scanner, is just as effective, if not more so, a mirror than *Stand-in for Red Goya*, allowing for more discreet, less obviously narcissistic glances. Although there was minimal tonal difference between the cameraless images’ black ground and the grey wall on which they hung – accentuating the border formed by brilliant white frames – their surface effects couldn’t be more different. The gaze finds no traction in *Fried Sensor*’s disquietingly hermetic image. Deflecting it in its glassy surface: me, *Twinned Mitsuoko*, the gallery windows and, through them, trains, the city – too much world.

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS
Paris

Eileen Quinlan

CAMPOLI PRESTI | PARIS

6 rue de Braque

March 21, 2015–April 11, 2015

It's hard not to be seduced by the array of Eileen Quinlan's shimmering vermillion and amber panels, which recall Turner's feverish sunsets or the violent splendor Delacroix gives to Sardanapalus's bed linens. In Quinlan's current exhibition in Paris, the sole work on view is *Double Charlie*, 2015: two photographs of a nearly abstract metallic leather surface shot under similar studio setups. Alternating across two rows of six panels, the entire editions of both pictures are presented, a recurring device of the artist. This accumulation of near equivalences pushes the specificity of the photographic exposure into the status of a decorative placeholder, filling one gallery wall with a tile-like proliferation.

Less than three months after the shootings, it would be nearly impossible in this city for the title not to conjure *Charlie Hebdo*. (Then again, Quinlan has previously given her works the names of perfumes, and Charlie is also a Revlon fragrance line.) Yet meaning remains elusive, and the inadequacy of the image alone as a vehicle of signification renders the pieces available to fantastic projection. Romantic themes suggest themselves in *Double Charlie*: desire and persuasion, trauma and mourning, transgression and violence. It's difficult to pin any of this down. Quinlan's equivocal images marshal the tools of contemporary media to solicit our interest, but to what end remains tantalizingly obscure. Perhaps that's the temptation of a beautiful backdrop: instruments of atmosphere, carrying the scent of a loaded context.



Eileen Quinlan, *Double Charlie*, 2015, twelve chromogenic prints mounted on sintra, each 40 x 30".

— *Phil Taylor*

ARTNEWS

LONDON ART PITCH



TWO OF A KIND: EILEEN QUINLAN AT CAMPOLI PRESTI, NICOLE WERMERS AT HERALD ST

BY *Jamie Sterns* POSTED 03/31/15 8:15 PM



Eileen Quinlan, *Good Enough*, 2015, gelatin silver prints hinged on museum board, 32 x 26 inches each (diptych).

COURTESY THE ARTIST AND CAMPOLI PRESTI

London Art Pitch is a monthly column by Jamie Sterns, a New York curator and writer based in the British capital.

“Eileen Quinlan, After Hours” at Campoli Presti, London, through April 18, 2015

Eileen Quinlan works in a medium that seems possibly out of vogue these days: photography. A true student, master, and innovator of this medium, Quinlan currently has concurrent exhibitions at [Campoli Presti’s two locations](#), in Paris and London. The London exhibition is entitled “After Hours,” and it combines new and past works. This exhibition is smart and exact, and it just feels right.

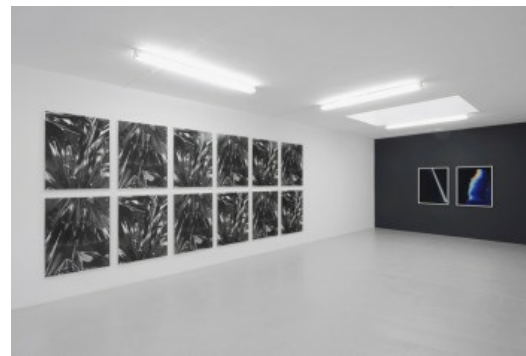
Quinlan’s photographs employ what are now considered traditional techniques: gelatin silver printing, medium and large format cameras, and the use of actual smoke and mirrors to create abstract effects in her studio. One can’t help thinking of the word “process,” but it is not in the familiar, dull way—the techniques she uses are not simply to quote the medium’s history; they are tools she has mastered in order to manifest a potent idea.

This is a show about pairings and groupings. Some works are obviously made for one another; others seem to have been pushed together, or perhaps drawn toward each other through their narrative content.

The pair that sets the tone right away is a photograph of a women's crotch, *Good Enough* (2015), which hangs beside *Bormo for Beca* (2015), an indiscernible abstraction of an unknown material that duplicates the V of this female region. As you absorb this, your eyes catch a glimmer of something on the opposite wall, and when you turn, you see two mirrors, *Stand-in for Red Goya* (2015). You start to straddle back and forth to see the reflections of the works in the room at various angles. These mirrors emphasize the precision and clarity of Quinlan's aesthetic. They fit, and they work perfectly in the room.

The V form can be seen throughout the show, most notably in *Twinned Mitsuoko* (2008–15), a series of 12 gelatin prints of black metallic, reflective surfaces that are pinched at the top or bottom of the work in the center. They are paired in two rows of six, so that an invisible force between the works seems to be causing them to pucker. They feel lush and sexy rather than coldly abstract, and they underscore the show's investigation into how one thing can be like another, and how anything seemingly fixed is mutable and flexible.

Image making, the surface, the body, the illusions of space, and the creation of narrative through subtlety and chance are Quinlan's fortes. "After Hours" demonstrates this confidently. The clarity of her vision and execution makes looking at her work continually satisfying, engaging, and surprising.



Installation view of 'Eileen Quinlan: After Hours' at Campoli Presti, London.

COURTESY CAMPOLI PRESTI

Gallerist

‘Technokinesis’ at Blum & Poe

BY WILL HEINRICH | 7/30 1:24PM



Installation view 2014. (Courtesy the artist/ Blum & Poe)

The technokinetic cranium imagined by Jenny Jaskey and Andrea Neustein looks down over 66th Street and is, like the inside of an atom, unnervingly empty; its pieces are still even when they're moving and look slippery when they're not. Dennis Oppenheim's video *Disappear*, in which a hand shakes frantically in front of a gray wall to a voice, often doubled and overlapping, that insists, "I don't want to be able to see myself anymore," faces an untitled motor by Michael E. Smith, which rapidly spins the broken-off nose of a

brownish, dry and upturned skull, close-set and waiting patiently. (What does it mean that the shape of a head is more sympathetic than its mechanism?) Cooly ignoring the motor's loud hum are three silver prints by Eileen Quinlan: *Withers Landline*, the half-expunged impression of a way we used to talk; *Mold Remediation*, in which an appalling whiteness eats Venetian stripes into a dumbly resistant black; and the smokily translucent *Language Acquisition*.

Downstairs in the cyborg's body, Nina Canell's (*Near Here*), a thick, stubby section of high voltage electrical cable embedded in clear acrylic, continues the question of what an instrument of communication can mean—or even whether it can exist—when not communicating; *Dead Air* is a clear ant farm half full of "coagulated air," the powdery white, next-to-nothing material used to insulate spacesuits; and *Another Mender*, seven nails drooping suggestively from a magnet in the wall, unsettles by understatement. And three handsomely evocative untitled canvases by Ryan Estep, on each of which is visible an offset fraction of a black rectangular outline about the size of the canvas, explain why it's so hard to pin down the ghost in the machine: all our meaning comes from imprecision. The show continues in L.A.

Gallerist

'What Is a Photograph?' at the International Center of Photography and 'A World of Its Own: Photographic Practices in the Studio' at the Museum of Modern Art

BY **MAIKA POLLACK** | 2/12 8:05AM



'What Is a Photograph?' at the International Center of Photography. (Courtesy ICP)

The title of the show poses a good question. Unfortunately, the works chosen to investigate this question, which date from the 1970s to the present, are, simply put, not very strong. What's worse, while many of them are cartoonishly bad, a few are magical and get it just right. The resulting exhibition is maddeningly close to being good, but it is hobbled by some serious and almost headache-inducing failures that can only be blamed on a lack of curatorial judgment.

A few of the artists here are excellent. A giant Sigmar Polke collage from 1977 and other great Polkes from the 1960s and '70s that deal with alternative and often chemically fanciful concoctions are wonderful and alone worth a visit. A few terrific Gerhard Richters in which personal-seeming photographs are overlaid with squeegeed paint make for beautiful and emotionally resonant abstractions. Eileen Quinlan's elegant work and Liz Deschenes' *Untitled (zoetrope)*, a silvery, subtle, even regal series of black exposures, are both smart takes on the theme. James Welling's photographs also look great here: multicolor op-art musings on modernist architecture in artificial sunset colors made possible through color processing manipulations. Alison Rossiter's modest work about expired media and latent images is simple and lovely.

But I was neutral on Floris Neusüss's process-based but heavy-handed and gimmicky works (many of which focus on long, cameraless silhouettes of figures), Marlo Pascual's large photograph-based installations and Marco Breuer's large, abstract prints (which look like they are trying hard to be paintings). There's nothing new to discover in this particular display of Lucas Samaras' Polaroids, and David Benjamin Sherry's ROYGBIV-printed scenes of famous 19th-century photographic landscapes look only halfway to being resolved works of art and more than half like MFA projects. Christopher Williams' works archiving obsolete camera types look interesting in themselves but uninterested in being in dialog with the premise of the show.

The show is rounded out by a large quantity of frankly bad art. Both Matthew Brandt's photos, with surfaces flaking from a lake-water soak, and Jon Rafman's Internet-explosion images are

terribly gimmicky, as are Letha Wilson's monochromatic sculptural landscapes. Mariah Robertson's *154*, a large, sloppy color photogram several dozen feet long, is baggy and ugly, with no discernible intelligence to its unwieldy display. Travess Smalley's scanner-based work looked simplistic and underdeveloped, while Kate Steciw references Photoshop in her pretentiously long titles, with no visual interest to the images themselves; both artists' works seemed made for an art fair. Owen Kydd's durational video operates under the illusion that boring subjects and bad still photography might be made better as video art, a premise which an examination of his work manifestly disproves. Artie Vierkant's post-Albers color-study-style-shaped images are one-dimensional and flat.

I like thematic group shows, but to see such a fundamental lack of discernment between good art and bad is jarring. My impression at ICP was that Ms. Squiers, a by-most-accounts-usually-very-good curator, was tone-deaf in this case to the quality of the work on display—a problem for a person in that position.

For a truly revelatory exhibition on a similar, although quite different, theme, the newly opened exhibition **"A World of Its Own: Photographic Practices in the Studio"** at the Museum of Modern Art is a must-see for anyone interested in the current and past state of the medium. The show's inward-looking take on photography (it makes the distinction between "made in the studio" and "made in the street") places contemporary trends in photographic abstraction in relation to historical developments in the medium. The show makes intelligent visual connections between, for example, contemporary Israeli-born, American photographer Elad Lassry and 1930s Czech photographer Jaroslava Hatláková. German photographer Karl Blossfeldt's stunning still lifes are on view, as are the Nigerian photographer J. D. 'Okhai Ojeikere's takes on hair, a Robert Rauschenberg and Susan Weil cyanotype from the 1950s and Auguste Belloc's sinuous 19th-century nudes. Effortlessly mixing early and contemporary photography, as well as film and video around the theme of studio photography, new MoMA photography curator Quentin Bajac's first New York curatorial outing puts to shame the ICP's rather poor take on its own question.



Man Ray, 'Laboratory of the Future,' 1935.
(Courtesy Man Ray Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris)

In fact, Mr. Bajac's show does a much better job investigating the ontological premise of photography purely by virtue of demonstrating outstanding and sustained visual, historical and curatorial intelligence. It's a commodity on scant display at the ICP. What is a photograph? It's a great question. Hopefully the answer is nothing as cynical as the collection of occasionally great but mostly very bad work thrown together in the basement gallery of the ICP.

(ICP: through May 4, 2014; MoMA: through Oct. 5, 2014)

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Exhibition: Eileen Quinlan, *Curtains*

Dates: October 26 – December 8, 2013

Reception: Saturday, October 26, 6 - 8PM

Miguel Abreu Gallery is pleased to announce the opening on Saturday, October 26th, of *Curtains*, Eileen Quinlan's third solo exhibition at the gallery.

In this new series of black-and-white gelatin silver prints, Quinlan exerts a kind of pressure upon the photographic substrate, and consequently upon every image in the exhibition. Quinlan alternates between a passive modality of production – allowing the development process itself to degrade the negative's surface – and active intervention, attacking the surface of the film with steel wool. Corrosion and abrasion alternately conceal and disrupt the images in these works, which take as their subjects varied visual motifs that have rarely appeared in her previous work: new portraits and rephotographed snapshots of the same figures from years prior; a close-up of a crocheted doily; printed stripes and hash patterns; imageless negatives, in which the process of decay itself forms an accidental composition; and a rephotographed reproduction of Gutai artist Saburo Murakami's 1955 *Laceration of Paper* performance.

In Quinlan's photograph, titled *Passing Through*, gossamer white folds peel back to reveal gaping black voids where the emulsion layer of the negative has peeled away from its support. The picture both mirrors and masks the composition of the re-photographed image it conceals, in which Murakami hurtles through forty-two layers of paper, and bursts through the front-most sheet towards the camera with his fist raised. No such figure emerges from Quinlan's laceration; we are instead confronted with the void by which his body has been swallowed. The photograph turns inwards, upon itself. Here, Quinlan asserts film as a thin membrane, and the photograph not as an unconditional reception of the perceived world, but as a position within a scopic regime mediated and inflected by barriers, screens, curtains.

Visual thinkers from André Bazin to Jean-Luc Nancy have likened the photograph to the death mask. Nancy describes the latter as the "casting of presence fleeting into absence"; a process of embalment. Quinlan, however, stages the mask itself in a state of compromise, in the midst of its own eradication. Decay becomes the subject of her exploration, rather than a drive towards some terminus. Putrefaction is a stage within a transitional continuum, and the artist a documentarian of this transformative rather than degenerative process.

For *Curtains*, the black-and-white gelatin silver prints are exposed: unframed, pinned directly onto the wall, and uniform in size. There are twenty-four works in total, as the hours of the day; an apt number for an artist who stages the accumulation of damage and the chemical event as temporal indices within a medium that purports to arrest the passage of time.

For more information or for visuals, please contact the gallery:

Miguel Abreu Gallery

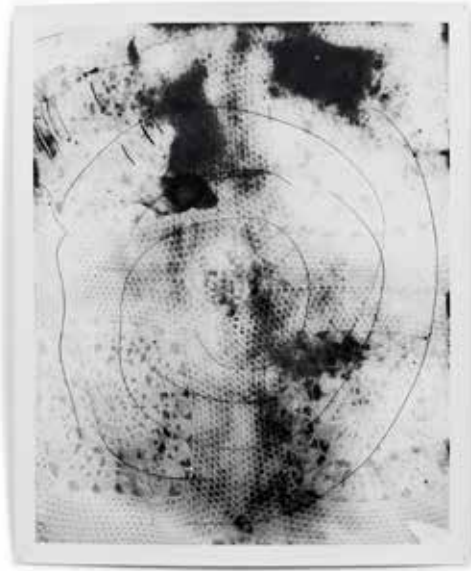
36 Orchard Street (between Canal & Hester), New York, NY 10002

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THE LAST MAGAZINE



EILEEN QUINLAN

By Kevin Greenberg

"Transformation plays a big role in my work," says Eileen Quinlan, one of a small number of young artists whose work blurs conventional lines between photography and something wholly other. Like her peer Oliver Michaels, Quinlan uses photography to create editioned pieces that underscore and foreground the hard limits of the photographic medium while simultaneously transcending them in works suffused with delightful ambiguity and tension.

"I've always been interested in the way the camera optically transforms and translates the things it renders," she says. "My compositions are lens-based, I'm taking into consideration how the camera sees and distorts reality."

Quinlan's compositions are thick with texture and often shaped by hard, kaleidoscopic geometries. She works almost exclusively in a studio environment and harbors an avid interest in transformation, both metaphorical and material. Though she sometimes shoots easily identifiable objects against a backdrop that comfortably recedes, Quinlan's work more often creates deliberate vagueness between figure and ground. While her pieces often begin as objective documents of multiple layers of gossamer materials, they're more likely to read at a glance as pure, visceral abstraction. Quinlan doesn't mind the uncertainty. "The more confusion the better," she admits.

The artist's technical process lends itself to that confusion. "I shoot with an outdated Polaroid product that produces a viable negative, but the film is very unstable," she explains. "The surface is easily marred, and lends itself to all kinds of manipulation. The film is allowed to languish in water until it deteriorates. Sometimes I even add other liquids—like tequila—to the bath to see how the process of decay is accelerated or altered. At some point, I retrieve some sheets from the soup and stop their process of degradation by washing and drying them, essentially fixing them at the point of removal." The alterations Quinlan makes to her photographs are both physical—scratching the film with tacks, steel wool, and ballpoint pens—and temporal, leaving the film in a bath saturated with powerful chemistry, sometimes for weeks.

Given the relative freedom of the photographic medium (along with the latter-day digital tools that make almost any outcome possible), Quinlan recognizes that imposing structure is perhaps the surest way to ensure that her work retains its integrity and its undeniably seductive draw on the viewer.

"Constraints have always been productive for me," she says. "That's one of the reasons I work in the studio: It's a limit, and that's also why I work in analog photography. There are so many ways to tweak in a digital environment. I have the sense that I wouldn't know when to quit."

Doggedness, relentlessness, obsession—those classically artistic traits cast a long shadow over Quinlan's practice. "I think about exhaustion," she says. "What happens when I've done something to death? Does it allow me to access a whole other level? How can I push past my initial, possibly clichéd reaction to a given subject? Boredom and failure can produce worthwhile results."

Quinlan embraces restrictions. For "Curtains," her recent solo exhibit at Miguel Abreu on Manhattan's Lower East Side, Quinlan presented a series of twenty-four unframed, modestly sized images. The uniformity of the images spread across the blank walls of the gallery was impossible to ignore and introduced a new level of meaning to the work.

"A lot of those decisions are arbitrary," Quinlan admits. "I try to demonstrate that. How does an artist know what size to make any artwork? In 'Curtains,' I made smaller prints, because I wanted to fit a lot of them in the gallery, and also because I wanted them to be easily available to the eyes of a viewer. They don't require scanning, you can take them in fully with a glance. They are about the same size as a human head. And they were naked—no frame, no glass, no distancing mechanism of any kind. Making them uniform was to de-emphasize a dialogue about format that I sometimes like to engage in. I wanted the focus to be less on the physical thing (except for the gorgeous curve of the paper) and more on the images themselves. More image this time, less object."

"Less object" seems an apt way to describe Quinlan's preoccupations. The works in "Curtains" were the antithesis of the mannered, packaged, and weighty art object that a well-heeled consumer might desire to possess. This kind of focus on de-commodification is by design. Quinlan is one of a bold and growing group of young artists who are actively working against the conventional attributes that make work easily collectible, instead using seriality as a theoretical tool, and pushing Benjaminian notions about reproducibility to their logical, 21st-century conclusions.

"I sense that people, especially collectors, privilege what they consider to be 'unique,'" Quinlan notes. "I like playing with that. My work looks like a one-off, but it isn't. How do people reckon with that? Does the realization that my photo is editioned deflate it somehow? I want people to think about how that aura of uniqueness affects their experience of the thing before them and what that might say about our human desire to fully possess things."

"Maybe it's because I'm a multiple myself," she laughs. "I have a twin sister."

Kevin Greenberg is the art editor of The Last Magazine. He is also a practicing architect and the principal of Space Exploration, an integrated architecture and interior design firm located in New York (SpaceExplorationDesign.com). In addition to his work for The Last Magazine, Kevin is an editor of PIN-UP, a semi-annual "magazine for architectural entertainment."



Eileen Quindlan, Portrait of Space, 2011.

ARTFORUM

Eileen Quinlan



Eileen Quinlan, *Passing Through*, 2013, gelatin silver print, 25 x 20".

The mostly color work that Eileen Quinlan showed in the "New Photography 2013" show at the Museum of Modern Art in New York this past fall is evidently abstraction yet just as clearly consists of pictures "of" something or other, though what that might be is not readily identifiable. In those photographs, Quinlan—like Cubist painters a century ago—leaves just enough pictorial space to preserve the idea of the image as depiction. By contrast, the twenty-four black-and-white prints (all but one unframed) in her one-person exhibition "Curtains" at Miguel Abreu Gallery suggest that even when the photograph shows something immediately recognizable—when the photo is a portrait, for instance—it does so only in order to vacate the subject, to attain a kind of abstraction. One of the photographs here was called *The Voidist* (all works 2013), and I got the impression that this neologism might be Quinlan's synonym for "photographer": When her photographs are void of recognizable imagery, they point to what this exhibition's press release calls "the photographic substrate" as the essence of the medium, but this characteristically modernist notion (seemingly justified by the work's affinities with the oeuvres of such photographic abstractionists as László Moholy-Nagy or György Kepes) is voided in turn by the use of rephotography, which turns the substrate back into an image.

In lovingly mistreating her photographic materials—abrading the surface of the film with steel wool, or allowing the developing chemicals to decompose it—Quinlan engages in activities that could just as well be described as drawing or painting. Indeed, some of the images that were on view here would not look out of place in an exhibition of Christopher Wool (*Makers*) or Albert Oehlen (*Brooks Brother*); more broadly, her efforts recall the whole swath of postwar art that Paul Schimmel catalogued in his recent exhibition "Destroy the Picture: Painting the Void, 1949–1962" at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. And the connection is not arbitrary. One photograph here, *Passing Through*, is based (although you'd never know it without the press release to clue you in) on a rephotographed image of *Laceration of Paper*, a 1955 performance by Saburo Murakami, one of the artists featured in "Destroy the Picture." But while Murakami destroyed his great sheets of paper by bashing through them, and Quinlan in turn ruined the emulsion on the negative of her rephotographed image of his action, the material traces of devastation are, so to speak, papered over in her gelatin silver print, which subsumes them in a once again seamless image, now incommunicative yet almost lyrical.

