

PARSONS
MFA PHOTOGRAPHY

#IRL

IN REAL LIFE

THESIS CATALOG
2014

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#IRL
IN REAL LIFE

On the Passage of a Few People at Parsons Through a Rather Brief Moment in Time

The thesis show is a curious beast. Only occasionally curated or thematic, it nevertheless arrives burdened with expectations of cohesiveness or, at least, a kind of pulse-taking—a visual/material snapshot of the position of a group of artists as they emerge into the world. A rite of passage, it marks the moment when artists metamorphose from students to accredited professionals, whether they burst out autonomous and fully formed, like Athena from the head of Zeus, or branded by a signature style of a professor or a school. If nothing else, the thesis show represents a manifestation of a group of individuals trying to make sense of two years of shared experiences and bodies of knowledge. These people, often young, have chosen to pursue a field of endeavor with little chance of monetary reward in order to try to make the world just a little bit better, by giving themselves—and us—a new way of looking, or thinking, or feeling.

In this regard, #IRL: In Real Life, the 2014 Parsons graduate photography program thesis exhibition, is nothing special. By this, I do not mean to downplay the achievement of its participants, which is substantial, but rather to note that what makes it singular is, in fact, the experiences and bodies of knowledge so recently shared by these artists, and the particularities of the new ways of looking, thinking, and feeling that they give us. These shared experiences have been numerous and varied. Yet none of them could be as affecting as the tragic loss of one of their cohort, Daniel Williams, who checked out far too soon, leaving behind promising work and indelible memories both painful and joyous. His absence, I think, may be felt in the work of his fellows—certainly not overtly, maybe not even perceptibly, but acknowledged in some way: a sensitivity, perhaps, to a shared experience.

While undoubtedly never meant to comprise a thematic group show, the works in #IRL: In Real Life, we could argue, cohere by means of a certain sensibility. We might even characterize this as an embrace of the ineffable, a willingness to entertain the notion that something exists beyond the ordinary world. Lara Atallah, Berk Cakmakci, Craig Callison, Xiao Chen, Daniel Cherrin, Magali Duzant, Michelle Claire Gevint, Jordan Hood, Woo-ram Jung, Gabriel H. Sanchez, Kristin Sigurdardottir, Jonathan David Smyth, and Michael Winfrey, provide us with modes of understanding that delve further than the merely empirical. Each creates thoughtful work of such specificity that it seems to achieve, “utopically,” as Roland Barthes said in *Camera Lucida* (one element of the shared knowledge of these artists) of a photograph of a lost loved one, “the impossible science of the unique being.”

Joseph R. Wolin



“I’ve always associated my work to literature.”



As for the idea of photographing a set up where lighting props and photographic gear is an inherent part of the frame, this reiterates my message, but pushes it further. In this case, you’re being bluntly told it is a lie. You’re not obstructing parts of the photograph the way the projections do, but rather building them from scratch.

Kelly: *I like how you use montage and collage; especially in the way you layer your images. I find it reminiscent of fractured narratives that you see in filmmaking. A lot of films nowadays use an artistic license to display historic events. This seems parallel to the things that you’re doing.*

Lara: It also feels like something culturally inherent to me as someone who comes from Lebanon and it’s funny that you mention cinema in relation to my work because in my mind I’ve always associated to literature. For this project in particular, my inspiration was a book by the Lebanese-American author Rabih Alameddine called *Koolhaas*. It also has a very fractured narrative that draws a parallel between the progression of the Lebanese civil war and the AIDS epidemic in the United States. It’s one work written in different literary formats, as a novel, as a play and as an email exchange. Given the conflicted relationship that Lebanon has with history, it makes perfect sense that such work would evolve from one of its countrymen. Within that line of thought, it also makes perfect sense that my project would use a similar language, too.