Lady and *Tulips* show portrait photographs tacked to a wall or bulletin board. The random blips and scratches that interrupt the image, thanks to Quinlan's darkroom abuse, rhyme with the equally random marks that are pictured in it, such as the tiny holes in the background where other photographs were

once pinned. Here, the “middle ground” of representation is bracketed by layers of aleatory eventfulness in the background and on the surface. By the same token, the alternating black and white vertical stripes in parts of *Brooks Brother* can be read as pure abstraction, but—especially given the work’s title—it’s hard not to wonder whether this might not be a close-up of the striped shirt worn by the man we see in two other pictures, *The Searcher* and *Harry Rag*. Just as photography brings Quinlan into the orbit of painting (and of modernist art history in general), her abstraction leads back to representation and vice versa, and damage is subsumed into a new but still provisional totality. “For nothing can be sole or whole / That has not been rent,” as Crazy Jane tells the Bishop. Maybe that’s why Quinlan’s gestures toward the void are not just beautiful, but strangely comforting.

—Barry Schwabsky

GalleristNY

‘Eileen Quinlan: Curtains’ at Miguel Abreu Gallery



‘Passing Through’ (2013) by Quinlan.
(Courtesy the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery)

Eileen Quinlan fakes left, goes right. While we were busy savoring her elegant, almost stately color abstractions in the Museum of Modern Art’s current “New Photography” show, the ascendant Brooklyn-based photographer nailed 24 small, scrappy black-and-white prints to the wall in one long row for her third show at **Abreu**.

She has again deftly channeled errors in developing chemicals and photographic paper to make images that bristle with tears, grayscale pools and pulsating grids, some borrowed from a snap of a doily that appears repeatedly. They may put you in the mind of paintings by everyone from Charline von Heyl and Christopher Wool to Joan Miró, but in their spacious, sometimes-curvaceous rough-hewn elegance, they could belong to no one but Ms. Quinlan.

In some works, she has scratched the surface of her film to create sharp, thin streaks, which pack an emotional wallop when they appear across a woman’s face. Pretty much straight portraiture represents another shift for the more typically abstract-minded Ms. Quinlan, and the results vary. Her subjects wear deadpan or forlorn gazes, like models in a fashion magazine. They look listless, no trace of emotion sneaks through, and so these images never really go anywhere.

Regardless, the elegantly battered abstract photo is a touchstone of today’s art, one fast becoming a cliché, but Ms. Quinlan again proves she’s one of its few masters. (*Through Dec. 8*)

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

New York

Eileen Quinlan

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY

36 Orchard Street

October 26–December 8

Eileen Quinlan's photographs slip between a space-drained illusionism and a shivered sort of abstraction. Her latest series of gelatin silver prints, unframed and identically sized, treat the negative as a substrate to be compromised. Some betray subtle technical lapses, their subjects blanched from overexposure or crossed by an errant hair. Others are more violently deformed, their emulsions incised with steel wool or torn from their supports. In each, Quinlan performs a physical encounter with the negative. Tactility, which implies a certain conjunction of touch and pressure, is made an issue, as if in dialogue with analog photography as an imprint of the real.

A rephotographed photograph of Saburo Murakami's 1955 performance *Laceration of Paper*, in which the artist flung himself through forty-two frames taut with paper, grounds *Sun and Stars* (all works 2013). Rehearsing Murakami's gesture, Quinlan has peeled the emulsion away from its support, which she then let tarry in a chemical bath. The excision announces itself in tulle-like folds, the original image now confined to a handful of halftone dots along the composition's edge. In lieu of an image, a velvet-black void speckled with sediment, like crusted stardust, commands the photograph's center. The result is a space at once demonstrably flat (the trace of silver salts on film) and infinitely recessive, even cosmic. Nearby, *Harry Rag* finds a male friend seated in profile in front of twinned windows, his gaze casually trained on a cigarette. Space here is cinched, the window affording not an exterior view but a reflection of the sitter's own image. The photograph becomes something hermetic, unable to register more than surface effects.

Silver gelatin's dusky gray scale lends the show a melancholy mood. Yet Quinlan's lingering on an outmoded technology speaks not of nostalgia but of an acute awareness of the complexities and limitations of her chosen medium. The show's title, "Curtains," suggests both a blockage and an ending. In Quinlan's work, analog photography resolves in saturated hues at the moment of its obsolescence, its materiality made vulnerable by digital's loosening of image into data.



Eileen Quinlan, *Summer*, 2013, gelatin silver print, 25 x 20".

— Courtney Fiske



Eileen Quinlan's Curtains at Miguel Abreu



Eileen Quinlan, Sister, 2013. Gelatin silver print. Image courtesy of Miguel Abreu Gallery.

The appropriately titled *Curtains*, Eileen Quinlan's spare exhibition at Miguel Abreu, unsettles in ways few shows dare. The 24 black-and-white prints, all gelatin silver, communicate a spirit that is both cryptic and choleric. They dampen, these images, as in deaden. They silence. One feels in their presence as if having stepped into the afterings of a wake, casket still open, all guests gone. Something lingers.

Part of what disquiets in this utterly hushed series is the spectering of Quinlan's aggressive hand, which haunts in ways comparable to the cramping of a limb not long ago severed. It manifests as fitful revenant in openly hostile attacks against the negatives themselves, which are scarred with slashings and steel wool scourings and experimental broodings borne of plain artistic urge. A good dozen-plus prints in the show reflect the latter. As fly to wonton boys, killed solely for the sport, the negatives for these prints were left for hours or days in chemical baths, eroding or outright obliterating any image that might have been and erasing with it any expectation as to what a photograph should even minimally convey. To that end, these prints merely allude to photography, working as they do in the same medium. They are acting, however, in an alternate other: as medium in a kind of necromancy. They conjure rather than represent.

Summoned prominently throughout the series is the artist's twin sister, who appears in various states of alarm, wistful cheer, or melancholy. In *Sister*, we find the twin relatively pert, with a ready smile and kitten in hand. But something is off. The kitten has a glaucomic, breathless glare, as if held too tightly in her handler's grip. The sister, for her part, is not so much showing off the kitten as using it for shield against a lens that seems a shade too intrusive. Its placement, however—the kitten's—leaves the twin partially defaced and her remaining eye is Cyclopedian and slant and communicates a presence only half there. She could be looking at us or through or nowhere at all. The shot's dis-ease is further amplified by the intervention of the artist herself, the other half, who nearly halves the image again into chemical abstraction, then attacks what's left with fingernail-like gashes that cut at the kitty's already traumatized face, around the sister's nose, across her forehead.

I suspect a conflict. And since this show so ruthlessly prods at the imagination yet so graciously and receptively allows for an imaginative response, I propose an interpretation, however partial, one that's fraught with sisterly cattiness. Mindful to the show's title, something indeed feels hanging in the space between picture-taker and subject, a separation of sorts, a curtain. Might it have anything to do with the lounging male friend we see in *Tulips*? *Tulips* is one of two prints in the exhibition that is a rephotographing of photograph. In other words, the artist pins a snapshot to a wall and shoots it again in place. The other such print, a virtual twin of the first, is *Lady*. The single difference being the snapshot in *Tulips* is swapped out for a snapshot of the sister. As they hang in the gallery, the sister in *Lady* looks back grimly toward the male friend in *Tulips*, as if in judgment or in longing. Finally, in *Open City*, —the last we see of the sister before the series moves entirely into abstraction—the twin looks entirely worn, as if from years of loss. In her hand is a photograph that bears the considerable weight of her gaze. What faintly bleeds through the backside of that photograph appears to show a photo within a photo, as if she too is looking at the same image we look at when viewing "Tulips." What is the relationship between the sister(s) and this male friend, and is it a corroding source of sibling tension? The remaining abstractions in the series prevent any firm conclusions, which in a way duplicates the interesting and disorienting effects we experience when viewing at least half the images in the collection, i.e. it effectively obliterates our ability to see the whole.



Eileen Quinlan, *Sun and Stars*, 2013. Gelatin silver print. Image courtesy of Miguel Abreu Gallery.

Of these abstractions, one of particular interest, in part because it works nicely as a metaphor for the show, is *Sun and Stars*. The composition is a record of its own developmental decay, a kind of graphic birthing that comes in allowing the negative to waste away in a corrosive wash. The result here, as if through a chemical big bang, is a spacial, densely celestial realm that orbs and turns and at its outer edges frays. In it a ghostly traveler floats up from the thick, clutching to the tatters of some astral fabric as he attempts an entry into the illumined core. Though not yet through. He remains ever at the edge, in the purgatorial peripheries of a lovely, long-sought world.

A companion print—yet another twin, though this one in way of a polarity—is *Top Down*. *Top Down* is a charged, lightning-blast of an image that would be no stranger amongst Dore’s masterful illustrations for Dante’s *Divina Commedia*; his “Burning Graves—The Heresiarchs” would be its perfect companion. Quinlan’s image would likewise welcome an embedded quote from that same canto Dore so splendidly illuminates: “And now there came over the turbid waves a crash of fearful sound, at which both shores trembled: a sound as of wind, violent from conflicting heats...” Indeed, the image crackles in white hot shards that crystalizes its upper spheres before flaming Phoenix-like into a simmering darkness. *Top Down* is the burning heart of *Curtains*, a series that otherwise roils in its own quiet storm.

By Christopher Hassett

"Eileen Quinlan," The Lookout, *ArtinAmerica.com*, November 21, 2013

Art in America



Eileen Quinlan

at Miguel Abreu,
through Dec. 8
36 Orchard St.

Eileen Quinlan's black-and-white photographs call attention to the material substrate of the medium; she finds rich creative possibilities in the delicate process by which an image emerges from silver salts suspended in gelatin. Candid portraits—one work is titled *Sister*—are legible through a haze of scratches, shadows, peeled emulsion and overexposed passages. Interspersed with the figurative images are abstract compositions of more mysterious origins, likely in various chemical baths. In an era of ubiquitous digital images, Quinlan revives the historical avant-garde's fascination with photographic alchemy.



THE NEW YORKER

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN: ART

EILEEN QUINLAN

The New York artist, a standout in MOMA’s current “New Photography” show, is known for turning close-up images of small-scale constructions into complex and colorful abstractions. She breaks with that approach in a strong show of black-and-white work that mixes representation (including rephotographed old snapshots and recent portraits of Quinlan’s sister and a male friend) and visceral, process-driven abstraction. The most sensational images are records of their own corrosion: prints left for days in a chemical bath that disintegrated or peeled back layers of emulsion. The resulting pictures feel unfixed and furious, like a blast site or a brewing storm. Through Dec. 8.

The New York Times

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2013

Art in Review

Eileen Quinlan

'Curtains'

Miguel Abreu Gallery
36 Orchard Street, between Canal
and Hester Streets, Lower East
Side
Through Dec. 8

Eileen Quinlan mixes portraiture, cameraless photography and performance to mesmerizing effect in her latest solo show, which coincides with an appearance in the Museum of Modern Art's "New Photography 2013." The differing forces are contained in the stark, deceptively casual-looking installation, a row of unframed gelatin silver prints held up by pins.

"Passing Through," which shows an inky void with ruffled edges, is typically complex; it's based on a famous Gutai performance by the artist Saburo Murakami, who hurled himself through a wall of 42 sheets of paper, leaving his image behind. In Ms. Quinlan's version, a documentary photograph of the event becomes the basis for a similarly violent gesture in the darkroom; she peels away the emulsion layer from the middle of the negative, obliterating the figure.

Elsewhere, she attacks her film with steel wool or embraces accidents in the development process, producing scratched-up portraits like "Sister" or marbled abstractions like "The Blade." The two categories sometimes mingle, as in the viscous-looking work "Failed Portrait."

Ms. Quinlan isn't alone in treating the photograph as a space for, rather than a document of, performance. But with her devotion to analog processes, she suggests that the action may happen well after the picture is taken.

KAREN ROSENBERG

ART+AUCTION



Quinlan's chromogenic prints walk a line between photographs and light paintings. Left, *Sophia*, 2012; below, *Process Point*, 2011.



THE FORMALIST

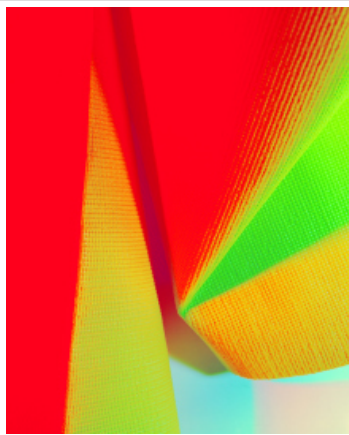
EILEEN QUINLAN

In the relatively short time span since earning her MFA from Columbia University in 2005, Quinlan has built a reputation for photographic work that almost seems more akin to contemporary painting. Her images live on the edge between abstraction and figuration, informed by occasional expressionistic flourishes or elements of chance. At MOMA the artist is showing a variety of work from recent and ongoing series, most of which begin with still life arrangements shot in the studio with analog cameras, then manipulated in the darkroom. Later, prints might be exposed to corrosive chemicals—or even a raw egg cracked onto a scanner bed before a print is laid down. Quinlan is shown by London's Campoli Presti (known as Sutton Lane at the time of her first solo, in 2006), Miguel Abreu Gallery in New York, and Overduin & Kite in Los Angeles. She has also appeared in group shows alongside blue-chip painters and sculptors at galleries such

as Paula Cooper, White Cube, and Marian Goodman. "Because of the varied formal and methodological threads that she's developed, Quinlan's work appeals to a diverse cross section of collectors and institutions," notes Andrea Neustein of Miguel Abreu, which opens a show of new work by Quinlan on October 27. "We have interest from curators in both photography and contemporary art departments," Neustein continues. At auction, Quinlan's work has appeared at Phillips under the auspices of contemporary art rather than photography. Noting that her market is still "embryonic"—both pieces on the block were bought in—specialist Benjamin Godsill predicts, "The MOMA imprimatur is going to bring her work to a broader audience; it makes more people more comfortable with work that is beautiful but also challenging. The scholarship and the discussion that will grow out of it augur well for her growth in the market." —ERIC BRYANT

GalleristNY

‘New Photography 2013’ at the Museum of Modern Art



Eileen Quinlan, 'Sophia,' 2012.
(Courtesy the artist and Miguel
Abreu Gallery)

From the cameraless images of mid-19th century photographic innovator William Henry Fox Talbot on forward, images of the labor involved in lace making have been an integral part of the history of photography. Lisa Oppenheim's visually engaging image of women's work, which picks up on Talbot's and is on view in the Museum of Modern Art's annual survey of new photography, is anything but dull.

You wouldn't know that from Ken Johnson's review of the exhibition in *The New York Times* last week, the first review of the show out the gate. He derisively quotes Ms. Oppenheim, describing her artwork, *Leisure Work III*, an image of handmade lace, and seems to find her assertion of its feminist import questionable.

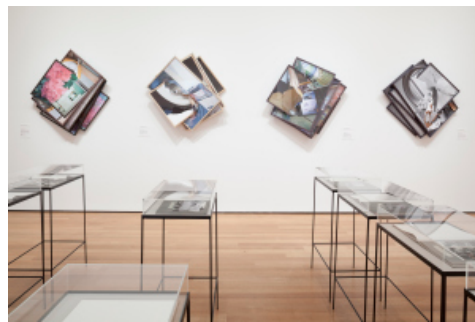
In Mr. Johnson's searingly negative review, he characterizes the works at MoMA as "contrived," "humorless" and lacking in "visual imagination," attacking young photographers—there are eight artists in the show—including Josephine Pryde, Eileen Quinlan, Lisa Oppenheim and Anette Kelm. Mr. Johnson has reviewed the "New Photography" exhibition for at least the past three years, and it is apparently an annual occasion of sorts for condescension and some nastiness on his part. While I am certainly not averse to critics writing negative reviews—I've done so in these pages myself, when it's merited—the problem with Mr. Johnson's approach is that he seems to take on the same subjects in formulaic ways with little regard for the quality of the work at hand.

In 2012, he described the photography of Michele Abeles, an innovative rising star of the coming year, as "heavy-handed" and "too literal." In 2011, he gave a tepid reception to Moyra Davey's "curiously anachronistic" conceptual photography. In the current MoMA show, Josephine Pryde's feminist inkjet prints of landscapes superimposed with ultrasound images of fetuses don't register in Mr. Johnson's review, but he does describe her images of guinea pigs, somewhat patronizingly, as "not just affectionate pictures of her cute little pets."

Eileen Quinlan's prismatic red, yellow and green chromatic experiments-cum-gender-bending images, like *Cock Rock 2011*, and other works bearing explicit Judy Chicago allusions, and Annette Kelm's sharp prints of salmon and green tulips on a black-and-white striped background are, similarly, more than the "shots of yoga mats" and "banal" images Mr. Johnson describes. Little in curator Roxana Marcoci's assembly of works of political—and often feminist—conceptual photography seems to interest or resonate for the critic.

Yet in a contemporary art world often dominated by the slavish worship of young male talent, the "New Photography" exhibition has delivered, year after year, a vision of an art world full of new women's voices. What's more, the formal innovation of Ms.

Oppenheim's solarizing and cameraless color exposure processes, or even Ms. Quinlan's penchant for colorizing black-and-white film or Anna Ostoya's painting-like photographs replete with gold-leaf and acrylic, also push for a renewed understanding of an old medium. In a media-agnostic contemporary art world with few occasions devoted to a single medium, it is a pleasure to see recent tendencies in photography grouped together—and to see gender parity enacted with no apparent curatorial fuss. This might be the real revelation of the show.



Installation view with works by Brendan Fowler in back. (Courtesy the Museum of Modern Art)

I could understand a critique of this exhibition that called for the participation of certain overlooked figures or themes—rising star Lucas Blalock's photography was notably absent, as is, on the other hand, the quiet, magically deft realism of Katie Murray or Dan Torop. The show, as usual, hangs together by the merest shred of a curatorial premise and therefore opens itself up to calls for a more thematic approach. It is hard to step back and see some of the work, because a huge amount of floor space is taken up by the plinths for a page-by-page display of Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin's publication *War Primer 2*, a book of appropriated images about the contemporary war on terror that might been considerably easier to navigate displayed against or on a wall.

The new formalism that the colorful and often oblique work in the New Photography presents might look abstract and pretty, but in the hands of so many emerging young, and predominantly female photographers, it is also political. How we interpret such images and their import says at least as much about the viewer as it does about the photographer. (*Through Jan. 6, 2014*)



THE NEW YORKER

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN: ART

NEW PHOTOGRAPHY 2013

Six photographers (Brendan Fowler, Annette Kelm, Lisa Oppenheim, Anna Ostoya, Josephine Pryde, and Eileen Quinlan) and one collaborative team (Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin) construct, collage, appropriate, and otherwise manipulate images in their work. None of them take pictures of the world around them, except Fowler, who shoots random moments, enlarges and frames them, and then smashes the framed pictures through one another until the images are virtually unreadable. Quinlan, Oppenheim, and Pryde, all of whom prefer various forms of abstraction, engage the medium at its most sensuous and evocative, usually with work that emphasizes old-school darkroom processes. Broomberg and Chanarin, two of photography's most reliable provocateurs, find another way to take on the real world, by covering the Nazi-era photojournalism in Bertolt Brecht's 1955 "War Primer" with images of 9/11 and Abu Ghraib, and related imagery found on the Internet. Their updated version of the book, displayed open in sixteen vitrines, jolts viewers back to a reality that is otherwise not much in evidence here. Through Jan. 6.

September 14 – January 6

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Reviews & Previews, News: MutualArt

May 8, 2013

Recommended Artists at Frieze New York



Eileen Quinlan makes bold photographic works that range from bright abstractions to dark, organic landscapes. Created by taking detail shots of commonplace objects and materials, they are captivating in their use of light, color, and scale. Quinlan creates images of dimensional confusion by photographing modest studio constructions of foam, mirrors, and other common materials. She is interested in exposing the formal constructs of photography, like light and shadow. She has also addressed the artificial scarcity created by a limited edition by displaying entire editions side-by-side and treating them as a singular piece.

Quinlan participated in a number of group exhibitions in 2012, including *Blind Cut* at Marlborough Gallery and *Accrochage* at Miguel Abreu Gallery in New York, *Second Nature: Abstract Photography Then and Now* at the deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum in Lincoln, MA, and *Printed at Mai 36* in Zurich. The highlight of last year, however, was unquestionably her September solo exhibition, *Twin Peaks* at Campoli Presti in London. Most recently, she mounted *Y? O! G... A.*, collaboration with Matt Keegan at The Kitchen in New York.