Kelly Cannon: *I find it interesting that you’re taking photographs of existing images by making this very tangible and constructed set up. It turns the studio into a 3D space, and shows the photograph as a three-dimensional object. I’m curious then that while working with your projections, you say that it didn’t feel right to make tangible photographs out of them. I’m wondering why you wanted to make one of these projects very tangible, and another, which emphasizes these unreal qualities. Is there a difference in your relationship to the subject matter? Do you feel that one is more resolved?*

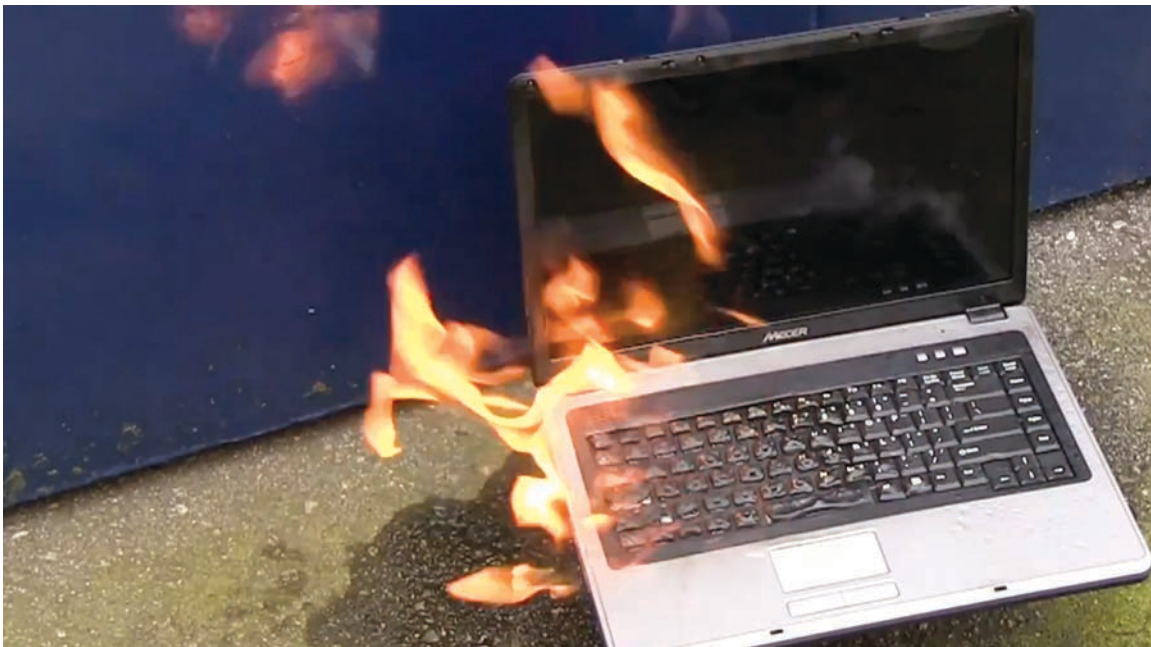
Lara Atallah: Considering that this project was conceived in chapters, these two parts work well together and cohesively within a whole. The projected photographs represent my relationship to the idea of vicarious memories: the type of thing that people born into my generation grew up with. They aim to question the veracity of golden age stories that surround them. In addition, they also bring up the age-old question of the medium regarding ideas of photography and truth, a discussion that is especially relevant in today’s digital age.

- **Kelly Cannon** is a writer based in New York and Budapest.