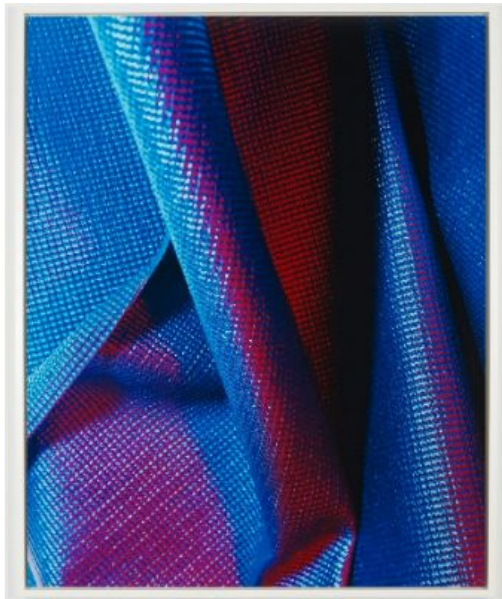
(Image: Eileen Quinlan, *Ishtar*, 2012, 60 x 48 inches, Courtesy of Miguel Abreu Gallery)

Eileen Quinlan's works can be seen at the Miguel Abreu Gallery, Stand B57

COMPLEX

25 Photographers to Watch in 2013

BY COMPLEX MAGAZINE | JAN 9, 2013



Eileen Quinlan

Based in: Brooklyn

Eileen Quinlan (born 1972 in Boston) makes bold photographic works that range from bright abstractions to dark, organic landscapes; created by taking detail shots of commonplace objects and materials, they are captivating in their use of light, color, and scale. Quinlan participated in a number of group exhibitions in 2012, including *Blind Cut* at Marlborough Gallery and *Accrochage* at Miguel Abreu Gallery in New York, *Second Nature: Abstract Photography Then and Now* at the deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum in Lincoln, MA, and *Printed at Mai 36* in Zurich. Her work was also on view at the inaugural Frieze New York in Miguel Abreu's booth. The highlight of last year, however, was unquestionably her September solo exhibition, *Twin Peaks* at Campoli Presti in London. Most recently, she mounted *Y? O! G... A.*, a collaboration with Matt Keegan at The Kitchen in New York.

Above: Eileen Quinlan, *Judith*, 2012, Campoli Presti, London

1 *New Work #93*, from the series *New Work*
© Jordan Tate.

1



The Perfect Playground

It's still life, but not as you know it... **Diane Smyth** reports on the resurgence of studio-based photography among a new generation keen to investigate the medium itself.

Last year's Deutsche Börse Photography Prize proved something of watershed. Not one but three of the four artists shortlisted by The Photographers' Gallery jury presented a conceptual, formalist practice – one that has been long emerging, but which seems to have taken the art world by storm in the past two or three years. In the event the prize was won by documentarist Jim Goldberg, but the shortlist seemed to confirm the suspicions of critics arguing The Photographers' Gallery was interested only in "a narrow thread of photographic curation" (as Chris Steele-Perkins put it). One of the three even preferred to be known as a "conceptual artist" rather than a photographer.

And yet the three artists, Thomas Demand, Elad Lassry and Roe Ethridge, can be seen as indicative of a reviving interest in studio photography. In particular, it seems many young photographers are embracing still life – a genre much neglected over the past 20 years, despite the fact that the two other genres with similarly

long historical traditions, portraiture and landscape, have flourished.

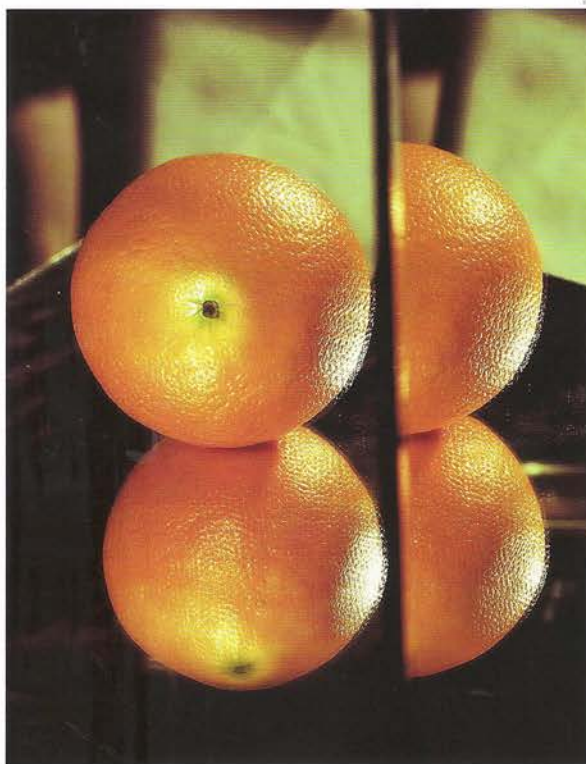
This trend seemed confirmed when *Frieze* magazine ran a still life-photography special last year, including a feature titled *Depth of Focus* by Chris Wiley, which argued that a new generation have been "developing new approaches to photography" over the last five years. This followed the *Rencontres d'Arles* 2010 edition, which was skewed towards conceptualism, and an exhibition at Foam gallery in Amsterdam last autumn devoted to modern Dutch still lifes. "For a wide group of contemporary photographers, still life continues to inspire, but the concept has been modernised," ran Foam's press notice.

Beyond the lens

Why is still life back in vogue? The answer may have something to do with pragmatism. Lucas Blalock, one of the leading lights of this new wave, says he first got into studio photography because he wanted to make images every day,

2-3 *Untitled (Dirty Pun)* [left] and *Tenting* [right]
© Lucas Blalock.

4 *Orphan Girl At The Cemetery* © Eileen Quinlan.



and "the limited hours at my disposal, along with the more general constraints of living in NYC, moved that practice into my living room". But Blalock, who is discussed at length in Wiley's article, soon began to view working in-studio as a more proactive decision, and gradually it became an integral part of his practice.

His recent book *Towards A Warm Math*, published by Hassla, is mostly composed of studio-based still life shots disrupted by slow exposures, mirrors and deliberately heavy-handed Photoshop. "Instead of thinking about making pictures with a camera, I have come to think about making pictures with a camera, computer and studio," says the 32-year-old, who is studying for his Master of Fine Arts at UCLA in Los Angeles but already attracting the American art elite. "This larger apparatus comes with a set of rules or moves that come from the historic uses of the various technologies involved. All three of these technologies were produced to exert greater control over a picture of the world, and were meant to support that picture while remaining ostensibly invisible. My work uses these off-stage techniques and brings them on-stage and into the picture."

Blalock's work is experimental and idiosyncratic, but he says he's noticed other

young photographers working in the studio with similar concerns. "I think the idea about what it means to make pictures is really in flux," he says. "I think the studio itself has come to function like a camera in contemporary practice – I mean that in some ways it is the aperture through which the photographer lets materials into the studio that constructs meaning, as much as the light entering the lens. I think the studio provides a model or scenario for looking that re-inscribes the camera's function."

Art and commerce

Eileen Quinlan, another American discussed in Wiley's article, takes a similar approach. She worked in advertising for five years after her BA, then assisted a series of commercial and fashion photographers, gaining "some technical skills that were considered too cheesy or slick to be mobilised in the name of art". When she won a place on the Columbia University MFA she decided to focus on studio photography and reclaim these commercial techniques, "using these tools rather than apologising for them".

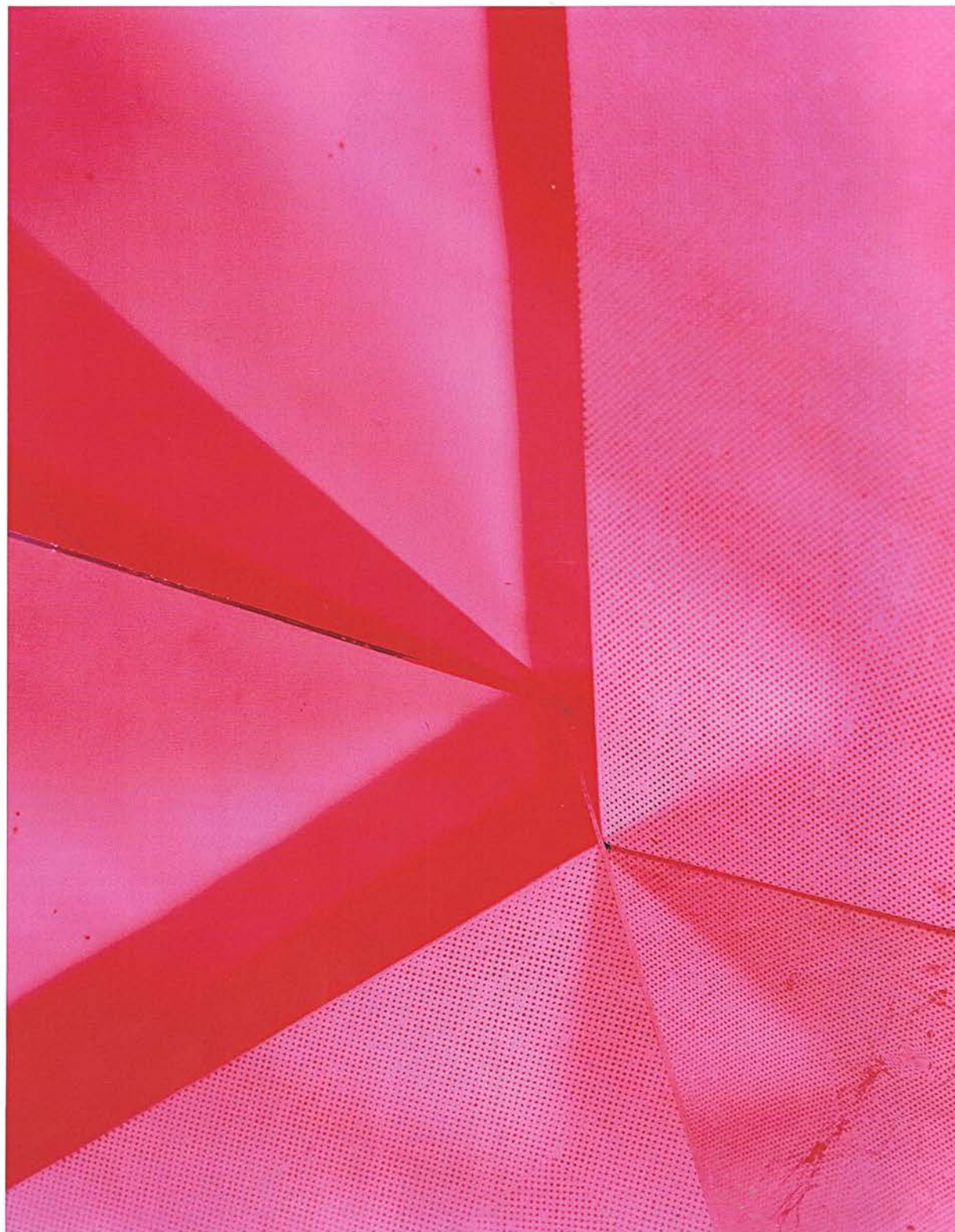
In her work she puts the tools centre stage rather than at the service of a product, creating what she's called "product photography without the product". One of her series is called

Smoke and Mirrors, for example, while another named each image after a different perfume brand. "I don't think of my work as a critique of commercial hocus pocus," she says, "but it does reflect my attempt to grapple with how commercial photography operates, how it cajoles and seduces."

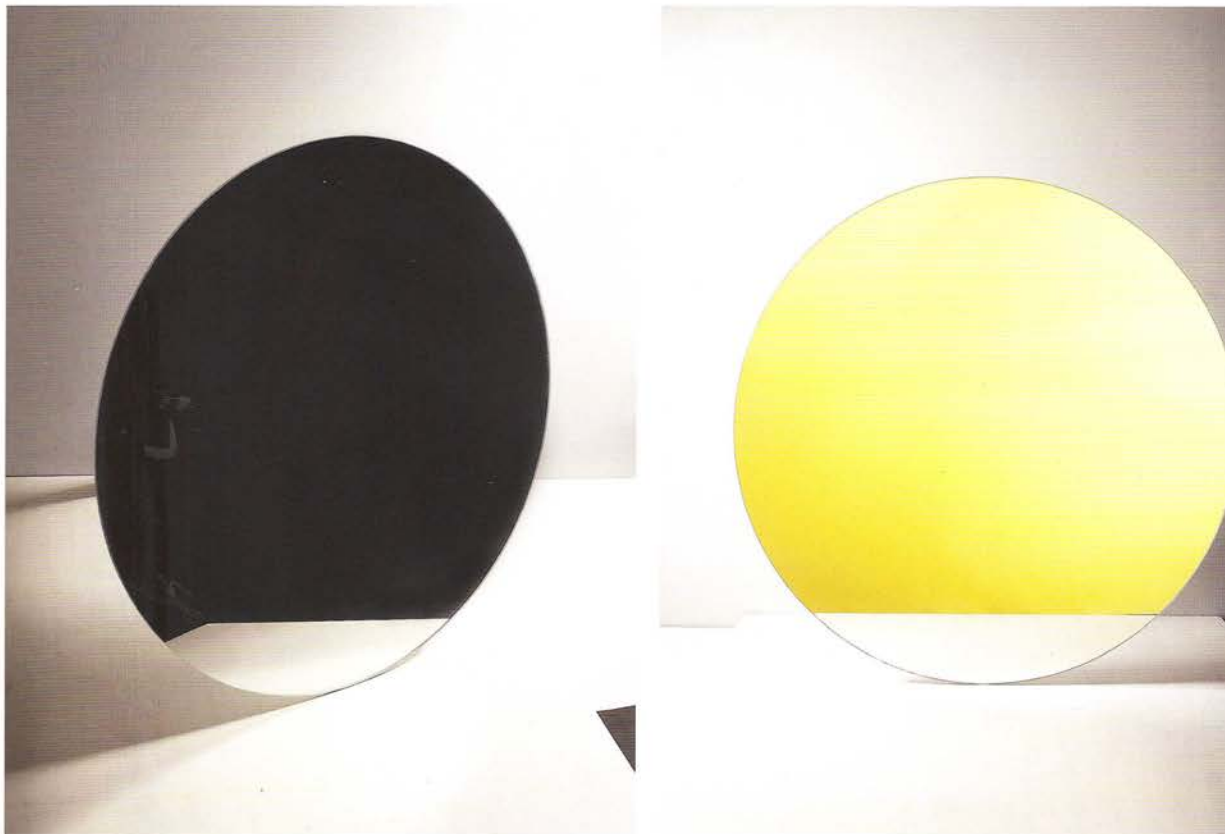
"I use a table-top setup, strobes, coloured gels, a large format camera, pieces of foam, fabric, and reflective surfaces to sculpt and bounce light, smoke to create atmosphere, different backdrops – much the same way product photographers worked in the days before Photoshop. I don't so much choose colours as arrive at them through a process of chance. The four gels I limit myself to using [red, blue, green, and yellow] produce a lot of different colours, depending on their combinations and the intensity of the lights that pass through them."

"Of course, I do choose which iterations to print and which to hang, and I choose these particular colours because they exist somewhere between being pleasing and offputting. They are almost too much. I seek this limit because I can't bring myself to make a pretty thing, and I hope these colours make people think actively about how the colour is operating on them and manipulating them. That's why I'll present the

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same image in multiple colours – [I'm interested in] what is an individual viewer drawn to or repelled by and why? And what associations do the different colours raise?"

Coincidentally, commercial still life photography is also having a moment, with forward-thinking brands and magazines commissioning work that's slick, but remains cutting edge. Dutch photographers Scheltens & Abbenes have been hired by companies including Cos, Uniqlo and Alexander van Slobbe to create graphic and daringly undescriptive product shots for their ad campaigns, for example, while *Fantastic Man* and *The Gentlewoman* have commissioned them to shoot near-abstract editorial stories. And some of these photographers pass between commercial and fine art worlds with ease.

Ingmar Swalve, another artist from The Netherlands, who was featured in the *Still/Life* exhibition at Foam gallery in Amsterdam last autumn, has shot avant-garde abstracts for clients such as *Wallpaper** magazine and Vitra. Even so, he says there's a limit to how far most commercial organisations will go, and saves his

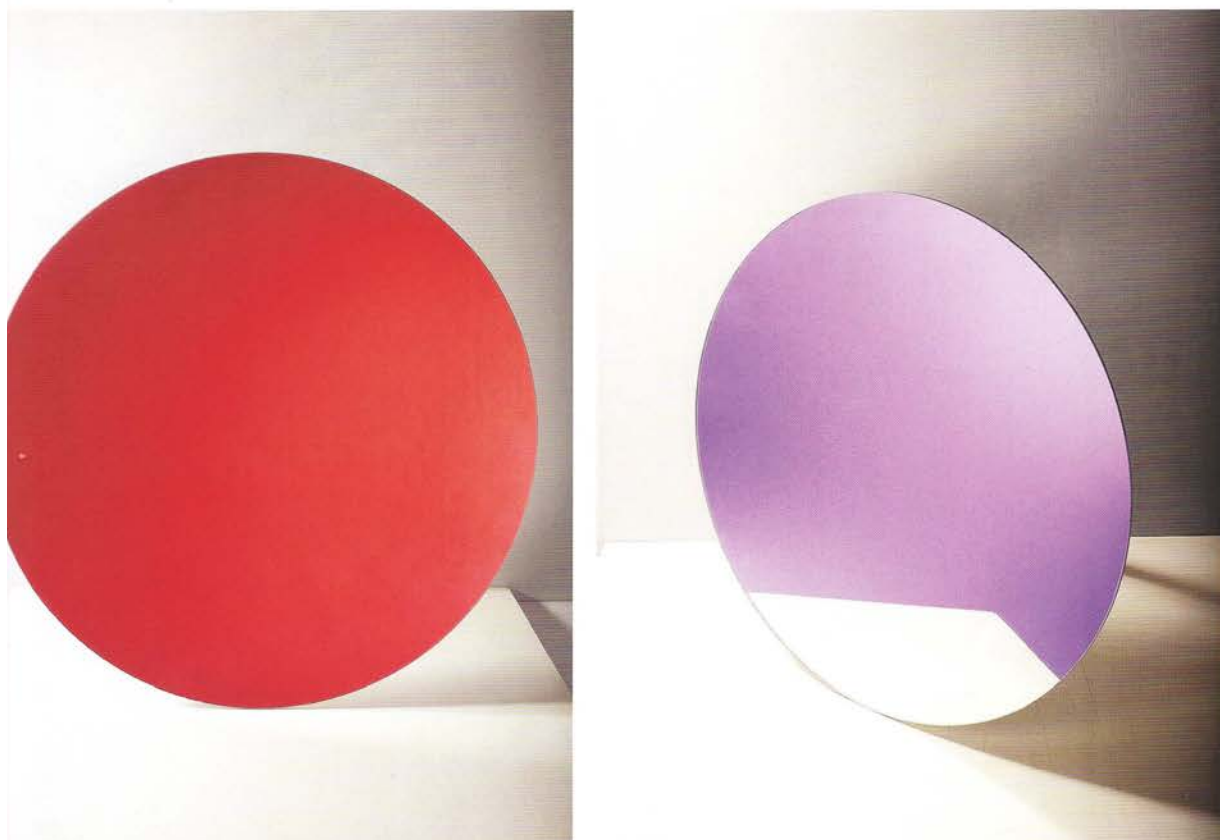
more experimental still lifes for his personal projects. With these, like Blalock and Quinlan, he's interested in disrupting the viewer's perception, and using techniques that make them question what they're looking at.

"The last [personal] series I did was a collaboration with stylist Mik Zandijk," he says. "We both work in commercial photography and wonder sometimes what we are making. Why is a beautifully designed product more likely to be photographed than a plastic cup? Why does there have to be perfection in this kind of photography? How can totally normal things become exceptional when being photographed? We try to question that in our own work and like to search for things we cannot use in the commercial field. People are used to photography nowadays, so you have to take it a step further to really get people looking and maybe thinking about what they are seeing. That's why we like to play with ordinary subjects, search for an imperfection or try to create something that is a little 'off', either in styling or photography. Photography can be challenging to look at; there should be space to wonder what you're seeing as

a viewer. It's fine when it can be easily consumed in the commercial field, but there's much more to look at."

For Blalock this dividing line between art and commerce is key, because while he also uses the techniques of commercial still lifes, he's not interested in showing off objects as products. "Elad Lassry and Roe Ethridge [two of the key artists associated with the new concern for the more formalist aspects of photography, both of whom were shortlisted for last year's Deutsche Börse] are interested in the commercial image and the way a picture can migrate across those boundaries," he says. "I love pictures by both of them, but feel like in my own work I am trying to develop relationships to the objects that frustrate their reading as commodities and in turn pull them into another sense of economy. But while I am not interested in making commercial pictures, I am interested in borrowing tools from commercial production and using them for my own ends. If photography has a dominant or major language I would say it is commerce. My practice is invested in using that major language to minor ends."

5 (From left to right) #1, #4, #9 and #7, from the *Sun Set Series* © Fleur van Dodewaard.



Towards abstraction

Canadian artist Jessica Eaton, who showed work alongside Blalock at last year's Contact Festival in Toronto, has taken this approach one step further with a series called *Cubes for Albers and LeWitt*, which uses simple, rectangular gels and multiple exposures to explore the tri-colour process. Recording tones and shades rather than objects, let alone products, it is in a sense a record of pure technique.

"I started working with the tri-colour process in 2004 or so, having found it in an old Kodak photography manual," she says. "I was often frustrated by the extreme primaries and secondaries the process achieved in more simple practice, while knowing intellectually that the additive colour theory it employs was capable of producing all of the recordable tones when in registration. I was interested in the process and wanted to find a way to have more control over it. The choice to use a cube was to simplify things – as the title suggests, both [artists Joseph] Albers and [Sol] LeWitt pointed me to the cube as the form for its neutrality. They used the cube as a platform to project other ideas or phenomena."

In fact, Eaton says she has never thought of her work in terms of still lifes, or even objects. On the contrary, she enjoys recording things she has never seen, "using colour I only imagine". Pictorial and abstract, her work prioritises the medium of photography and its ability to make images over its apparently indexical relationship with reality; in fact, she says she doesn't even know "what indexical is supposed to mean".

"It is like no matter what I do, at least I did something that says that analogue photography can be something else – that it doesn't have to be intrinsically bound to the visible world," says the 35-year-old. "It is full of possibility."

Fleur van Dodewaard, another Dutchwoman featured in Foam's *Still/Life* show, takes a similar approach with her *Sun Set Series*. The set of 13 images uses a mirror, a table, and reflected colours, and is shot with the sleek minimalism of much contemporary product photography, but it doesn't aim to make the objects interesting in their own right. It instead uses them to reference the still life genre and as elements in an interesting image – and thereby question the nature of photography and perception.

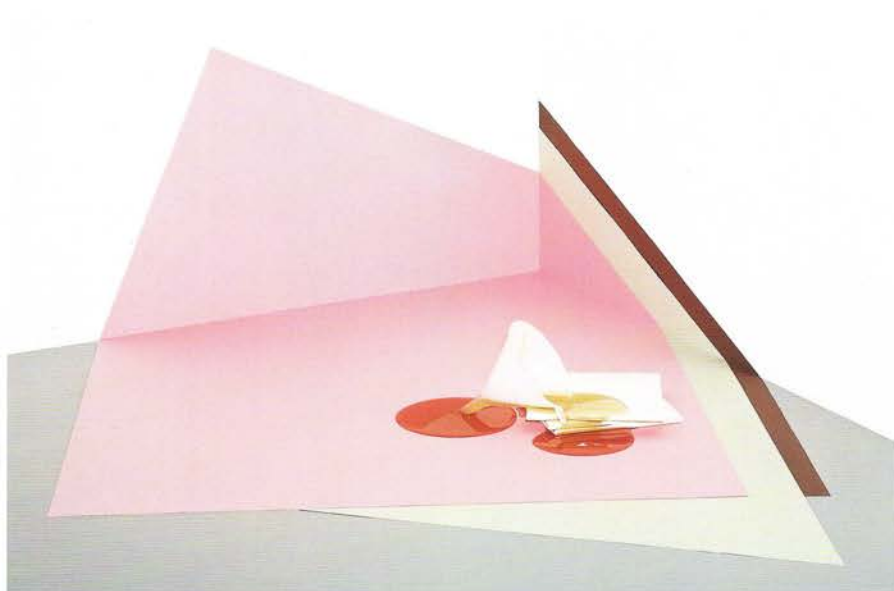
"Other than the traditional still life, the objects in my work don't carry meaning or function in themselves," she says. "They are materials, shapes and colours. Simultaneously, they embody an idea.... My working process often starts with a question in relation to the medium, and hopefully ends with a good image. But this questioning is not a goal in itself; it serves as a tool. It is rather a metaphor for questioning the world instead, which deals with the issue of how we look at things, and enables me to use the medium that normally records the world as it is to create imaginary perspectives."

Crossing genres

The work of Iranian-born artist Shirana Shahbazi, winner of the Citibank Photography Prize in 2002, is also concerned with photographic representation too, and her most recent book *Then Again*, published by Steidl, includes abstract still life images that have been identified with pictorialism. Urs Stahel, who curated her exhibition at Fotomuseum Winterthur last autumn, has interpreted her work in terms of a move towards pure imagemaking, writing in

6 From the series *Cubes for Albers and LeWitt*
© Jessica Eaton.

7 From the series *Spill* © Ingmar Swalue,
created with the stylist Mik Zandijk.



the introduction to *Then Again* that "the focus is now on pure pictoriality" and "a free, celebratory pictoriality; for a delight in colour and form in structure, in rhythms, dynamics and movement; a delight in pictures, their visual impact and their more self-effacing utopias".

Shahbazi doesn't see it this way. "I did discuss this a lot with Urs, because I actually do not agree," she says. "I would never make a separation between beauty and content, meaning that my work is definitely not just trying to be pretty. I put the abstract images in relation to non-abstract images, the images question and influence each other.... You can go both ways, back and forth, see something real, lose your path, get back, see a deeper space in the abstract images, see a flatter image in a landscape, put them into relation. [It's about] looking at pictures, and asking yourself questions."

The Zurich-based artist points out that she has never exhibited her still life photographs by themselves, always mixing them up with portraits and landscapes, to encourage her viewers to question their perceptions and the medium they are looking at.

Many of her contemporaries work in this way too – Lassry, Ethridge and Blalock all use a variety of genres. So too do Andrey Bogush, the 25-year-old Russian artist whose work was exhibited at the Hyères International Festival of Fashion and Photography last year, and who was selected for *Foam* magazine's Talent Issue; Jordan Tate, runner-up in *Aperture*'s 2010 Portfolio Prize, and Bryan Dooley, an MA student at London's Royal College of Art, who recently exhibited with Blalock, Eaton and Scheltens &

Abbenes in Amsterdam. "I see a range of genres as a way to create a rhythm between images, causing the viewer to reverberate between perceived fact and fiction," says Dooley.

"I see many young photographers working with seemingly disparate images and I think the trend is at once a rejection of previous photographic methodologies, yet still deeply rooted in the photographic tradition of series," adds Tate. "I view each of my pieces as a sentence in a broader dialogue about the form, function, and implications of the photograph. Many of the artists I see working in this manner tend to be addressing similar ideas, and I see their work as a method in which to understand the paradigmatic shift that photography underwent as digital input reached a critical mass."

Digital paradigm

For Tate, digital imaging is key to understanding contemporary photography, and as well as combining still lifes with other photographic genres, he mixes it with computer-generated 3D, screen grabs and animated "marching ant" clipping paths. Digital techniques and processes have fundamentally altered the ways in which we are able to deal with images, he argues, and "it is this expanded ground in which I attempt to situate my work, as a dialogue about how we approach photographs, what it means to be a photographer, and how we can reconcile the two".

Bogush argues something similar, and has included Photoshop graphics in his *Color Picker* series. "These images of colour pickers function as a very direct reference to Photoshop as well as to digital photography in general," he says. "My

works focus on how the image was done and how the viewer would be decoding it."

Hans Gremmen and Jaap Scheeren's *Fake Flowers in Full Colour* also uses still life to investigate digital imaging. The pair photographed a bouquet of fake flowers, then digitally separated the image into cyan, magenta, yellow and black; they then painted four further bunches of fake flowers to match the separations. Next they photographed each set of flowers, used those four files to print the images – adding colours one at a time in an attempt to put the colours back together. The final image is slightly off on all but one stem ("because we weren't good at flower-arranging" laughs Scheeren), but the end result wasn't really the point – the project was more about the process, and about becoming more aware of digital processing.

"The techniques we use every day are given techniques, which are hardly questioned," says Scheeren. "During these technical processes many decisions are made by the computer in a split second. We wanted to use digital techniques without the digital process, to get a grip again on the processes that surround us. People nowadays grow up in the digital world, it's something they take for granted."

Blalock's images, with their deliberately gauche Photoshop interventions, do something similar – but like Scheeren, Bogush and Tate, he feels digital technology has impacted on more than just the surface. His work is "engaged in understanding and remodeling what it means to make a photograph", he says, after the digital revolution. "There has been so much made of the material transition going on right now with

10 From the series *Color Pickers* © Andrey Bogush.

11 *New Work #38*, from the series *New Work*
© Jordan Tate.

11



digital, and, in turn, there is a lot of talk about the loss of the indexical aspect, but the history of photography is already rife with aberrations from this viewpoint," he told Sam Falls in an interview published by *Humble Arts* in 2010.

"To me the real point of interest is one of scale. I feel that the film picture is based on a model easily associated with the photographer and with the eye, so that its scale is human and seemingly dependent on the individual's looking. I feel that digital has interrupted this metaphor by aligning the picture not so much with the eye but with the technology. We come to a juncture where the picture is a bit of information that relates abstractly much more to the web or the archive than it does to the person."

To Blalock, this change has an effect whether the photographer is using digital techniques or not (and, in fact, he shoots on film and then scans his images). Similarly, Eaton says *Cubes for Albers and LeWitt* is informed by digital imaging, despite being shot on film. "Even with my analogue work I really consider everything at this point to be a hybrid," she says. "The way

I am able to think of a photograph, regardless of how I make it, is informed by digitisation. I am conceptual digital by simply being alive right now. Photography is inherently connected to technology, so if the technology changes drastically, so will photography. Photography has had a revolution via its technical dependence – digitisation has reframed the entire medium, and all aspects of it, not just still life."

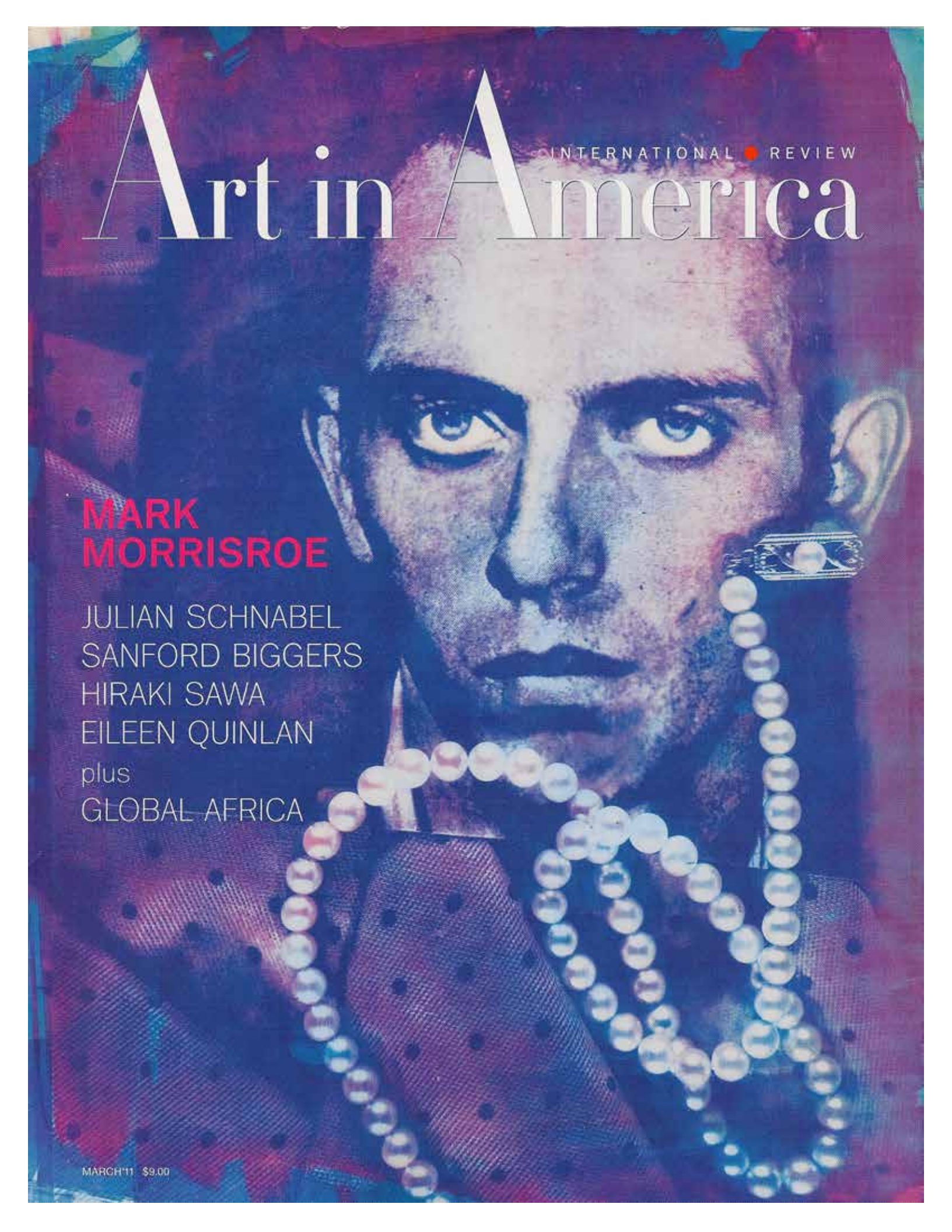
Experimental mode

This implies a new generation of photographers is interested in the medium because it has changed – but, as Eaton points out, digital imaging has reframed the entire spectrum of photography, not just still life or studio work. So why is still life so hot right now? Perhaps it's down to practicalities – Blalock and Eaton refer to their studios as laboratories, and still life, with its static elements and controlled conditions, allows for the kind of experimental engagement with the medium that they're interested in. But perhaps it's also still life's historical link with painting, and its to-and-fro relationship between

object and representation, that make it an ideal starting point from which to question any media.

"Still life is the perfect way to experiment," says Colette Olof, curator of *Foam's Still/Life* exhibition. "In the 17th century it was the best way of experimenting, since important issues such as religion and politics weren't used to experiment with. Young artists are looking for new ways to express themselves, and with the studio and still life they can try many different possibilities. For artists interested in crossover media, it is the perfect playground to look for new aesthetics and expressions." *BJP*

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Art in America

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EILEEN QUINLAN

AN INTERVIEW BY STEEL STILLMAN

Eileen Quinlan describes herself as a still-life photographer. Born in 1972, she has become well known in recent years as one of a cohort of photographers—Walead Beshty and Liz Deschenes are notable others—who, following in the footsteps of practitioners from Moholy-Nagy to James Welling, have been disassembling the layered apparatus of photography (light, subject, optics, chemistry, bytes, the material image) and finding new means of expression.

Often stunningly beautiful, Quinlan's work is surprisingly straightforward. She uses medium- and large-format cameras and studio strobes to shoot tabletop, house-of-cardlike worlds—angular constructions, staged for the camera's lens, in which propped mirrors reflect intensely colored light, deep shadows, bits of fabric, reflective Mylar, wisps of smoke, photographs, and, especially, each other. The resulting images offer kaleidoscopic views into indefinite and often infinite spaces. Little is seen of the studio where they were taken or of the photographer who made them, though sometimes she leaves clues: specks of dust, a fingerprint, a crumpled paper towel, or the edge of a can of beans used to buttress a mirrored tile.

Quinlan shoots on film and avoids Photoshop for reasons more practical than nostalgic—she was professionally trained in the analog world and still knows where to find film.

Overall, there is an unexpected sincerity to her process. Everything you see happened just the way it appears. The wizardry is all in the setup. Quinlan plays hide-and-seek with the camera (I've never seen it, but I know the camera is there, deep in some reflected shadow) and invites us to play along. To look at her pictures is to parse their construction—a game for puzzlers yielding endless pleasure.

Quinlan grew up in Boston and in southern New Hampshire. She attended the School of the Museum of Fine Arts/Tufts University, graduating with a BFA in 1996. After moving to New York in 1999, she worked in advertising and fashion—and as an assistant to commercial photographers—before earning an MFA from Columbia University in 2005. In the last six years, she has had eight solo exhibitions in the U.S. and Europe, including her first museum solo, at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston in 2009. Her work has appeared in dozens of group shows and is currently on view in "All of this and nothing" at the Hammer Museum in L.A. Quinlan was recently appointed co-chair of the photography department at Bard College's Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts. She is married to the artist Cheyney Thompson, with whom she has a three-year-old son, and lives and works in Brooklyn. We spoke in her Williamsburg studio on a cold night in January.

STEEL STILLMAN What kind of art were you looking at as an undergraduate?

EILEEN QUINLAN I remember coming across a book on Sigmar Polke in the library at the Museum School in 1991, and being struck by the liberties he took with photographic materials—solarizing and staining his prints, even burning his film. The spirits of Nan Goldin and Philip-Lorca diCorcia hung over the Museum School at that time—they had studied there in the late '70s—but I was looking for less diaristic or cinematic models, and Polke's irreverence excited me.

SS Did Polke inspire your interest in ghost photographs?

EQ It was more the other way around. When I was quite young, I discovered the images of the Cottingley Fairies—a suite of photographs taken in the 1910s by two cousins. Arthur Conan Doyle claimed they illustrated psychic phenomena—and ever since I've been interested in supernatural stories and how photography, even in the age of Photoshop, has been used to support them. I love the way the camera can



Eileen Quinlan in her studio, 2010. Courtesy the artist.

Opposite, *Yellow Goya*, 2007, UV laminated chromogenic print mounted on Sintra, 40 by 30 inches.

All photos this article, unless otherwise noted, courtesy Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York.



make immaterial or unconvincing subject matter look real.

While working on one of my first projects at Columbia—I was taking simple still-life pictures—I began researching contemporary ghost photography. I discovered that the ghost rarely takes human form and appears more often as an orb or cloud, invariably caused by dust on the film or smoke from somebody's cigarette. As I searched, I stumbled on smoking fetish images, photographs of women in various stages of undress surrounded by smoke; these led me to make a series of not altogether successful photographs of smoking men.

I next tried photographing smoke by itself, and though I wasn't sure what I was doing, my teachers encouraged me to keep at it. I realized I could use mirrors—they doubled the volume of the smoke—and the commercial lighting skills I'd acquired working as an assistant. Gradually, the pictures became more complex and began to resemble commercial still-life shots. In those early



days, when people asked me what they were, I'd say they were product photography without the product.

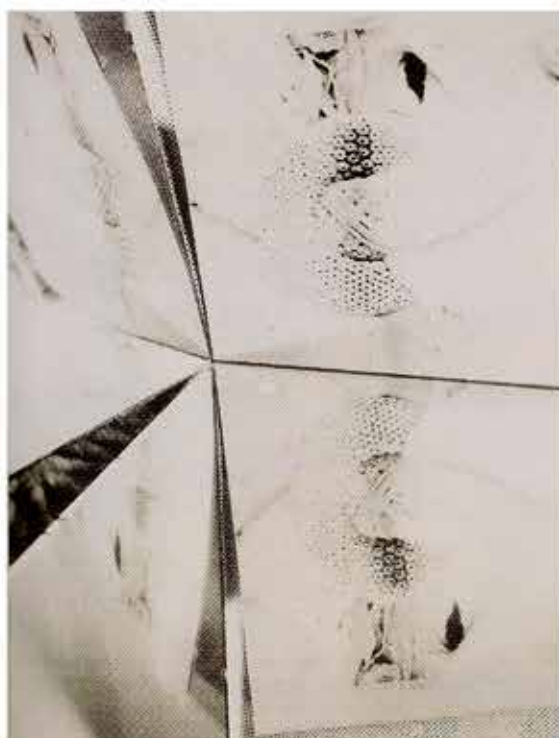
SS This body of work formed the basis for your thesis show at Columbia and seems to have set the stage for almost everything you've done since. The title you used for this first series, "Smoke & Mirrors," was

important, too: it described the work and nodded to the sleight of hand behind all art production.

EQ I wanted it also to evoke the subtle, manipulative ways that abstraction is deployed in advertising and mass media. "Smoke & Mirrors" began as a project—I thought I'd just do a series of pictures and move on. But the more I made, the more layers I found to investigate; so what began as a project turned into a way of working. I still use the same setup—three lights, three or four colored gels, a small table and 2-by-2-foot mirror tiles from Home Depot. Eventually smoke became less important. And, as other series emerged, I began using different titles—several sets of images were named after perfumes, for example.

SS When I saw your second solo show at Miguel Abreu Gallery in New York, in 2010, it seemed that something had changed—a rougher, less obvious beauty had come into your work. What had happened?

EQ I was feeling stuck and thought a little violence might help. The black-and-white Polaroid film I use produces very fragile negatives [color Polaroids have no negatives] and, despite my best efforts, they always get damaged. For a change, I decid-



Top, *Smoke & Mirrors #10*, 2005, UV laminated chromogenic print, 16 by 20 inches.

Left, *The Star on the Forehead*, 2010, gelatin silver print mounted on aluminum, 40 by 30 inches.

Opposite, *Highlands #8*, 2010, gelatin silver print mounted on aluminum, 60 by 48 inches. Courtesy Sutton Lane, London.

"I DISCOVERED THAT THE GHOST RARELY TAKES HUMAN FORM AND APPEARS MORE OFTEN AS AN ORB OR CLOUD, INVARIABLY CAUSED BY DUST ON THE FILM OR SMOKE FROM SOMEBODY'S CIGARETTE."

ed to stress the negatives to the max—even to the point of letting the images fall apart. On a parallel track, I began rephotographing still-life photographs of flowers and other funerary ornaments, which I'd been shooting for years at Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris, and incorporated all these images into my setup.

I was looking for a way to get my hand into the work, to make it more personal, more meaningful. Death is a key to this series. I lost many of the older people in my life last year—between the two of us, *Cheyney* and I lost three grandmothers—and I was feeling very sad. These women were our last link to the early 20th century. Calling my show at Miguel's "Nature Morte" and titling all the images after works by artists or writers who are buried at Père Lachaise—*Star on the Forehead*, for instance, was the name of a Raymond Roussel play—became a way of mourning.

SS What will you show at the Hammer?