BERK CAKMAKCI

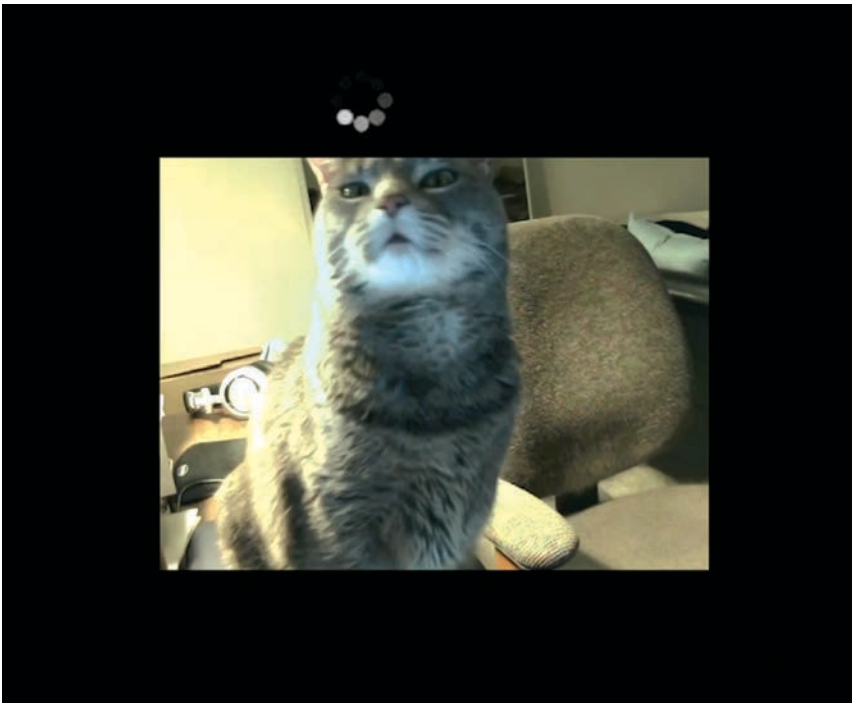


Video still from *Man's Ultimate Destiny*



Video still from *UX (User Experience)*

“I have given up anticipating.”



Video still from *Man's Ultimate Destiny*

Bora Akinciturk: *What are the differences between your expectations of the future as a child compared to today?*

Berk Cakmakci: I don't see any radical difference to be honest. Future predictions during the 90's were much more realistic compared to those of the previous decades. Also, things are moving very fast, technological evolution is happening almost on a daily basis. I have given up anticipating.

Bora: *Why do you use YouTube as your main source of content?*

Berk: YouTube is an amazing place to explore and study collective experiences through very personal videos. It's a black hole; you know where you started, but can never anticipate where you'll end up. I can spend an entire day in front of it. Appropriation has always been something that I've enjoyed doing, and video-sharing websites take it to another level. I considered making my own versions of these videos, but that would have been an extremely self-conscious act. I would have missed the point of what I was doing.

Bora: *How does the viewer play into your work?*

Berk: Found footage comes with an audience that already exists. Most of the videos I work with have been watched by at least 10 people before I discover them. It's almost like playing a game of catch; the audience passes the ball back to me. Because of this, there might never be a definitive conclusion.

Bora: *What are the differences between burning a laptop in a gallery and showing a video of a laptop burning?*

Berk: In this case, watching a video is more real to me than doing it in front of an audience. There is something undeniably intimate about these videos. They are produced in the cheapest way possible and uploaded by all kinds of people around the world. Anyone with internet access can experience them, and that excites me. I approach them with the mindset of an archivist. I want to create loose narratives that function as meditations on modern day obsessions.

Bora: *Do you think people really have a tendency to form sexual or emotional relationships with technology?*

Berk: I think that attraction is also being encouraged by the brands. A person opens the box, peels off the protective cover, touches the product, and enjoys the design before turning it on. It can be surprisingly arousing. What is even more interesting to me is that the arousal can happen from just watching someone do these things.

Bora: *If the products in your videos weren't technological would it change the work?*

Berk: Definitely. All of these videos are shot with digital cameras, edited with digital software, and then uploaded on to YouTube. This is all done using a computer, and downloaded by me on my laptop, re-edited, then uploaded again online. It is an interesting cycle; almost like a paradox. Technology itself allows us to document, share and store its own humiliation and destruction.

- **Bora Akinciturk** is an artist based in London & Istanbul.

CRAIG CALLISON



“The work always ends up being a strange consolidation of social critique and my own lust.”



Inny Taylor: *Sports and sex, vintage and current, what do these things have to do with each other?*

Craig Callison: There is this sense of Americana to football, basketball, academic scholarships and getting into college because you are a student/athlete. There is also a huge glamour and sexuality aspect, and a lot of it can center on and around masculinity. I think there is an unspoken eroticism with being athletic. It's the ridiculousness of looking back at the imagery of men in the late 80s and early 90s, which is so telling of the culture my generation is born out of.

Inny: *What kind of man are you?*

Craig: For me, that's constantly evolving, and I'd like to believe that my generation is questioning what it is to be a man, too. All we have been told are these strict definitive answers. Nowadays, we live in such a post-modern world that I don't believe anything is so conclusive. It's up to individuals to define themselves, and that's a good thing because it means we are progressing. An artist is a person that questions everything about life.

Inny: *So your work is inspired by fitness and sex. How much does sex actually drive your creativity?*

Craig: Unfortunately art for me is generally a sexless process. In fact, when I am in a relationship I find it hard to produce work. I get fully involved into that person and I almost completely abandon what I do. So in some ways my process is a relationship and a very sexual one at that. The work always ends up being a strange consolidation of social critique and my own lust. I simultaneously look outward and inward.