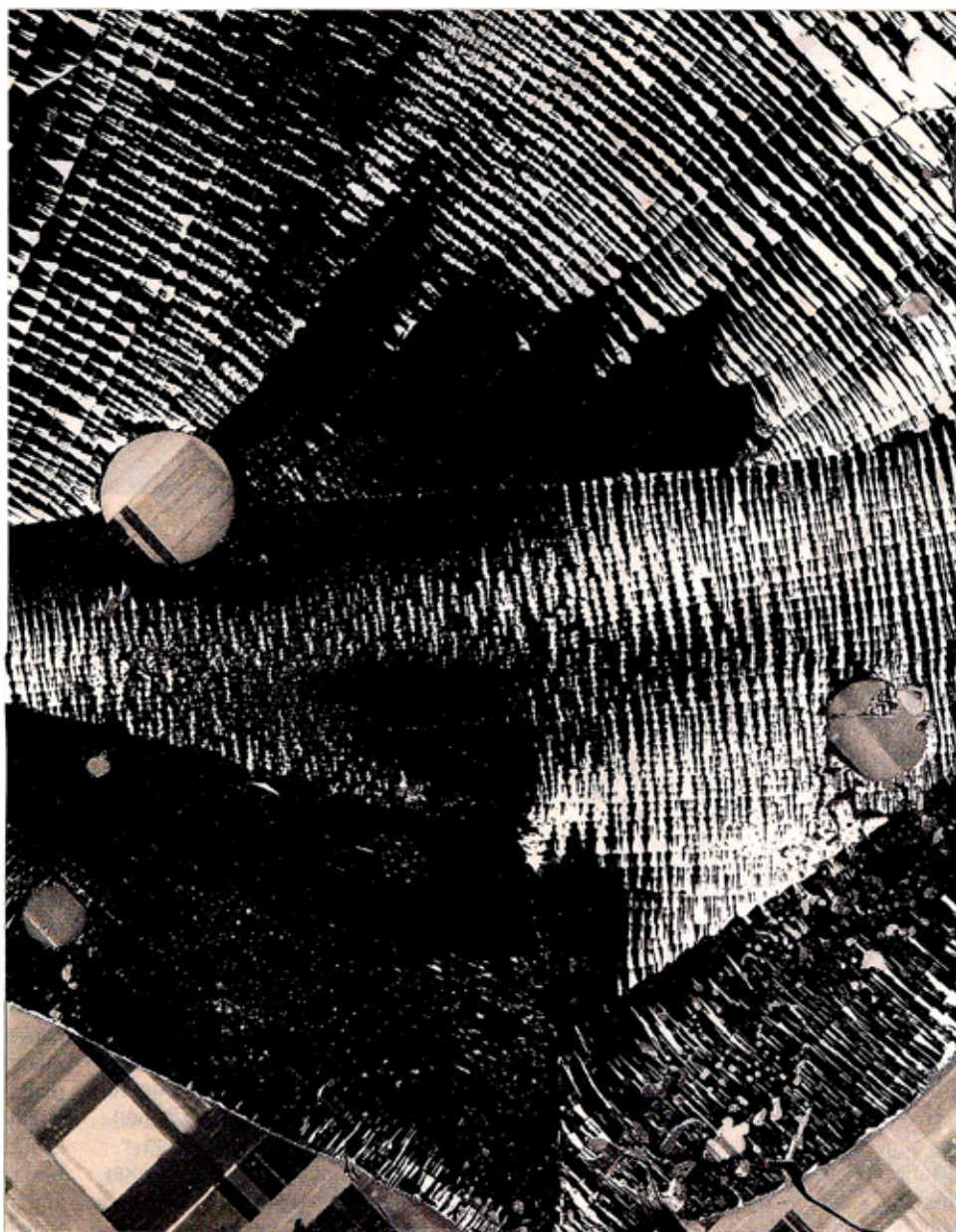
EQ There will be pieces from the "Nature Morte" series and others from a show called

"Highlands" that I did last November at Sutton Lane in Paris. "Highlands" included images of plaid that I made as a sort of homage to Alexander McQueen, the fashion designer who committed suicide last year.

SS Do you think of yourself as an intuitive artist?

EQ When I first became an artist I resisted intuition and poetry, perhaps because so many of my

teachers were skeptical postmodernists. But as time has passed, I've realized there is no way to eliminate subjectivity. Intuition and reason take turns. My process is open-ended—I make work first and edit it later—and my relationship to it changes all the time. I'd rather have my work accumulate references, even seemingly contradictory ones, than be about any kind of purity. ○



STEEL STILLMAN is an artist and writer based in New York.

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Exhibition: Eileen Quinlan, *Nature Morte*

Dates: March 20 – April 29, 2010

Reception: Saturday, March 20, 6 – 8 PM

Opening on March 20th, Miguel Abreu Gallery is pleased to present *Nature Morte*, Eileen Quinlan's second one-person show at the gallery.

From the onset and before anything, Ms. Quinlan's photographic works have been still lifes - or nature mortes - that is, images depicting arrangements of inanimate, commonplace objects. Apprehended as a whole, the exhibition operates as a kind of confirmation of that basic fact.

The still life, of course, is an age-old genre in the history of art. It originated in ancient Egypt with such paintings often adorning the interior of tombs, as it was believed that represented food elements and other items would, in the afterlife, become real and available for use by the deceased. One might argue that, in a sense, a similar thread of belief obliquely re-emerges in Quinlan's new body of work. But it is more for the eye and mind to consider than for the stomach to digest that 'trompe l'oeil' floral arrangements find themselves disseminated in several pictures in the exhibition. More or less fragmented and refracted parts of a funerary bouquet, an artificial object at first produced to commemorate the memory of a loved one, reverses the natural cycle of life and death. Ephemeral and colorful fresh flowers constitute life-affirming offerings, but they exist simultaneously as symbolic reminders of life's impermanence. Here the solid and long lasting, the silk or ceramic reproduction of a bouquet on a tomb, actualizes the fantasy of the immortal overtaking the fragile and mere mortal.

Quinlan's inscription of this narrative of transubstantiation in mostly black and white photographic objects suggests an alignment with Roland Barthes' assertion in his late essay, *Camera Lucida*, that death is the logical implication of every image. But death is also the final moment of a life and the last possible photograph. Concurrently, Barthes sees the photograph as a kind of resurrection. It continues after the thing or person is gone. It ends up acquiring a life of its own, in scrapbooks, for instance, on walls or on screens, as long as a material support can bear to manifest it. One might say, further, that the past becomes as certain as the present. Through photographs, Barthes can assure himself of his mother and know that his experience with her was real.

What is also to be noted in the present display is the way in which Quinlan scrambles some of the oppositions that have rendered intelligible the reception of her work to date. For example, she at times abandons the comfort of her studio practice and ventures outdoors to take pictures of fake flowers. Traces of physical and chemical friction, in some works, disturb the purity of seemingly abstract, geometrical compositions. Older pictures are mixed with newer ones. And the subtle oscillation between black and white and color posits neither chromatic register as truer than the other.

As the viewer confronts this complex constellation of cross-pollinating images, at once unstable and precise, it might be said that it is the tired sense of seeing *through photography* that is put to work and re-energized. And that is what makes the forms and elements depicted in Quinlan's works available for use by the living dead.

For more information or for visuals, please contact the gallery:

36 Orchard Street (between Canal & Hester), New York, NY 10002
Tel 212.995.1774 • Fax 646.688.2302 • post@miguelabreugallery.com

Gallery hours: Wednesday – Sunday, 11:00 AM to 6:30 PM

Subway: F to East Broadway; B, D to Grand Street or J, M, Z to Delancey / Essex Street

frieze

Eileen Quinlan



Eileen Quinlan
After Winter
2004-10
C-type print mounted
on Perspex
41x51 cm

Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York, USA

Looking at an Eileen Quinlan photograph is like peering into a kaleidoscope – a disorienting and unstable arrangement of colours, reflections, textures and planes. Her show 'Nature Morte', however, which incorporated shots of memorial bouquets in Père Lachaise Cemetery, Paris, served as a reminder that she has always viewed her photographs as still lifes – not intuitively generated abstractions but images of inanimate objects and lighting effects.

Quinlan re-photographed some of the cemetery shots in the studio, where she caused the blossoms to splinter or multiply in mirrors like monstrous crystals. Still lifes, of course, have often included representations of fresh flowers, whether as celebrations of plenitude or reminders of mortality. These garlands and bouquets, however, are made of stone and synthetic materials, which are at once cold to the touch and – though they may become worn – resist decay. The images evoke death but also acquire a life of their own, recalling Roland Barthes' meditations on photography in *Camera Lucida* (1980).

The first photograph in the show, *After Winter* (2004-10) – an unusually straightforward, if moody, shot of silvery artificial flowers before a tombstone – signaled something different from the hermetic abstractions one expects to see in Quinlan's work. Several obvious departures initiated a dialogue between her various working methods: she shot the cemetery images on

location, whereas other works continued her usual practice of creating contained installations in her studio. The show was laced with overtly figurative imagery; gelatin silver prints outnumbered the smattering of lush colour photographs.

Assuming the guise of a beguiling novice magician, Quinlan sometimes drops hints as to her process – through visibly scratched surfaces or ragged mirror edges that don't quite fit together, for example – when she documents installations in her studio. But she's equally likely to craft stubborn enigmas, when she deploys such illusionistic paraphernalia as mirrors, strobe lights, smoke and coloured gels. Her palette, lighting and materials also frequently echo commercial design – such as stock photographs or perfume and liquor adverts – but their polished allure surfaces in her work as a form of disturbance. Quinlan's preoccupation with examining how photographs work means that she usually eschews digital manipulation or darkroom wizardry, but in 'Nature Morte' she allowed some chemical distortion, such as a cerulean stain that courses down the shot of a *trompe-l'oeil* garland in *You'll Never Follow Me* (2008-10) – as if venturing out of her studio necessitated further mediation.

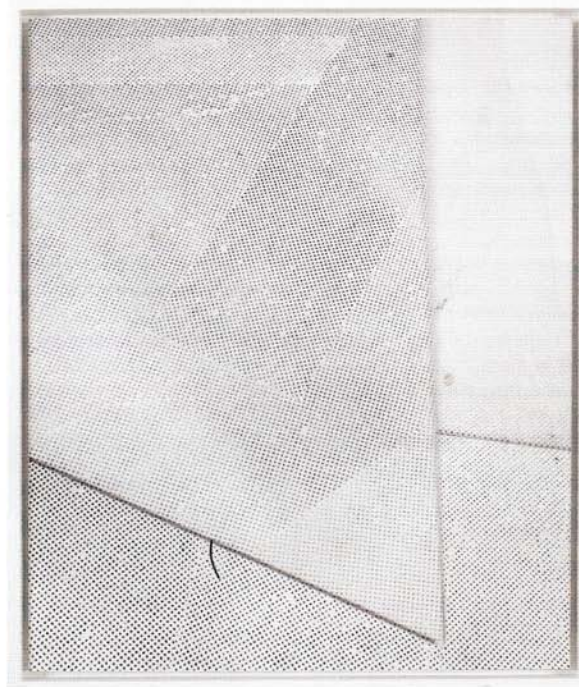
The connection to mortality extends beyond funerary imagery to more playful or accidental →

echoes. Some photographs recall the look of 19th-century mourning cards and spiritualist photographers' visual hokum. *The Raft* (2010) seems to depict a piece of ruffled fabric whose centre has been eaten away, leaving a shape like a diaphanous white frame floating against a black field. In *A Ground in the Air* (2010) a sheet of some less identifiable material, perforated with two face-like ovals and divided into shaded areas resembling patches of aquatint in Francisco Goya's etchings, hangs in front of a grey field that is mottled as if shot with ectoplasm. A whiff of the morbid also emanates from imperfections - redolent of dust, age and failure - that Quinlan allows to mar her images. At the same time, one is always brought back to the freshness of her project, her ability to unsettle the way we look at photographs.

Quinlan's photographs make one want to look. *The Things as They Are* (2010), for example, which comprises three overlapping planes that reflect or are imprinted with a woven texture, is a maddeningly absorbing image - absurd and cerebral, grubby but also perfectly composed, mysterious yet matter-of-fact. Elsewhere in the show, a larger photograph, *Everything Moves, Everything Shimmers* (2010), deflated that fascination by offering a more flaccid, but also more legible, arrangement of similar materials. Meanwhile, it moodily revealed its own vexing spatial conundrums.

Kristin M. Jones

Eileen Quinlan
The Things as They Are
 2010
 Gelatin silver print
 mounted on aluminium
 61x51 cm



ARTFORUM

Eileen Quinlan

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY

The fact that nearly all of Eileen Quinlan's photographs are still lifes has often been obscured by the variety of other interests evident in her work. Critics have, perhaps too often, related her images to the historical precedents set by early modernists such as Edward Weston, Minor White, Aaron Siskind, and Alfred Stieglitz (notably his "Equivalents"

series of 1925–34). But Quinlan's 2004–2007 "Smoke and Mirrors" series, for instance, which documents a large number of arrangements of the titular materials, alludes not only to the legacy of early modern abstraction but also to the Bush administration's secretive war strategies in Iraq. These lush images, at the same time, do not shy from their co-optation of commercial photography and graphic design. The imperfections of dust and scratches on some of the photographs, moreover, point up Quinlan's concern with the mechanics of producing a photograph in the studio.

Her latest exhibition, "Nature Morte," focused explicitly on still life, prompting a reconsideration of the obsessive desire to reconfigure and document a limited set of inanimate objects in the earlier series. The new,



Eileen Quinlan,
*The Rose Is Finished
(for Kate)*, 2010, color
photograph mounted
on Plexiglas, 24 x 20".

mostly black-and-white images address the still life's age-old connection to death and the funereal, in part through allusions to the increasing obsolescence of film—with, for instance, several works made from negatives that had been soaked in a water bath. The somber atmosphere was most plainly conveyed, however, in images such as *Women's Business*, 2010, which depicts a torn photograph of artificial flowers covered in dirt, and *After Winter*, 2004–10, a small photograph portraying an ashy collection of more flowers in front of a tombstone. This second piece, the only unambiguously representational image on view, stood out as a reminder that Quinlan's photographs have been particularly devoted to examining the lifeless as if it were lifelike—and, however incongruous it may seem, to the way in which photography grants objects a nearly talismanic presence. The exhibition marked an extension of Quinlan's investment in the photograph's aptitude for unnerving sleights of hand, already apparent in the "Smoke and Mirrors" series. *The Rose Is Finished (for Kate)*, 2010, for instance, a precisely constructed and almost symmetrical labyrinth composed of strokes of pink paint on angled mirrors, seems deeply uneasy—an effect won, paradoxically, through its kinship with high-gloss advertisements.

Indeed, the show as a whole exuded an undeniable energy in spite of the pervasive sense of deterioration and decay. The origin of this liveliness, surprisingly, seems to lie in the new paths opened up by Quinlan's decision to focus on death. In an oft-quoted statement in which he responded to the so-called death of painting, Steven Parrino said, "Death can be refreshing, so I started engaging in necrophilia . . . approaching history in the same way that Dr. Frankenstein approaches body parts . . . Nature Morte [. . .] I am still concerned with 'art about art,' but I am also aware that 'art about art' still reflects the time in which it was made." Quinlan may be onto something similar, but rather than mining art history, her new photographs consider her own previous work, as if processing it through a distortion loop. They offer something refreshingly new.

—Lauren O'Neill-Butler



THE NEW YORKER

APRIL 07, 2010

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN: ART

EILEEN QUINLAN

Quinlan's photographs, nearly all of them still-lives of mirrors and their reflections, mesh representation and abstraction so seamlessly that the distinctions dissolve. Her new works include more recognizable elements than previous ones, mainly fake and stone flowers from the graves in Paris's Père Lachaise cemetery. But the melancholy bits of information they provide are almost immediately shattered—sucked into faceted fields of abstract compositions that suggest the view from inside a diamond. Other pieces, made by allowing prints to deteriorate in a chemical bath for days, dispense with everything but wonderfully decrepit and entirely accidental expressionism. Quinlan's restraint and finesse are what keep these extraordinary images as sharp as her mirrors' broken edges. Through April 29.



Depth of Field

In recent years, the topic of abstraction has returned to photography. Curator *Christopher Bedford* discusses this resurgence of interest with artists **Walead Beshty**, **Liz Deschenes** and **Eileen Quinlan**



Liz Deschenes
Horizontal/Vertical
Photograph #5
2009
Silver toned black and
white photogram
133x82 cm

CHRISTOPHER BEDFORD I think we can all agree that within the field of photography, abstraction has emerged in the past few years as one of a few *de rigueur* topics. Several recent exhibitions have drawn attention to the most prominent practitioners, but neither these exhibitions nor related writings have suggested critical taxonomies to help us think analytically about the variety of conceptual interests driving artists to investigate the applications of abstraction in photography. Instead, exhibitions – many of them visually dazzling – have been based on simple visual parity, implying relationships between works that in many cases don't exist. Some artists have used photography as a way to create abstractions that function in a documentary sense, as very literal records of specific physical conditions. Can each of you comment on this as a strategy in your work and, more broadly, as a strain within abstract photography?

WALEAD BESHTY I wouldn't use the word abstract to describe my work, especially the work that the term is usually associated with. I consider those works, the photograms or X-ray photographs, to be literal, meaning that they aren't abstractions of a particular subject matter, but are concrete manifestations of a specific set of conditions.

In contemporary art, abstraction is used as a shorthand for a certain set of formal traits, the absence of figuration being one, but as a category it lacks any real solidity, unless it's used as a proper name for a particular historical movement. Abstraction tends to describe the way an object is approached and our expectations of it, rather than anything inherent, lending these assumptions an air of concreteness. I resist the term because it is a false delimiter, and tends to stop certain fundamental questions from being asked. Claiming abstraction, in anything but a naive sense, seems a melancholic negation of the Utopian arguments that abstraction, as an agglomeration of historical movements, implies (i.e. a site of unfettered subjectivity, transcendental meaning, or the proposition of a materialist revolutionary project within art), because it reduces these arguments to a set of formal similarities.

Technically, whatever might be called 'documentary' is also an abstraction (which is the case for any representation), because whatever the term is applied to is thus proposed as an aesthetic model of a social phenomenon; meaning that documents are – by definition – about something that they are separate from. 'Documentary' also implies a certification by the state, an authority that operates by mandate, and the documentary

mode reifies this type of authoritative voice, again obscuring some fundamental questions. The law is, of course, an abstraction *par excellence*.

Regardless of the appearance of what either term is used to describe, what unites documentary and abstraction is that they imply that the object is separate from the phenomena it is proposed to depict, that it must stand apart to have meaning, and its material condition, its ideological function, becomes secondary if acknowledged at all. I'm more interested in thinking of objects as part of an active system, seeing the political or social meaning of an object as inseparable from its material existence and going from there. Terms like 'documentary' or 'abstraction' aren't really useful for me as anything more than historical or methodological curiosities.

EILEEN QUINLAN The first abstract photos – still-lives, really – I created were titled 'Smoke & Mirrors' which allowed me to telegraph their subject matter as both stubborn fact and sleight of hand. The imperfections they bore (settling dust, a scratch on the surface of a mirror) and an undeniably photographic rendering of the smoke that curled its way toward the heat of a modeling lamp, were necessary in order to tether

them to the things in front of the lens, away from a painterly or subjective reading. The fact that these images, and the ones I continue to fashion under other names, are never manipulated in the darkroom or digitally continues to reinforce their possible status as documents of real events in the studio.

I can't speak for other artists dealing with the issue, but they must feel a similar anxiety in the face of appearing to create only abstractions. I flirt with a kind of refusal, but hope to stay on the right side of the question through an accretion of implied meanings, rather than, as Walead put it, an evacuation of it.

LIZ DESCHENES There have been many exhibitions, of late, that have brought together the words 'photography' and 'abstraction'. All photographic images are simultaneously representational and abstract, constructions that have gone through a series of translations and manipulations – either mechanically, digitally, or both. There are as many perspectives as there are practitioners, objectives and approaches to grappling with the medium.

For several years, my work has taken on self-reflexivity in photography. It became clear to me that historically these concerns have always existed, but the discussion of



it as a phenomenon or practice was not evident. While explicitly narrative photography was the dominant mode of expression and exhibition in the late 1990s, in 2000 I curated a show at Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York, entitled 'Photography about Photography', that focused on 13 contemporary artists and revealed a wide array of medium-specific concerns. My own work has been thoroughly invested in photography – in its history, its ongoing, complicated relationship to other practices and their histories.

I resist the term abstraction because it is a false delimiter, and tends to stop fundamental questions from being asked.

Walead Beshty

CB In an effort to inch towards a less trans-historical, more specific understanding of abstraction's currency for photographers working today I'd like to turn away from photography and towards painting for a moment.

In her recent study of Robert Ryman, *Used Paint* (2009), Suzanne P. Hudson proposes a new understanding of Ryman's work through John Dewey's conception of pragmatism or 'learning by doing'. Dewey wrote 'Here is the organic relation of theory and practice. [One learns] not simply [by] doing things, but [by] getting also the *idea* of what he does; getting from the start some intellectual conception that enters into his practice and enriches it; while every idea finds, directly or indirectly, some application in experience and has some effect upon life.'

Dewey's formulation of a self-sustaining, practice-based inquiry seems relevant in varying measure to each of you and might

Both images courtesy, Wallpaper, New York, and the artist

I'm interested in the mechanics of presenting images, a sudden bracing encounter with the clumsy hand of the artist, attempting to adjust the veil.

Eileen Quinlan

Opposite, top:
Walead Beshty
FedEx® Tubes ©2005
FEDEX 139752 REV 10/05
SSCC, Priority Overnight,
Los Angeles – New York,
International Priority, New
York – Pouques-les-Eaux
2008
FedEx box, laminated
safety glass, silicone,
tape, metal, tracking and
customs labels
Installation view, 'Los
Angeles Confidential',
Parc Saint Leger, Centre
d'art Contemporain de
Pouques-les-Eaux

Opposite, below:
Walead Beshty
Travel Picture Meadow
[Tchaikowskistrasse 17
in multiple exposures^o
(LAXFRATHE/
TXLCPHSEALAX) March
27-April 3, 2006], ©Contax
G-2, L-3 Communications
cXaminer 3DX 6000, and
iNvision Technologies CTX
5000
2006-7
Chromogenic print
221x124 cm

Right:
Eileen Quinlan
Fracas #4 (for A.R.)
2009
Chromogenic print
61x51 cm



even be seen as a way to think through much more broadly the materialist/pragmatist impulse so prevalent in photography today.