Inny: *Are you happy with your artwork?*

Craig: Sadly, I'm almost never happy with it. I work on a piece for about two months, and when I print it out, I'm instantly disappointed. It grows on me, but I have to hear what people think of it. It's a really gross analogy, but it's almost like being constipated for two months. What comes out in the end is kind of disgusting to me, but everyone else sees it as this terrific achievement. I don't think I can see it for what it actually is at first because the process is so painful.

Inny: *You mean pushing it out?*

Craig: [Laughs] I guess so – but it all comes down to this: each piece is a signifier for a time and place in my life. Recently, I have started to understand what is happening when I'm working on a piece, so I now have more control over what it is I'm doing. I love that I'm beginning to find happiness in the process of making my work. Everything in life is about experience, and we are all building upon our own experiences all the time. I'm 27 years old, and I have years to learn what makes me happy. Each piece brings me closer to that happiness. Like I said earlier, as an artist I question everything.

- Inny Taylor is freelance writer based in Brooklyn, NY.



“Some people read into the past like fiction instead of fact.”



All my doubts and conjectures have formed longings and curiosities. I first began to make images to tell people the stories in my head, and I want people to look at them. The most fascinating story was The Silk Road. It's a series of trade and cultural transmission routes that were central to cultural interaction through regions of the Asian continent.

It connects the west and east by linking traders, pilgrims, monks, soldiers and urban residents from China to the Mediterranean Sea. From China, it divides into the northern and southern routes by passing the Taklimakan Desert and Lop Nur, all the way to the Europe. It runs along the desert, but there has never been a fixed route because the landform is always changing. Most of the area is extremely dangerous, so the journey has never been documented.

I've spent years reading books and watching documentaries about The Silk Road. It has become a huge fantasy for me because I've never seen or experienced it. In my work, I'm trying to merge and blend the fragments in my head to create a fictional landscape. I am chasing a mirage, and I find this very fascinating but sad.

Yichen Zhou: *How would you describe your work?*

Xiao Chen: It represents my understanding of things that can't be understood. Meaninglessness and confrontation are the most important presuppositions of my work. My work represents the method, which I believe in to perceive life and the universe.

Yichen: *What does the past mean to you?*

Xiao: The figures and landscapes in my work are not from the period I am living in. I've always had a passion about the past – it's so tempting to idealize it. I keep imagining what it would have been like if I was born earlier. I think what's so fascinating about the past is that there is no doubt it's happened, but as time goes on, stories and histories fade away. The past gets more and more mysterious for me. People begin to read into it like fiction instead of fact.

Yichen: *What do these fake landscapes mean to you? How did The Silk Road inspire you?*

Xiao: There may come a time when I may or may not know everything. In the meantime, I use fantasy to create stories with isolated words and phrases.

- **Yichen Zhou** is a performance artist based in New York City.

DANIEL A. CHERRIN



“Framing ‘truth’ in a truthful way is the challenge.”



Video still from *Madd Clowns*

Thomas W. Tolin + Edna Ohana: *You describe yourself as a photographer/filmmaker. What does that mean to you?*

Daniel A. Cherrin: The camera is my tool. I want to create awareness. The possibility that images may serve justice and humanism appeals deeply to me and it motivates my work.

Thomas + Edna: *Was there a moment when you realized that you operate in the world as an artist?*

Daniel: When I first photographed a decaying bird I realized I was exploring questions about life and death and picturing animal sacrifice as a metaphor for human suffering. The image in the frame was both a document and a piece of art.

Thomas + Edna: *Most people would not equate Art with Documentary. Why do you?*

Daniel: Photography always has been scrutinized for its contribution to fine art, but all art ultimately is documentary. I want to create documentary art that is ethical and empowering.

This is not an easy task. Every artist who honestly portrays the human condition faces the same moral dilemma. Suffering is experienced in the world and the artist uses this suffering as a source of inspiration.

Thomas + Edna: *How do you address this dilemma? Don't you risk producing propaganda and not art?*

Daniel: The activist artist often is accused of using 'art' to promote his or her own agenda. Propaganda intends to obscure truth. Art, in its best form, illuminates truth. This awareness sensitizes me to the situations in which I find myself. It is true that people without power need people with power. How the artist navigates this imbalance in power is difficult. I try to remain mindful of the ethical problems as I engage the world and document human struggles. I also practice working in more experimental and abstract forms dealing with similar themes. Photography operates on many levels. This is what is attractive about working within the medium.

Thomas + Edna: *You continued your film and photography studies at Parsons. Did you also continue your political work?*

Daniel: My work at Parsons has become more abstract, but it is grounded in the same political awareness. I began to understand the power of images as symbols. The daily task of discovering truth in a culture steeped in sacrifice and ritual is difficult. Framing images is a political choice. At The New School I've worked on several social projects, including a study of public surveillance systems in New York City. I also continued my work developing projects overseas.

Thomas + Edna: *What do you want to be remembered for as an artist?*

Daniel: Most people view images that reinforce their comfortable worldview. Framing "truth" in a truthful way is the challenge. I want to produce art that shakes the world and forces people (including me) to reconsider their preconceived notions. Art has no better purpose.

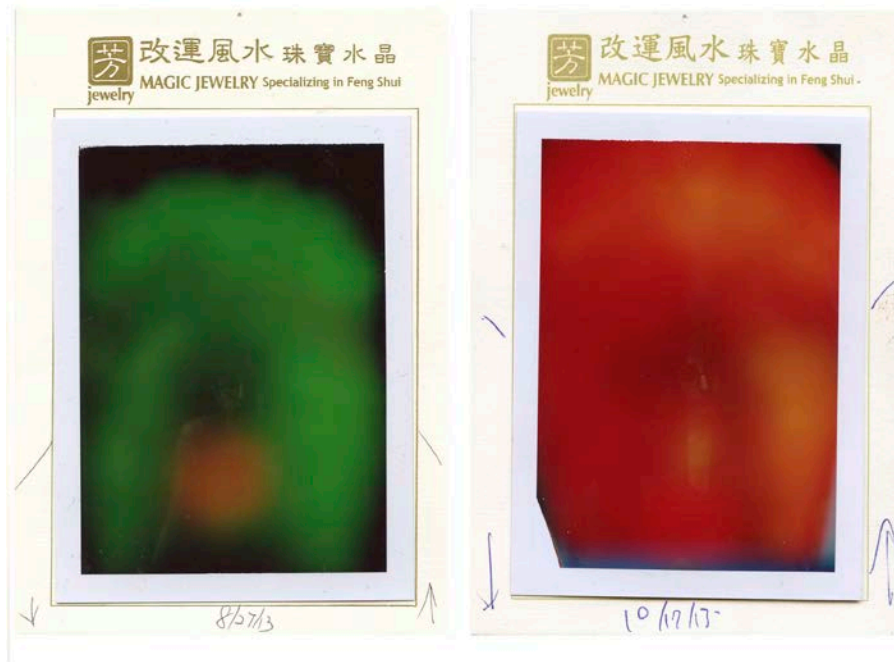
- **Thomas W. Tolin** is a professor of Economics at West Chester University.

- **Edna Ohana** is an artist based in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

MAGALI DUZANT



“I’m interested in the failure of systems.”



Jesse Boardman Kauppila: *Can you briefly describe the projects you are working on?*

Magali Duzant: I’ve been working on two – I’m live-streaming the sun setting across the country in each time zone. The stream will be projected to fill a window in the gallery space, essentially replacing the sun in the New York sky. Over the past year, I’ve also been recording my aura to create an alternate system of understanding.

Jesse: *I think reflection is a good word to describe the process of your work; there is a bit of an idea where reflection makes you more present. It seems paradoxical but fitting. You’ve mentioned this term dasein, so what does it mean in regards to your work?*

Magali: I began thinking about this condition of the present. The future is filled with possibility, but it’s often abrupt and hard to make sense of. For someone to explain it through pop psychology, you can try and process it, even if you think it’s not real. You can also fool yourself into a state of belief because it’s comforting and reassuring. When I came across the word, dasein, used by Heidegger, it really resonated with both of my projects.

It explains the form of experience unique to humans, living amongst others but also alone. My sunset piece is a personal experience that I’m sharing; I’m trying to extend the moment. It also mirrors my life in New York. How do you balance your internal self with your surroundings? It all leads back to my methods of working – accumulating, systematizing, repeating, and analyzing.