WB I suppose this makes sense, since contemporary debates about photography seem stuck in decades-old discussions of the politics of representation, which, in struggling with the instrumentalization of aesthetics, dead-ended in an existential divide between signifier and signified. In what has become the dominant theoretical cliché about photography, this line of thinking asserts that the only meaning a photograph can hope to achieve is a display of its own failure to have a stable meaning, that death and absence are their only inherent qualities. Instead of accepting contingency as a mundane condition of photographic meaning, and the source of its power as a relational tool, contingency as hollowness becomes photography's identity, a melancholic ontology that encourages poetic musings that masquerade as aesthetic theory.

A learning-by-doing model offers one way around this impasse by placing the emphasis on active processes, instead of on the relative truthfulness of competing representations and the lack of an absolute measure by which to evaluate truthfulness. But rather than stopping with the model of the individual artist in the studio, Dewey's idea seems most useful when it's applied to the larger social field of production (as many after him have, say Claude Lévi-Strauss or Michel de Certeau); opening up the possibility of treating the pragmatics of social space as a dynamic and active context for production.

Politics in art usually gets reduced to the revelatory, representing something that is going on somewhere else, and usually reiterates problematic relations of power and subordination, speaking to the viewer in a borrowed tongue – that of institutional power – that limits the viewer to the role of receiver. But there is the fundamental political question of the site of reception that is left unaddressed, and at worst obscured, by this

sort of work, specifically whether politicized aesthetics can be proposed in a manner that doesn't perpetuate the top-down assertion of aesthetic meaning. I don't mean addressing it by condemning institutions or art production as corrupt – this is too easy – but in a way that treats the social realities of the site of reception as a condition of contemporary production, both acknowledging it, and also proposing modifications to it through active, rather than passive relationships to an audience. All of the meanings attached to objects are a sort of learning-by-doing, a navigation of the varied forces at work. I think it is important to acknowledge these forces, not treat them as secrets.

To go back to the abstraction and documentary question, Hito Steyerl linked the two eloquently when she wrote that with documentary images, 'the more immediate they become, the less there is to see. The closer to reality we get, the less intelligible it becomes.' I take her comment to mean that as representations become increasingly



Liz Deschenes
Left/Right
 2008
 Fujiflex print
 58x96 cm

embedded in the circumstances they depict, the more thought and effort they require to be legible, and that this legibility has the potential to alter or intervene in our relationship to daily life. Considered in this way, there is a possibility to challenge and, hopefully, shift the symbolic order that makes these expressions unrecognizable in conventional terms, and as a result, the false solidity of categorical delimiters we use to understand aesthetics will have to be altered, and vulgar concreteness, as a problem confronting the politics of aesthetics, can be destabilized.

All photographs are simultaneously representational and abstract, constructions that have gone through translations and manipulations.

Liz Deschenes

LD To a minor degree, materiality was present in my curatorial project, and has been in the background of my photographs. However, process is more of a means to an end. I am significantly more invested in what these pursuits can communicate about photography, and the particular way the medium has been positioned and historicized. In regards to Dewey, learning-by-doing, or exhibiting and lecturing would apply to those practicalities and potential discoveries. These activities have allowed me to have a clearer perspective on my concerns and possible directions for the work.

EQ On the question of learning-by-doing, it's a fair enough characterization of the way I work. I oscillate between an experimental, subjective, and even (gulp) intuitive studio process, where I shoot with very little structure, bound only by a limited set of materials and a more considered editing and installing process, where I shape and make sense of the mass of fragmentary images that are generated in the studio. This is the moment when I try to grapple with the actual site and experience of viewership, and the greater context of the world in which my photographs circulate. I'm deeply suspicious of occupying the mythic role of masterful artist, or of medium channeling an elusive muse, but I also recognize that art-making cannot be totally controlled. The output of my studio activities can look like other art (Suprematism, Constructivism, Surrealism) or it can resemble commercial photography (perfume advertisements, abstract stock, album covers). I don't privilege most compositions/iterations as good or bad, I recognize that they are almost always interchangeable. My selections satisfy the different aims of each installation, sometimes to demystify the circumstances of the making of the images, and other times to conceal it – sometimes to force an engagement with each picture as such, and other times to create surrogates, almost without content, that can be configured into larger pictures on the wall. While some photos are seductive, even beautiful, others frustrate with a not-quite-there-ness. This creates for me an interesting tension, foregrounding questions of taste, of what constitutes success in the eye of the viewer.

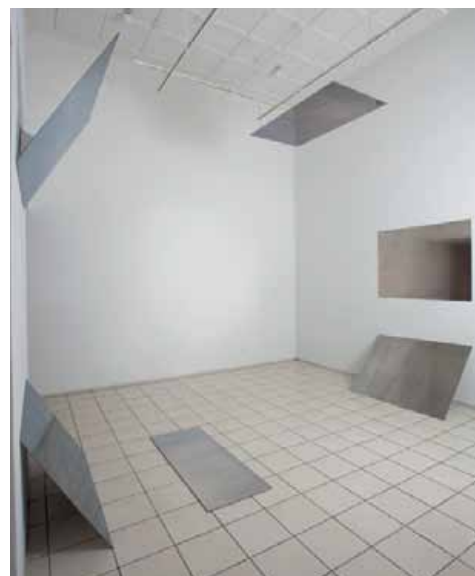
Ultimately I'm interested in presenting people with both an opportunity for contemplation and an alienation effect that can interrupt it – an awareness of the mechanics of presenting and consuming images, or a

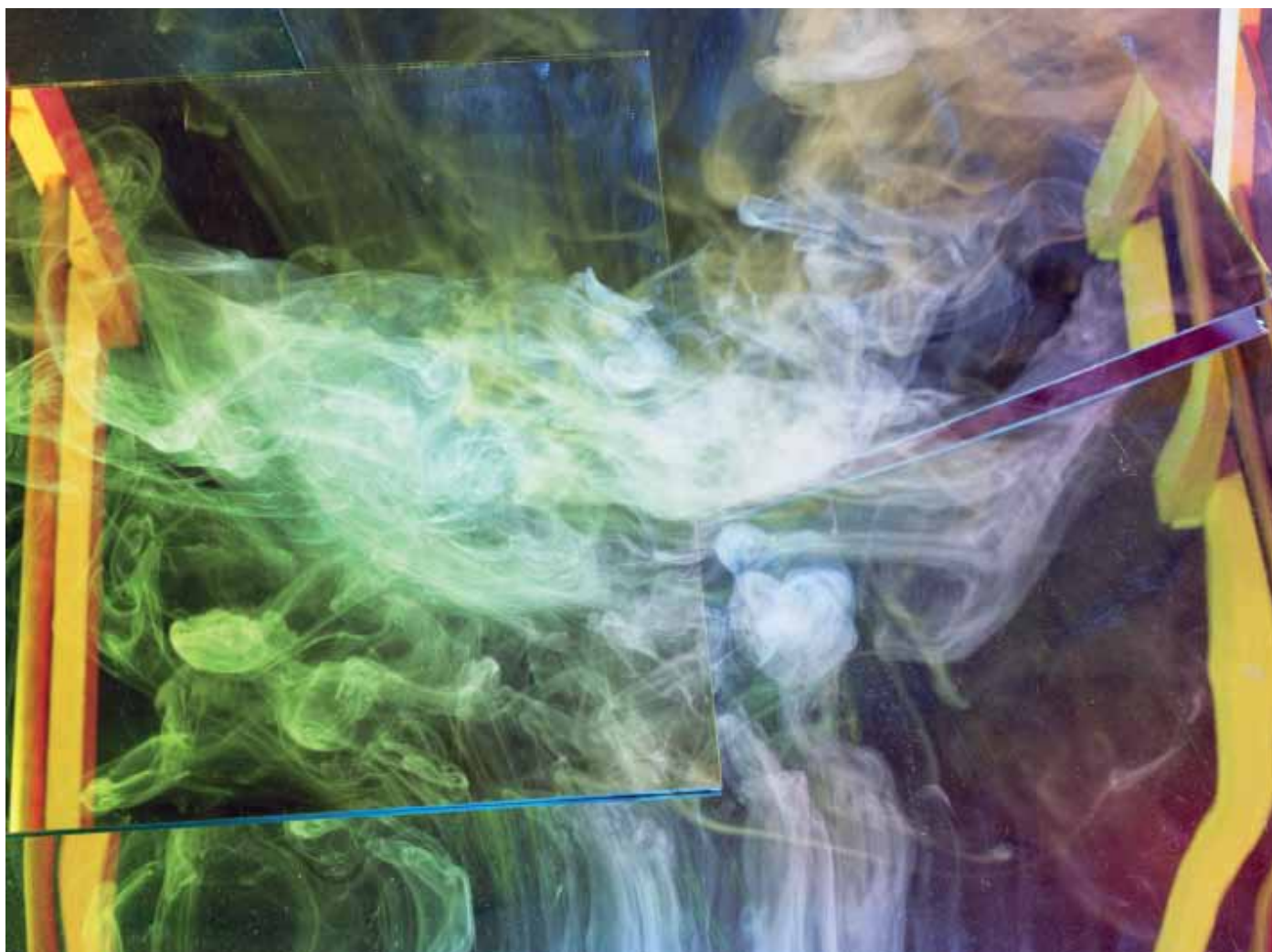
sudden bracing encounter with the clumsy hand of the artist, attempting to adjust the veil. These aims are ambitious (though certainly not original), but they allow me to produce, despite my anxiety around the value and meaning of the whole endeavour. Sometimes I'm leading the work, and other times I'm being led by it.

CB I began this discussion by gesturing towards a need to develop a more specific understanding of the various registers of abstraction within photographic practice. That question grew in large part out of a desire, shared by us all, I think, to develop a more nuanced understanding of the inter-related concrete and ideological relationships that exist between the appearance of certain non-representational works and the conditions under which those works are produced and shown. What seems to have emerged is an understanding of non-representational image making in photography today as a mode of production that is deeply conscious of the 'social realities of the site of reception', to quote Walead, as well as the specific conditions of the site of production, since it is those conditions that determine the formal characteristics of the work.

A thorough 'formal' investigation of such works, then, naturally enfold conception, production *and* form, and mandates an understanding of all three phases as mutually constitutive and, ultimately, physically indivisible. This model, it seems to me, has only a coincidental relationship to shared formal vocabularies, and everything to do with process as a means of connecting with social realities/conditions. Does this seem to you all a fair summation?

Liz Deschenes
Tilt/Swing (360° field of vision, version 1)
 2009
 Silver toned black and white photograms
 Installation view





Eileen Quinlan
Smoke & Mirrors #10
 2005
 Chromogenic print
 41x51 cm

WB I still respond negatively to the separation that terms like photography and abstraction imply, and I really don't find the conventional meaning of either all that useful. Perhaps it's a matter of denaturalizing the terms, allowing them to describe specific processes. I agree with Liz that processes or procedures are only significant as means to an end, and for me the end should never mythologize or exoticize the means; this is what I'm most wary of, treating convention, or naturalized authority, as a mystical fact. I try to limit my work to procedures that are mundane, available, and almost dumb. I think of the processes and production of my work as parasitic, using expansive structures, say FedEx, or airport security, or the supposed transparency of technological images, to produce outcomes they weren't intended for.

I don't have a particular attachment to photography *per se*, but I return to it because it remains the dominant mode through which images circulate, and the widespread rituals involved in its traffic and dissemination raise the stakes on the vague critical tools available for its discussion. I see photography as an

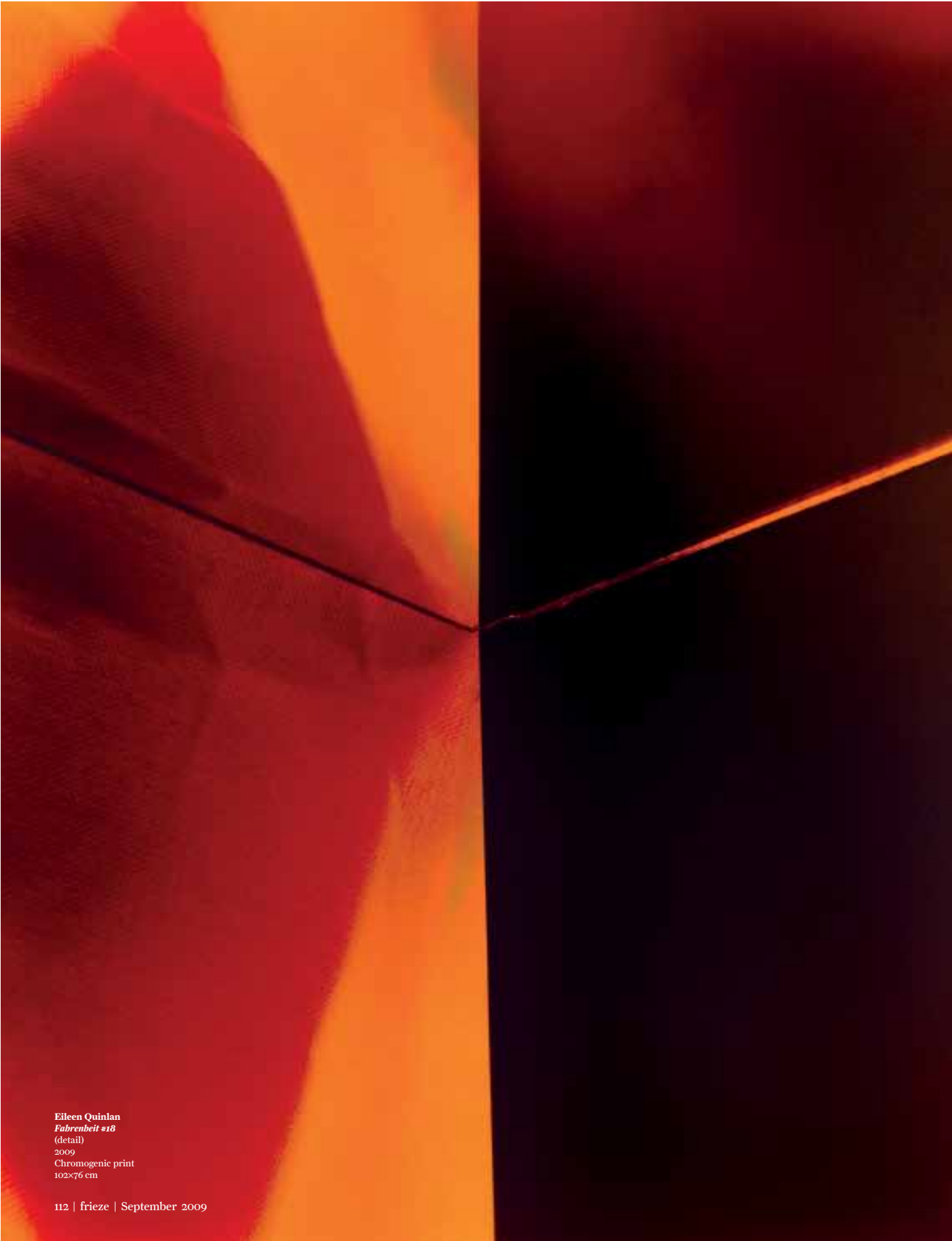
umbrella term for a set of operations, which are actually quite distinct, with their own histories, applications, and implications. It's an expression of Alfred North Whitehead's notion of a 'fallacy of misplaced concreteness' when such disciplines – like photography, sculpture or abstraction – are assumed to have meaning beyond that of institutional classifications; I don't think etymological or ontological dissection could ever lend them the specificity they are assumed to have. Sure the categories have histories as part of organizational structures, but on their own they are anaemic, hollow. On the other hand, objects, how they traffic, how they dialectically construct our movement through the world via our participation can be discussed in specific terms. We negotiate our roles within expansive dominant structures on a daily basis, and I try to produce my work with an awareness of that, to use restrictions as generative tools.

CHRISTOPHER BEDFORD is Curator of Exhibitions at the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio, USA.

WALEAD BESHTY is based in Los Angeles, USA where he is Associate Professor at Art Center College of Design's Graduate Fine Art Department. His solo exhibition, 'Legibility on Color Backgrounds' at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington D.C. will run until 13 September. His project '12.25"' will open at the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio on 16 September, and his work will be included in 'New Photography 2009' at The Museum of Modern Art, New York. His first solo exhibition in the UK will open in October at Thomas Dane Gallery, London.

LIZ DESCHENES lives in New York, USA. Her work was recently included in the inaugural exhibition of the Modern Wing at the Art Institute of Chicago, and 'Colour Chart', which travelled to Tate Liverpool, UK from MoMA, New York. She will have a show in October at Sutton Lane, Paris, France.

EILEEN QUINLAN lives and works in New York, USA. Her work was recently shown at Krobath, Vienna, Austria and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, USA. In 2010 she will have a solo show at Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York.

An abstract artwork consisting of a vertical split. The left side features a textured, organic shape in shades of red and orange, resembling a leaf or a draped fabric. The right side is a solid, dark red or maroon color. A thin, dark line runs diagonally across the center, separating the two sections. The overall composition is minimalist and evocative.

Eileen Quinlan
Fahrenheit #18
(detail)
2009
Chromogenic print
102x76 cm

BOMB

Walead Beshty & Eileen Quinlan
Web Only/Posted Sep 2009, ART



[Left: Walead Beshty, *Six Color Curl* (CMMYYCC: Irvine, California, July 17th 2008, Fuji Crystal Archive Type C), 2009, Color Photographic Paper, 50×94 inches. Right: Eileen Quinlan, *Satin Star*, 2007, Unique color polaroid, Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Buchholz.]

Head over to BOMBLOG for a [slideshow](#) of works by Quinlan & Beshty.

Both Walead Beshty and Eileen Quinlan make photographs that look out of time, out of place. If there's an initial inclination to label their photographs "abstract" based on their *look*, they agree in the conversation below that the designation is problematically founded on a modernist painting paradigm and, especially in the case of Beshty's photograms, is simply inaccurate. Better to say that each artist is involved in the material concerns of photographic practice. Quinlan creates images of dimensional confusion by photographing modest studio constructions of foam,

mirrors, and other common materials, and she exposes the construct of the artificial scarcity of the edition by often displaying an entire edition side by side and treating it as a singular piece. Whereas Quinlan doesn't manipulate her photos in the darkroom, Beshty's darkroom practice for his photograms is dependent on chance operation; to make them, he exposes multicolored paper to light according to a predetermined and self-imposed set of rules. The Los Angeles-based Beshty and the Brooklyn-based Quinlan both taught briefly at Bard this summer, and they met to record this conversation on a rooftop in New York's Chinatown.

WALEAD BESHTY Maybe it's good to start with basic questions about your process, specifically your choice to avoid making decisions in the darkroom.

EILEEN QUINLAN I made a decision when I went to graduate school that I didn't want to go out into the world and shoot anymore; I only wanted to be in the studio. So in order to limit my options in searching for a subject, I decided I wouldn't pursue any effects or manipulation outside the studio itself. Then I would print in a really straightforward way. It's kind of the opposite for you, no?

WB Sort of, in the sense that the production of some of my work occurs exclusively in the darkroom, but several years ago I had a similar desire to go back to a discrete set of limitations and a conventional site of photographic production. For me, the place to regroup was the darkroom, probably because that was the place where I first confronted photography as something distinct from just taking pictures. The questions I had about your process hit me when I saw the show that you were in at Lühring Augustine, *Strange Magic*. If I remember correctly, you showed a whole edition in a continuous row.

EQ I did, yeah.

WB It made me think of Sherrie Levine, particularly the way she would show full editions of her work side by side. That choice surprised me; I hadn't thought of your work in relationship to appropriation before. I thought your choice undermined the purity that is usually ascribed to working non-figuratively, and connected the history of abstraction with the history of appropriation, two threads that are usually treated as discrete. That work prompted me to think of abstraction as a readymade form, which resonated with some problems I was considering at the time.

EQ In that piece I was looking for a way to encourage people to focus less on the image and more on the distribution form itself, the construct of editioning. I hadn't done many solo shows then, so the idea of hanging the whole edition as a singular work allowed me to put my photos out there and protect them from being lumped in with any emerging school (neo-modernist, concrete) or being misunderstood as nostalgic investigations of abstraction itself. I wanted to make it clear that my struggle didn't end with manifesting an image, but extended to grappling with photographs as objects. I wasn't thinking consciously about Levine, appropriation, or Pictures artists, but I was chafing a little at the way the discourse around the "new photography" was being framed—formally—in *Strange Magic* and elsewhere. I wanted to isolate myself and my concerns through a presentational device.

WB Was it sold together?

EQ Yes. I was interested in collapsing the idea of the edition by turning it into something unique. So the five prints plus the AP couldn't be broken up, and it was titled as one work: *The Full Edition of Smoke & Mirrors #24A*.



Eileen Quinlan, *The Full Edition of Smoke & Mirrors #24A*, 2006, UV-laminated chromogenic print mounted on Sintra, 24×20 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Sutton Lane Gallery, London.