Jesse: *These photographic cards contextualize the aura project. The object itself seems to be important – it’s what you are looking at, passing back and forth, and focusing on. How do you view the object?*

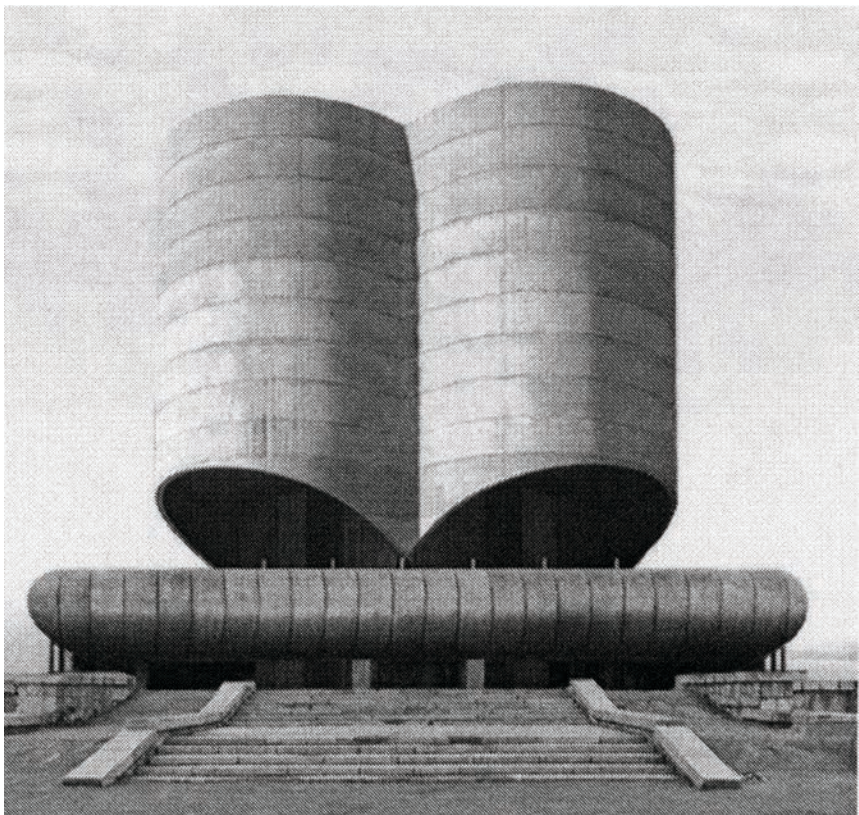
Magali: A person can be affected by actions or words imbued to an object. It plays into sympathetic and contagious magic; the aura card becomes this magical proof. It carries something of me, in its origin of my hands resting on metal plates, and something of the reader – the way she produces the print and annotates it. It’s a record that is temporal and permanent. The card signifies a desire to believe. There is a parallel view happening, too – the woman reading the card has a perspective of me in person and the image represented on the card. There is also my personal view from my various visits. Whether it’s twenty people describing the moon on one particular night, or capturing two suns in the sky, balancing is rising and setting simultaneously.

Jesse: *You mentioned an interest in systems, how do you think about them in terms of your work?*

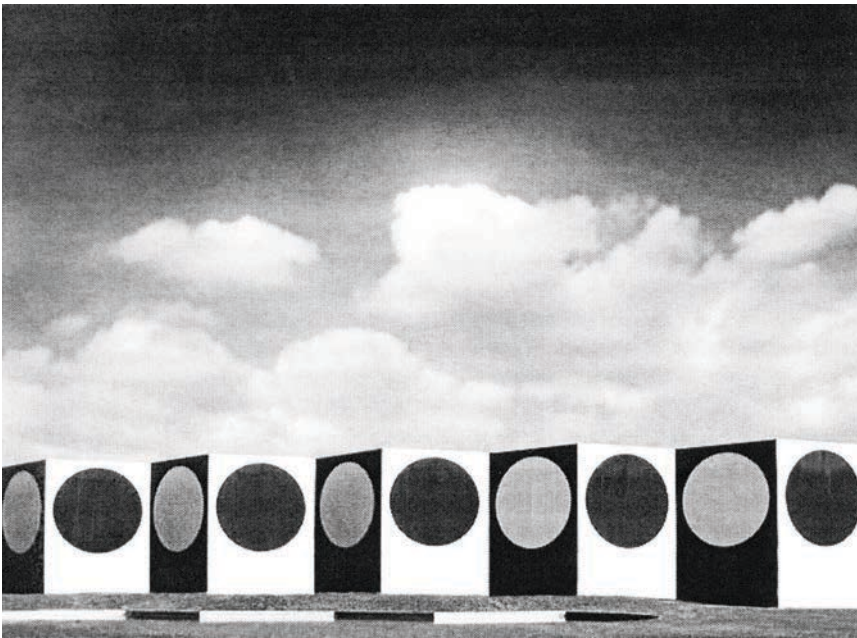
Magali: It’s the failure of systems that I am most interested in. The moon project, I looked & looked, deals with the need to verbally articulate an experience and its impossibility to do so in full. As I began to put my moon book together, I was collecting articles about the meteor in Siberia. I was so intrigued by the interviews of people who’d seen it happen. There seemed to be such a beautiful grasping of vocabulary to describe it. Someone said, “It was a light that had never been before”, and this opened up a visual play in my mind. The aura project is about breaking down systems and looking for other structures of explanation.