WB Doing this acknowledged photographic reproducibility, complicating the idea of the autonomous artwork. In retrospect, I think your gesture stood out to me because the abstract picture is the quintessential autonomous artwork; I remember thinking, What better way to play with its transcendental purity, its loaded history, than to accept the premise of abstraction but turn it into a sequence of copies or duplicates.

EQ I was interested in the way abstraction was mobilized commercially, via stock photography and graphic design. There are abstract forms, corrupting painterly geometric abstraction and abstract expressionism, for example, that we encounter daily in the non-art world around us. I was reflecting on that somewhat, looking to muddy those waters.

WB When you mention that you were “grappling with photographs as objects,” it strikes me that it is a particular way of thinking about a photographic object—one where it is a substrate for an image, a means to distribute a particular image, and where the material is also meant to disappear. When photographs are editioned, the object exists to facilitate distribution, to circulate the image it holds. It is the means by which the image becomes tangible and can be *possessed*, even if the object itself is provisional, one of many. So its individual character, the differences between iterations, is less important than what unifies them, i.e. the image. The image is the rarified thing, the material that holds it isn’t. I took it as an argument that what distinguishes photographs is their ability to *contain* images, that being a likeness of another thing defines something inherent to the medium.



Walead Beshty, *Three Color Curl* (CMY: Irvine, California, August 22nd 2008, Fuji Crystal Archive Type C), 2009, color photographic paper, 50×90 inches. All Beshty images courtesy of the artist and Wallspace, New York.

EQ Demonstrating that the prints are yielded from a negative—that they are prints and not paintings, drawings, or photograms—is important to me. And I do struggle with my orientation toward the image. I enjoy working with photographic objects as units that can be arranged in a space. The image itself isn't always important. Through it I can begin to unravel how images are transmitted. Though sometimes I prefer to engage with a single image as a picture, emphasizing less the way it manifests and circulates and more the way it's perceived visually, perceptually, historically, as media. I go back and forth.

WB So showing the whole edition also alludes to the potential to make an unlimited set of prints from a single negative because it is an artificially delimited sequence within a potentially infinite set.

EQ Right. The edition confers a kind of value on a photograph that would otherwise be de-valued if you could make 500 prints of it.

WB So the delimitation of the set is also a nod to its commodity status, its transformation from mass-producible good to a scarce good. Perhaps it also creates friction with the time when most photographs were open-editioned.

EQ They were? I hadn't realized.

WB I remember being in school and seeing open-editioned work of my teachers' generation; I don't think that practice fully disappeared until the end of the '90s. I also remember being told that you *had to* edition your work, that you couldn't just print as many as you liked. That didn't make sense to me, and no one could explain why a particular edition size was chosen over another. The only explanation was that with photography, one had to create artificial scarcity in order to have it operate as art. The arbitrary delimitation of the edition never stopped troubling me, but at the same time, the idea of any set of objects—even prints—being equivalents was equally troubling. I think producing rule-based photograms was an effort to reconcile the seriality of the photographic print with the heightened attention to object specificity that is an integral part of looking at objects within an art context. In general, photograms are discussed in terms of their uniqueness, but my photograms are interchangeable, repetitious, because they are produced according to a set of rules that are fixed, yet each execution of those rules is specific unto itself. With my

photograms, the paper acts as its own negative—it is the thing that is imaged and the thing that registers that image, but the negative is generic, industrially standardized. Despite the limited set of variables, differentiation still happens. I would argue that all of my photograms are, in a conventional sense, “images” of the same thing, even though they are unique as objects. That dualism interests me. I think the way we understand industrial objects emphasizes their similarities, yet the distinctions between them are important and generally obscured. After all, uniqueness is always present in a photograph—even when using the same conventionally made negative to produce a series of prints of the same size—it is just deemphasized. Small shifts in temperature and the conditions of the chemistry all create variations in prints, even something as minute as a shift in the emulsion batch of a particular paper. But the question is the significance of these differentiations, and whether it is possible to open up what is treated as a closed system, to find the possibility of agency within a predetermined, standardized, structure. I felt like some element of this question of difference was in play within your *The Full Edition* ... work, but from a drastically different angle. I was reminded that the same thing twice, or five times, is very different than that thing once. That resonated with me because the arbitrarily delimited edition as an unaccounted-for element of making photographs was something I’d been struggling with, and I thought yours was an ingenious way accommodate and use the convention of editioning as an integral part of the work.

EQ There’s always some variation in any set of prints, even from the same negative, since their production involves the separate handling of each piece of paper by a human operator. But inconsistencies within a set are all but invisible, even when installed side by side. The edition piece wasn’t a place where I wanted to emphasize difference, but rather open-ended reproducibility being artificially corralled. I was both giving the collector what they seemed to want, allowing them to possess the picture completely via the entire edition, including my AP, while demystifying, and potentially hobbling the seductive power of the works by framing them as technical images, straightforward photographs divorced from my hand. We seem to both struggle with the appearance of producing “satisfying” art objects, especially where their consumption is concerned. We both make colorful, sometimes beautiful and mysterious photographs, though you make many other things as well. Conversely, your photograms may be attractive to some because they can be possessed as singular objects, yet they have so many very close cousins that singularity becomes diluted.



Eileen Quinlan, *Smoke & Mirrors #18*, 2005, UV-laminated chromogenic print mounted on Sintra, 16×20 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York.

WB Their interchangeability is important, but I don't think of it as a dilution of a concept of singularity. I think of it as degrees of differentiation between and within sets. I'm less engaged with undermining (or asserting for that matter) a universal concept than establishing a provisional case. Singularity doesn't really exist in my thinking in any absolute way; it's just a question of how a context or a particular group of works can structure an understanding of difference or construct difference itself—but only as an instance, not in any universal sense. A problem is that often the particular is confused for the universal or the example is taken for a rule. So people might say my work is "about" chance, or "about" singularity or repetition, but really this depends on the context, and none of these concepts exist in isolation. I think of how difference is constructed in your work, especially the close aesthetic and compositional strategies that run through various series. I find it forces me to look more closely, makes me more attuned to subtle changes and the history of your work.

EQ My work exists both in actual multiples and in very close variations that circulate as other discrete editions, creating a surplus of images. If your fear is the arbitrary, false, edition, mine is the precious draw of the unique art object, though I do complicate that by presenting Polaroids as one of my formats. When you do make editions, how do you set your limits?

WB When I first showed the photograms they were accompanied by editioned sculptures; the edition closed when the casts wore out. I don't think of the work, even the work that is "unique," as singular—they're all duplicates in some sense. If there is a unique work, it's in the rules and context to which it is applied. I guess this is how I think of all artworks. My first photograms came from an appropriated source, generated from a drunken conversation with Dan Hug about a body of Moholy-Nagy's—Hug's grandfather—work that turned out not to exist.

Moholy-Nagy always stood out because his work was ideologically promiscuous, almost illustrative. His work, distinct from his writings, never seemed to veer into universal prescription; it was local in a formal sense, which was quite different than most photography that seemed to be about a singular type of approach. I admired artists whose use of photographs varied, like Walker Evans and William Christenberry, or later Michael Schmidt, Stephen Shore, James Welling, Catherine Opie, or Wolfgang Tillmans; it made me think of the connections between works, to treat their practices as a larger structure, beyond the aspects of a single work or group of works. While this felt common in art in general, it wasn't so common in photography. In the late '90s and early '00s, I had the feeling that photographic practice was stagnating in a late Victorian pictorial model that treated the photograph as a window, the frame as a proscenium arch, and I was pretty suspicious of this sort of theatrical pictorialism. It was the only thing that seemed to be around, not just staged work, but also work that aped the New Topographics photography of the '70s, that was strongly influenced by *Neue Sachlichkeit*, and 19th century landscape photography like that of the US Geological Survey. This isn't to say I wasn't strongly influenced by that generation, but I couldn't make work in that way, and I had a problem with work that *looked like* that but was contemporary. So the photogram was both a way to try to get out of historical trajectories that felt like dead ends and figure out how I could contribute or participate in a conversation without reiterating or just performing it. So my conversation with Dan started by asking why contemporary photography all looked so similar, and I brought up a question I had discussed with Jim Welling: why had no one made a materialist photograph—one that dealt specifically with its condition as a material object—in the early 20th century? It seemed like it should have happened in the '20s and '30s—especially in Russia—because there was such a strong polemic being developed about pictorial images, and a pretty advanced argument about the politics of aesthetics, which manifested in an early form of the critique of representation. Dan said, "Moholy did it." So we came up with this whole story, fully believing it in the drunken moment. We even invented dates and titles.

EQ There was no evidence of the Moholy-Nagy work?

WB In the end, neither of us could find any work that fit the description we concocted. But that didn't matter. What was important to me was that it was a possibility that wasn't fully exploited. It was something that *should* have happened and didn't. And that was the premise for that first series of photograms, to reconstruct a missing link that, for me, solved some of the problems that I was confronting. We figured that the title for Nagy's work would have been *Abstractions Made by My Hand with the Assistance of Light* because he had these very verbose, spilling, descriptive titles.

EQ And very direct.

WB Yet so hyper-descriptive that they almost sounded like poetry. So I called mine *Pictures Made by My Hand with the Assistance of Light*, striking the word abstraction because I couldn't embrace that term in good faith. That term articulated the rift I felt with the history that was being obliquely cited.

EQ Well, it's a problematic term. Especially regarding photography. Obviously you could argue that all photographs are abstractions of, or from, reality.

WB I think all pictorial photographs are, but I was curious if there was a possibility for a non-abstract photograph, which is funny because of the tendency to describe the work that came out of this thinking as abstract. Strictly speaking, though, they aren't, they literally are what you are looking at, they image themselves and the context of their production. Abstraction is always something that stands apart or

aside from what it means and what it represents. Abstraction as a category seems to be a problem for painting, too, but at least in painting there's a string of historical movements associated with the term. Describing a photograph as abstract usually implies a simulation of those painterly movements. Anyway, my first photograms used this fictive story as a way out of a set of problems.

EQ For me, stories are the problem. When I was studying photography at the Museum School in Boston in the early '90s, we lived in the shadow of these towering figures and former students: Nan Goldin, Philip-Lorca diCorcia, and the Starn twins. A foregrounding of narrative, via slices of life or highly composed film stills, was the first (but not the last!) approach to contemporary photography I was bothered by. Spielberg was not my hero. The cinematic style of Gregory Crewdson didn't speak to me, and I wasn't willing to plunder my life for subject matter the way Goldin had. At the time it looked like art photographers were either messily diaristic, nostalgically noirish, or artily retro-mythic like the Starns or JP Witkin. If your mind didn't work that way, there weren't a lot of other models. The teacher that took the most time with me, Bill Burke, was an adventurer, a Gonzo photographer, regularly tangling with the Khmer Rouge and documenting casualties of war in a very personal, powerful way. Using the camera as a means of trying to confront Pol Pot's horrors was a project I respected deeply but couldn't imagine engaging in. I was definitely interested in Cindy Sherman. Her awkward, shabby, cryptic "narratives" in the *Untitled Film Stills* implicated the viewer in the construction of the story. That seemed true to me.

WB Staged work from the '90s still relied on Sherman or Jeff Wall as a template. Narrative was definitely something I was trying to excise from my own thinking. A photograph is, in depictive terms, static; there's no temporality. Narrative never really happens in a photograph, and it seemed like that impossibility was what staged photography was about—in other words what was absent—and the viewer was directed toward this missing component. It's kind of like abstraction, because the only thing that makes something abstract now is that it looks like something that was once called abstract, so it's an echo of something that once had a clear motivation. Also, it is about something that isn't present, simply by definition of the term: it is "abstracted" from something else. Likewise, narrative photography in the vein of Wall looks like religious painting or history painting; it plays off a time when certain stories were assumed to be part of a collective unconscious. Only the echo of these narratives remain. Sherman was different; compositionally it looks like street photography or documentary photography as much as film stills, but it relied on a similarly false assumption in viewers that turned something that was assumed to be direct—like photographic story telling—into something that was ambiguous. Narrative photography seemed duplicitous, cueing a certain interpretive approach only to present its lack of certainty, and it didn't seem to offer a way to think through this uncertainty, to propose something affirmative in its absence. In the cases of "narrative" or "abstraction," there is a formal trigger for an interpretive code, a relationship between shapes onto which one projects a script, but it really has very little to do with the object itself, it just describes an interpretive approach to a work, and asserts this as a rule. Still, there is something about that work that stuck with me. Its alienating effects felt ubiquitous; it paralleled an alienation that was present in the world at large, or at least my suburban upbringing. I think the prevalence of staged work is why I was first drawn to the perverse theatricality of malls.



Walead Beshty, *Phenomenology of Shopping (Filene's, The Danbury Mall, Danbury, CT) 3*, color photograph, 2002, 47 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 68 inches,

EQ It's interesting that you equate supposedly uncompromised abstraction with being scripted, associative, and clichéd, like narrative. I also felt that the staged photos I was seeing suffered from referencing either history painting or film to such a degree that they became abstract collages, ceasing to communicate any story directly. My attempt to dredge my unconscious for "new images" from a tightly

controlled but highly “creative” studio practice only produced more clichés. What I see in my work are the ghosts of things I’ve internalized through looking at art, while working with graphic design, or advertising, or fashion, or commercial photography. I try to transmit this through the framing of it, so that the work isn’t understood as purely formal, as being untainted by my time and experience.

The first works of yours I saw was the series you were doing in stores where you were plunging yourself into bins of products. They felt like performance documents. Was that the same as the work you were doing in malls?

WB No, I did those while in grad school. I guess those works do function like performance stills—they are pretty conventional in photographic terms—and I was thinking more of the behavior being depicted than the act of depiction. The early mall photos were done in a street photography style. I was 18 when I was making them, which makes sense since my suburban adolescence was situated around the local mall and I was sweating that out. What I realized later was that malls were like stage sets; they constructed vision in a way similar to theater and implied a narrative relationship between objects. They were like theater sets for the public to inhabit, act within. The *Phenomenology of Shopping* photographs came later, and were a byproduct of my fascination with the constructed space of the mall, of display. I was reacting to that in a base manner, just forcing my body into displays and willfully misrecognizing the type of use they invited. If I came upon a hole the size of my head, I’d stuff my head in it, but there was no way to define the duration of the act, so making a photograph put brackets around it. I’d been thinking of the Situationists, and the idea of *detourning*, as an antipode to the idea of the *flâneur*; instead of being detached, distant, like street photographers, I wanted to stupidly interface with what I was provoked by. I didn’t want to cynically reiterate the theatrical qualities of those spaces. The mall continued to be interesting for me because it doubled as an analogy for the exhibition space as well. Department stores, malls, and contemporary museum architecture have a shared origin in the rise of the leisure class in the 1800s. The transformation of the idea of a public was being constructed through democratic forms that often defined the voice of the public through its consumptive activities ... I forgot where we started.

EQ We started with narrative, but first I want to respond to a few things you just said, beginning with our shared relationship to the document. I know you implicate your body, your physical presence, in the production of your work. Whether it be through titles like *Pictures Made By My Hand* ... or a document of you performing an unauthorized activity like shoving your head in whatever space beckoned at the mall. I too related my *Smoke & Mirrors* series, particularly the early pieces, to documents of a private performance, staged only for the camera, where I tried to wrangle a slippery subject—smoke—into a desired position, center stage in my hall of mirrors. My aim was like that of the big game photographer, looking for something around the next corner—or even the amateur bird watcher, collecting a rare specimen by bagging it with her Nikon. There was a relationship for me to the document as evidence of something fleeting. Something conjured, pursued, captured. You also mentioned that you were looking to unmask how malls or galleries frame our experiences of everything within them. I was also looking for a way to foreground the set of assumptions we have about what a photograph is or should be by removing the subject and focusing rather on the way subjects—products in my case—are staged in a seductive atmosphere.

Speaking of staging, how did you “exhaust” your interest in it so quickly? You seem to still be pursuing that alienation effect, though your work offers a site for projection, for enjoyment as well.

WB There was already a great deal of work in that vein, so it seemed foreclosed. I also came to realize that I actually didn’t agree with the cynical aspect of it; I didn’t

want to perpetuate forms which seemed to revel in alienation. No matter what, staged photographs reified dominant or automatic modes of looking at photographs and constructing their meanings, even if it was just to reject this reading. I'm not interested in creating alienation, in fact, I think far too much is designed to have an alienating effect. I want my work to produce affirmative possibilities. In terms of performance, there is still an element of this in the work for me—much of my work operates in this way, not only the photographs—but I think the performance is that of the apparatus, be it technological, social, or what have you, over a duration.

EQ We have the document, and its subject, performance. Like you, I didn't want to stage it. So I had to work blindly.

WB Perhaps, but within your work there's also the idea of the image, the likeness, that persists—something passing for something else. The title *Smoke & Mirrors* offers the idea of revelation, of pulling back the curtain. The readymade answer is that, in materialist terms, it's "the real relations between things" that is obscured. At least in a European context, this seemed to be what postwar abstraction was grappling with; it seemed politicized from the start, a kind of ideology critique focused on the instrumental use of aesthetics and their potential for social change, like El Lissitzky putting one of his abstract paintings outside of a factory or his engagement with design. But your work implies that there's nothing behind this surface, which is a potent argument, a Pop argument, perhaps. And it makes me think that the conversations around abstraction in the US seemed to be about something less social and more alienated. Pop seemed a direct reaction to painterly abstraction in the US, a negation of the arguments that proposed abstraction as a testament to unfettered subjectivity. Still, it seemed most polemical when considered in terms of self-expression. There were many more artists invested in abstraction in Europe who sought public modes of address or worked with mass media directly. To put it in shorthand, abstraction in the US seemed to point to self-expression, whereas in European context it seemed to develop as a materialist argument. I was wondering what you thought about the term "abstraction," where you situate yourself in relationship to it.

EQ For a long time I didn't think of my work as abstract, and I desperately hoped that it wasn't "expressive." I really thought of what I was doing as studio photography, as *nature morte*. Again, the effects come from photographing products. Maybe the effects themselves are the subject. I notice motifs in the world all the time that emerge in my photos. It could be a curving swoop of light in the background of a shampoo ad or the glow around a piece of tagline text. I'm curious about what these formless elements are supposed to be communicating. I was thinking about alienation in a Brechtian sense, about revealing what was at work in the process of viewing, of constructing meaning within a photograph. In that sense I have more to do with the American school of abstraction you describe than with the postwar European abstractionists who were seeking liberation, utopia.



Eileen Quinlan, *Backdrop and Bandit*, 2008, 6 silver gelatin matte fiber prints mounted on aluminum and 6 UV laminated prints mounted on Sintra, 30×40 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York.

WB You assisted a product photographer?

EQ I actually only shared a studio space with a product photographer. I was working for an architectural photographer who would always leave me behind because I was pretty inept with large-format architectural photo gear. So I would constantly watch this great photographer named Jack Miskell here in New York. He does a lot of work for Clinique, photographing makeup. Most of the things that I do in the studio—the ways that I set up pieces of foam or even the mirrors I use—come directly from that way of shooting. A lot of photographers have some history of working commercially but often separate that from personal work, as if it has a corrosive effect on their artwork.

WB I asked because I was an assistant to a product photographer when I got out of undergrad—a box photographer, to be exact. I’m sure I was the worst assistant. I liked the idea of photography as a 9 to 5 job; I thought it would be an escape from the self-indulgent way of talking I had grown tired of in art school. What I found, perversely, was even more of this attitude, except in the service of hair care products or energy drinks. I guess looking for something to reject is a natural way to begin, but I didn’t find what I expected. I realized that I couldn’t get by with rejection forever; producing is affirmative, an *action*, and even if the action erases, it is motivated. I avoided this fact by thinking in terms of negation; shifting this thought process was an extremely important change in my work. What was initially provocative to me about the title *Smoke & Mirrors* is that it played off the narrative around materialist art, that it reveals the truth behind things. But behind the falseness of images you find more surface. Purity and abstraction simply begets more alienation, more image, so in your work there’s no proposition of revelation. The truth is its surface, it’s immateriality. Does that make sense?

EQ Some. (*laughter*) I was horrified when people called me a neo-modernist early on. I’m not sure I even know what that means, but I took it to suggest that I was

seeking some kind of truth, an appraisal of the limits of my chosen medium or of my artistry. I only knew how to complicate my questions with more questions. I didn't believe there was an answer. I probably stop with revealing possible assumptions, while you go so far as to try to undo them.

WB Well, I think my early attempts at doing that were really naïve, hubristic.

EQ I don't see your project as hubristic at all. It's cautiously hopeful. I really appreciate that. It's so easy to disavow. You don't give up there, and it's plain in your work. I guess starting with *Smoke & Mirrors* I was looking to unpack what a photograph was—how it's a construction. Of course I was also interested in how photographs circulate via editioning.



Walead Beshty, Installation view of *Legibility on Color Backgrounds* at the Hirshorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington DC, 2009.

WB That's something I really appreciate in that work, because pointing to that in an exhibition space is almost perverse. There's something impolitic about acknowledging editioning. It represents the vulgar part of consumption; it's repressed. It takes a slap at art etiquette. There's this ludicrous idea that there's an art that's outside of economic traffic.

EQ The artist's artist?

WB Yeah, and that it's indiscrete to talk about certain things. MFAs are professional degrees and yet actual instruction about the literal mechanisms of the career is limited to studio gossip. At least this was the case when I was in school, and most of us lacked even the most basic tools to negotiate with it when we left. There are artists who are idealized for rejecting a marketplace, but those tend to be the artists who were independently wealthy or had other personal circumstances that made this choice part of the work. I remember thinking that any relationship to the market was a compromise, and absurdly, I didn't know what that marketplace even was. Ironically, this puritanical attitude just exoticizes the market to the point where it becomes a singularly monolithic force, which it in fact isn't. A marketplace is just people trading goods and services. It's one of many systems that create meaning. It

should be accounted for specifically, not invoked in general terms. It's one element in the way works become public, through their being bought and sold, but its mechanics are clear only to insiders, and this makes it seem like it is the chief agent in the art world. Any art effect people don't like, find alienating, is ascribed to the market. In this, and in all other aspects of art making, I think transparency is the only way to destabilize the mythologies of the art market, and of art in general.

EQ When I visit the studios of artists who aren't yet showing, I often try to imagine how their work will translate from the private world of the studio to a public context. I've noticed that they sometimes get upset if I ask about the final form they envision a work taking, or what audience they believe they're speaking to. Some artists want to protect their vision from the effect of "the art world," but I think it is best to try to armor artists against outcomes they want to avoid. Maybe I'm giving the market too much power. But I feel uneasy whenever a subject becomes taboo. And when a grad student claims they don't want their work to have a public life, it seems disingenuous.

WB Also disingenuous is that the people who most vehemently express their outrage with the market are the same ones who create the buzz. The popular critics who decry the marketplace simultaneously reinforce it. It's often the same ones who go on tirades about theory or academic discourse, as though it is a unified thing, as though they are protecting art from it. How noble! I find that sort of faux populism to be condescending and repugnant. It's those instances that seem the most insidious—the lack of honesty, and transparency.

EQ I agree. And now that the market is bad, people sometimes say it will be "good for art," because the artists who will survive these troubled times are the ones that should survive. So there's still this faith in the wisdom of the market as a kind of hive mind to decide who is good and who isn't. Natural selection?

WB Well, to me it sounds like Hitler's famous comment to Spear when he received news that the Allies were closing in on Berlin. He said something to the effect of, "It's great that the Allies are here. They can bomb the city to the ground saving me the trouble of knocking it down to rebuild it how I intended." (*laughter*) When I hear people say things like that, I'm perplexed. A crash does the opposite of what they claim. It makes what little money is out there even more powerful, and the desperation it creates invites abuses. I have no idea how a sane person could argue that less money is good for art. Fewer resources don't mean good things will be supported, in fact I think the opposite is more likely. I believe the more flow of capital there is, the more art venues survive, the more public discussion and consideration is made possible, and the more freedom there is to take chances. My concern is that the smaller projects running on shoestring budgets are most vulnerable and will be hurt first, and that larger institutions are less likely to take risks because of the financial repercussions. Sure, the frantic marketplace produced its own set of problems, but at least there's a greater potential for a diversity of thought within art when more people are able to support themselves through it. There's more freedom to do things on the side, develop projects that don't need to make money, but are borne of excesses in other areas.

EQ What was awful for artists before the crash was the speed of everything, how quickly you had to deliver work for art fairs. Then you had shows, and if you had more than one gallery you had to produce work for several galleries for every art fair. Now that there aren't as many galleries participating in fairs it allows more time to develop work, but if you don't have another source of income, it's difficult to continue working at all. It's true: it's easier to be untainted by serving the market if you don't need to support yourself with your work.

WB I think the discomfort people express about the market comes out of wealthy etiquette, a type of aristocratic shame. People want status objects, but also want this myth of their purity. There was never a point in history where any kind of production was outside the marketplace, especially art. Discussing this frankly begins to answer why certain works were available to a public, why they are a part of history. Again, I think transparency, in that regard, is important.

EQ Let's talk about the term "abstraction" for a moment. You said I'm more comfortable with the term than you are. I'm not so comfortable with it either. I wish I had a better word.

WB It doesn't work for me because it short-circuits some of the reasons I'm doing what I'm doing. My problems with the term have been generative, and perhaps I engage with these issues because it gives me clarity about what I'm doing. I feel similarly about the word "image." An image is always an abstraction no matter what, because it's a likeness and any likeness is subject to a set of transformations, a code of translation, that are used to create an "abstraction" of a state of affairs. Abstraction, like the term "conceptual," gets kicked around in an ahistorical way. I don't really know what people mean when they say it. It's slippery.

EQ "Conceptual" seems to be applied today to anything that is highly intentioned or smart or has a thesis that drives it, that doesn't function intuitively. Usually when people call something "conceptual," they are telegraphing the fact that they don't understand it.

WB And it's often used pejoratively and implies elitism, which is hilarious because conceptual art actively sought popular outlets, like the magazine page, or accessible forms like the Xerox, map, or graph paper; it made artmaking available to anyone with the most basic means. It connected artmaking to the mundane, to daily life. But what I meant was that the term "abstraction" seems important to how you were discussing the function of images—again, how they can slide from material substrate to material substrate and stay, by definition, unchanged, which is the case for the true sense of abstraction: it operates on a metalevel, it organizes the thing it refers to, stands aside of objects.

EQ I'm not sure that they do stay unchanged. My obsession with formats, with presentational modes, is partially driven by a desire to see the same image transformed via its travels from one material substrate to another. When I made the piece *Red Goya*, a diptych where two prints from the same negative are juxtaposed in 40×30 and 24×20 formats, I wanted to force an engagement with the question of the viewer's taste, to examine the power of the physical manifestation of the image to alter its impression on a person. Does the bigger print have more authority because of its relationship to a body viewing it in a space, as something you can't take in with one glance? Something that envelops you? Or is the smaller print more powerful with its higher resolution? More jewel-like in its intensity of color? More precious in its scale? By working with imagery that is less assertive in terms of its subject, I can highlight decisions of presentation because people are less involved in what they're actually looking at.



Eileen Quinlan, *Red Goya*, 2007, UV-laminated chromogenic print mounted on Sintra, Left: 30×40 inches, Right: 24×20 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York.

WB Well, working that way sidesteps the question of what the photograph is “of” or “about” by making the answer both mundane and irrelevant.

EQ Regarding pesky abstraction again, there’s a real consolidation going on of a number of artists, you and I included. There was that story in *ARTNews* about new abstract photography and your work was on the cover. It was funny because I got 10 phone calls from people thinking it was mine and I had to say, “That’s Walead Beshty’s, actually.” We’ve been crammed into this emerging school that is supposed to represent some kind of new direction for what was becoming an exhausted medium.

WB The irony is that calling it “new” and putting on the cover of a magazine means that it’s already past. (*laughter*) This is true in a sense, since work considering the material conditions of photographs had been largely dismissed and was usually treated as a dead-end experiment.

EQ Exactly. The history of materialist photography isn’t really taught art-historically, though it has always been practiced.

WB Or it’s fabricated. That article said that I studied with Jim Welling, and that I went to UCLA, both of which aren’t the case (I taught some undergraduate classes there). I learned a great deal from knowing Jim, and he continues to be extremely generous, but there were teachers I had that don’t fit into that argument who had an impact on me; Cathy Opie, Roni Horn, Stephen Shore, Mel Bochner, Philip-Lorca diCorcia, or Gregory Crewdson all impacted the development of my work. Large positions of my practice are similarly left out of that story. It’s the impulse to create false genealogies that’s disturbing; what’s lost when history is smoothed out.

EQ Strange that *ARTNews* felt the need to create a neat little story, somehow accounting for your formation as an “abstract” photographer. People often ask me what I’m going to do when I’m not doing this “new photography” anymore. I find that a funny question because it’s like their way of saying, “It’s time for you to move

on.” Maybe they’re really wondering what comes next for those of us who seem to be playing the endgame of emptying everything out? I admit that I am interested in the notion of doing something a little too much. I want to take this project to the point of utter collapse, to resist the urge and the pressure to produce something novel. To imagine other possibilities for this seemingly inflexible way of working.

WB When something gets old, you can begin to fully understand it. The endgame thing is a problem; I don’t think of myself as playing an endgame, actually quite the opposite. I think of making work as being propositional, about it containing a possibility for future work, endlessly recombinatory, able to be repurposed. This is sometimes quite literal; like when the work enters into installation, the recombinatory gesture continues. An individual work has a new life within each moment of exhibition. I think of the work like a modular component, endlessly rearrangeable, a spatial tool. Each exhibition is a mechanism made from standardized parts.

EQ You work in some very big scales, but you also make things that are smaller. When you think about installation and how things break up the space, how are you making those format choices?

WB The photograms are scaled off of my body, and the scale of the material produces different kinds of formal effects on the paper. In my work, there’s no real possibility for compositional choice. The conditions of production generate compositional arrangements. The shift between series of work is the result of different rules being implemented. Before and after a work I’m more of an author—maybe the term “organizer” is more accurate—but as it’s being made I’m just a dumb machine, pure labor. If I’m dissatisfied, I have to change the whole process and think of it as a whole, not just in terms of what comes out. I try to take the intuitive moves out, to have everything be about the resistances between forces at work. I find intuition is just another word for convention, an automatic choice made without thinking, because it has been ingrained through repetition. Artists hide behind that, and it creates art that just looks like art, or makes the production of artwork a hermetic and private endeavor. I think of making work like gambling or a game. A game isn’t a single outcome, but a range of outcomes and the parameters that produced them. Intuitive moves change the rules midstream, they destroy the game itself, make the game illegible, ambiguous.

EQ But your subjectivity is at work because you edit; it’s not like you present everything that you do. There are failure photograms, I’m sure.

WB The failures become other works. The choice to show some of the work means that other outcomes aren’t shown. So I shred the work that doesn’t make it into a show and reconstitute it into bricks or slabs and then show these. They are called *Selected Works* but are really selections made by the existence of other selections. So there aren’t really “failures,” per se. A failure would be breaking the rules, being inconsistent, or second-guessing a process because of an unexpected outcome. Installations have recently started working in a similar way, according to rules, which gets me out of a sort of “placing by feel” decision-making during installation.

EQ I too operate within a set of self-enforced rules, but I enjoy transgressing them sometimes. It’s difficult, this question of the intuitive. It’s obviously problematic to think about producing what you said are either naïve art objects or things that you cynically create with a *look* in mind that you know is some kind of readymade for what looks appropriate as art. I spend hours setting up and adjusting lighting and I don’t think much about what I’m looking for. I don’t set out to make something resembling Suprematist artwork, for example, even though the result may feel like that sometimes. At other times, things come out referencing stock photography or

other things I've been exposed to. I do work in this kind of unconscious way that isn't completely governed by the apparatus itself. After the fact, I produce and configure these materials, these outcomes as you put it, to function in a more critical or intentioned way or to make claims about their context and to not just focus on them as singular images. I oscillate between the two positions. It's very uncomfortable for me to think of myself as "expressive," but there is some of that in the work. There is something intuitive operating. I'm not convinced it's simply internalized convention. I do occupy that awkward position of trying to come up with whatever a "good" composition is. I'll put it through all these dogged iterations, reflecting mostly on the process of coming up with a range of images that can be mobilized later ... This is the mechanical anti-intuitive aspect of my efforts. I guess I haven't completely abandoned the idea of seeking something. I feel ashamed about that, and definitely suspicious. But the unconscious is still there, and my ambivalence about it is at the core of my work.

WB I don't think it's a problem for unconscious aspects to be present, it's just when an artist's unconscious is mythologized. I try to work against that impulse. I think of the material as having a kind of aesthetic unconscious, a trace of its past uses ingrained within it that become manifest in future use.

EQ I'm also interested in your titles. Are they always descriptive of how things are created? *Smoke & Mirrors* was a generous title for me because it's straightforward while having a double, winking meaning. Later on, starting with the '08 Armory Show, I stepped away from it, because I realized that a.) *Smoke & Mirrors* wasn't so much a project as a process, and b.) I was curious about how titles could serve to either demystify or mystify a work of art. I began using perfume titles for some of the bodies of work. *Shalimar* was the first motif named in this manner—as a way of coloring the viewer's perceptions of an otherwise opaque image. Perfume titles were especially apt because they subtly linked my work to my very real involvement with commercial photography, all while being somewhat meaningless. *Shalimar* is a garden in India, but even if you didn't know that, there's an exotic sound to it. It didn't matter if people knew about the perfume reference or not, but I did choose to avoid very obvious titles like, say, *Chanel Number 5*.

WB Titles are tricky. They don't take center stage, yet they evoke a context for a work and can easily close things down. My titles are obviously literal, in part because I don't want to imply any grand symbolic reading or be coy, but in their description there is the potential for an associative reading that stays secondary or tangential, such that if a viewer reads it as symbolic, it's meaning is not imposed by me. Sometimes I think I should abandon descriptive titles. Just choose an arbitrary system and stick with it, like titling everything by the most popular boys and girls names for that year; in a way that would be just as legitimate as the descriptions. A viewer might imagine a person in relationship to it; that amuses me.

EQ That's like Tomma Abts.

WB She does that? I hadn't realized.

EQ She uses a book of names to title her paintings, anthropomorphizing them in a way. When you make work like ours that isn't obviously *about* something, the title has great power to transmit meaning. What I was getting at is the impossibility of making art democratic by demystifying it through a long, overly descriptive title. As if anyone could then reproduce it, given that roadmap.

WB Presenting a recipe isn't the reason behind my titling; it's more about putting a tool or a methodology out there in a way that it can be accessed. I don't think of it as revelation. I think of it as "not concealing," and that's an important distinction for

me. Being able to replicate the outcomes isn't important, but I don't want to repress the variables I was considering in making it; if I did, it would potentially mystify the process, which is actually quite basic. What I would say is that the title proposes that the production of the work is an open text, and one of the pathways into the work.

But I want to turn to something you said about availability. Using available means is very important to me. MoMA had this Sol LeWitt wall drawing from the early '70s, #273 I think, on display for a long time in the old building, just before they moved to Queens. It had this big painting feeling—it was beautiful—overwhelming, but it was also completely transparent about how it was made and the materials used. The artist as the initiator of the work wasn't mythologized; it was clear where LeWitt ended and the work began. That balance between total openness and aesthetic beauty allowed seductive beauty to be available, open for a viewer to consider as more than just a receiver, like an open-source version of abstract expressionism, which to me was a potent political assertion. Usually, seductive objects conceal how they're made—that's part of their power, the sense that there's an unaccountable sublime force behind it, whether it's artistic genius or institutional authority. Capital mobilization seems to be a recent extension of the idea of artistic genius. Like Olafur Eliasson's or Doug Aitken's public pieces in New York: really, the sheer magnitude of capital they mobilize to make these works is their initial effect. Massive spectacle and artistic genius become tied together. To an average person it's mystifying; how do you get \$10 million to stick a fucking waterfall on a bridge? How do you convince people that this is a good use of resources? That becomes the sign of the charismatic genius of the artist: a sublime mastery over capital. I was thinking about Paul Chan in contradistinction, specifically his work in the public sphere like the *People's Guide to the Republican National Convention* he was involved in or his New Orleans Beckett project. What was so amazing about his New Orleans project was that the ability to organize people and capital happened in a way that wasn't self-justified. As opposed to just signaling the ability to mobilize wealth, spectacle, labor, and capital for its own sake, he honed in on a latent resource embedded in a community that was torn apart and fractured, managing to create a production that took this untapped social power and created a legacy that made further production possible in the community. He created an organization where there hadn't been one before. It crossed class and racial lines, and used community organizing to create alliances between groups in the city. It doesn't matter that it was *Waiting for Godot*. The play has symbolic and historical relevance but that seems secondary. What is most important is that it created connections that were almost impossible but were needed. Jeremy Deller's *Battle of Orgreave* comes to mind as well. I admire the kind of intelligence that work required, the self-awareness and restraint. And importantly, it came out of an understanding of art and aesthetics as a social phenomenon. I wish I had that sort of fortitude, it really is an exemplary project of the potential of art.

EQ It's true that artists function more and more like directors these days, commanding capital, and crews, transmitting their visions on a grand scale. But you're right that the spectacle often ends there. Is the point that they produce something that has no use value? Like Eliasson's waterfalls? Is that gesture supposed to give the people hope? Is it outsized whimsy? Or vulgar hubris? Chan's project does offer much more than that. It's not grafted onto a site, but actively engaged in it. If this interests you, why can't you command that same power over resources?

WB It's not a matter of power, but a matter of skill. I think that Paul Chan is gifted at this sort of negotiation, and his work is at its best when that gift is capitalized on. That's not where my abilities lie, and that's probably why I admire that aspect of his work. I learned a lot from thinking about that project, and it outlined the potential of

working in the public sphere. Most public art seems wasteful and condescending. It's usually a game being played with someone who doesn't realize they were playing, like throwing a football at the back of someone's head and yelling "catch" after the fact. I prefer the gallery because people make an agreement upon entering that is conscious. I don't know that I'll ever feel comfortable with putting work on the street, in public, although I do think that when it's done well, it's the most invigorating type of work. It's funny, in school Stephen Shore made a comment on several occasions that artists only make good work for five years. I think about that a lot when I'm imagining where things are going in my work. It occurs to me that it's funny coming from somebody who has worked for so long. *(laughter)*

EQ Which five years would he say were his best?

WB I assume he thinks it was early on, but it was said with a sense of acceptance, an absence of anxiety. I admired that. Even if I didn't agree with his assessment, it felt humble, but not self-deprecating. I guess it spoke to his relationship to his students, too, his generosity. It wasn't part of the narcissistic hubris most artists cling to, talking about their own importance. Some artists are lucky enough that their work resonates with a conversation that is ahead of its time, that speaks to a latent need. I think Stephen's work did that. The Paul Chan piece is another example for me—Jeremy Deller's is also—it pushes the boundaries of the potential for art, and there are many works that do what these did for their respective time and place. I think those instances make whole careers salient; they speak to the potential of things to come. I try to remember those works when this job feels absurd and frivolous.

Head over to BOMBLOG for a slideshow of works by Quinlan & Beshty.

ARTFORUM

APRIL 2009

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

REVIEWS

Eileen Quinlan OVERDUIN AND KITE

For an artist who cites accidental elements in her practice, Eileen Quinlan is undeniably fixed on the parameters and the quantifiable conditions of making a photograph. While the images she produces are marked by bleeding colors and the incidental abstraction of common objects, Quinlan in her meticulous experimentations stages her materially driven subject matter with the precision and control of a set designer—even employing the trade secrets of commercial photography, such as smoke machines, filters, and strobe and key lighting. For her first solo exhibition in Los Angeles, titled "Downtime," Quinlan presented eleven new works—mostly from her ongoing series "Night Flight" and "Santa Fe" (both begun in 2008)—which carefully choreograph a tension between constructed elements.

To make a picture, Quinlan typically assembles a discrete arrangement of materials (a kind of nonfigurative still life) and then shoots it in extreme close-up with a fixed camera. For each image in a series, the artist manipulates the ambient conditions of the arrangement, which, in the case of "Night Flight" and "Santa Fe," involved lighting her subject from oblique angles while deploying a variety of colored gels. In this way, each series presents tonal variations on a single repeated composition. In the main gallery of her recent show, for example, four large "Night Flight" C-prints portrayed the same geometric, starburst pattern formed by the meeting edges of perpendicular mirrors: While *Night Flight* #40 (all works 2008) is bathed entirely in shades of blue,

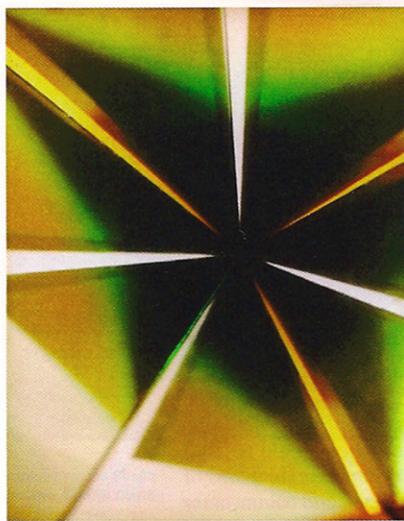
creating a dark navy center that bleeds outward toward an azure penumbra, *Night Flight* #49 is a prismatic burst of black, orange, and translucent green set against a sharp white background.

Quinlan resists digital processes in her work. In a mediascape where digital photography has become ubiquitous, desensitizing the average viewer to staged or unlikely superimpositions, Quinlan's analogue approach can seem outmoded. This is particularly true of the "Santa Fe" series, which, though a purely formal study, has a distinctly retro aura. In a saturated palette of hot pink, indigo, and lime (colors that go quickly in and out of fashion), these slickly produced images read like illegible fragments of a 1980s cosmetics ad. In this group of photos, a cubist composition is formed by propped-up mirrors that reflect gauzy surfaces awash in col-

ored shadows; razor-thin beams of light are refracted along the intersecting planes; suggestions of interior and exterior space are collapsed into one irregular field. On the longest wall of the main gallery, five prints in a row seem to progress from daylight to darkness, as if the first, *Santa Fe* #2, had been photographed at high noon and the last, *Santa Fe* #20, at twilight. After prolonged viewing, these abstract pictures appear as synthetic landscapes.

Photographs are notoriously unreliable documents, yet the credibility of photography today remains generally undisputed in mainstream culture, insuring its continued value to, if not dominance in, advertising, journalism, and politics. Quinlan, too, exploits our willing suspension of disbelief to explore the limits of the medium, while making a convincing case for the value of ambiguity. That her moody compositions can simultaneously exist as essays on deception and as seductive, formal exercises, is the strength of Quinlan's ongoing project. If she continues to exploit the slippage between the real and the fictive, her serialized images should continue to surprise.

—Catherine Taft



Eileen Quinlan,
Night Flight #49,
2008, chromogenic
print mounted on
Sintra, 40 x 30".

*More information available
upon request*