- Jesse Boardman Kauppila is an artist living and working in Pittsburgh, PA.

MICHELLE CLAIRE GEVINT



“From the outside, the structure may seem threatening but it’s also a method of protection.”



Lior Tamim: *Can you discuss how you began appropriating images from the web?*

Michelle Gevint: I was working on a project where I was traveling to suburban towns, but I began to feel logistically and conceptually limited. I wanted to widen the span of my work and eliminate the specificity of American culture, so I began to search the web for structures that interested me without the need to physically travel. This resulted in a new project that allowed me to develop my interest in the culture and functionality of architecture. Using Photoshop, I weave together web-sourced images creating absurd, functionless, often threatening hybrid structures. I alter the images and make them my own.

Lior: *In your work you communicate with the ideas of Utopia and Dystopia. Can you talk about this?*

Michelle: It all relates to Israel where I come from. Israel is based on the relationship between Utopian Dystopian thought. The first immigrants who came from Europe and established Israel had a Utopian dream, but then they met the hardships and challenges of building the country and the harsh reality of dealing with a constant state of conflict, which still remains today. The relationship between the dream and disappointment and the constant state of flux between the two extremes is a critical aspect in my work.

I am trying to describe a state where Utopia can easily become a Dystopia.

Lior: *The pieces have a Communist and European feel to them. Can you explain the connection you have to this kind of architecture?*

Michelle: I’ve always had a fascination with Eastern Europe and Russia because my family’s roots are from there and the first immigrants who established the state of Israel came from there. I’m drawn to Communist architecture because it’s an example of a form that is used for power and control. Architecture is a symbol of power and I’m interested in how it can be used to influence form and function.

Lior: *Can you talk about the importance of the materiality structures?*

Michelle: The structures I create are made from concrete because I’m building bunkers and protective shields. They ultimately describe a place that is a post war zone, or a desolate urban environment. From the outside the structure may seem threatening but it’s also a method of protection.

Lior: *Your 3-D models function very differently from your images. Can you talk about these differences?*

Michelle: There’s an uncanny and mysterious feeling to the 2-D images because they do not reveal very much. The perspective is limited and distorted and the viewer is left with very little information. By turning these images into 3-D prints, the structures seem as if they might function in the world. They are actually made out of a white powdery material, which is fragile and delicate. There is a conflict between the static white models and the dynamic light, which I project on to the surfaces of the models. The light is supposed to represent human life, which is not present in the 2D images. I am projecting a video of static light in order to represent my idea of a city life; apartment lights, moving cars, streetlights etc. That being said, this environment is bound by a divider, which separates it from the outside world and functions as a method of protection and isolation.

- Lior Tamim is an Israeli photographer based in New York City.

JORDAN HOOD



“Something has to die so you can grow from it and move on.”



Amy Stein: You were making work about the responsibility that we have to one another within a family, and more specifically your large southern family. So tell me about the new work you have made, which is a lead into this new medium, and how that came about, and this piece *Entanglement*.

Jordan Hood: I began to work with film about a year ago. I reached a point where I realized my work should be more of a performance, rather than just still images. It's about me being in this landscape at home in Mississippi; my mere presence there feels very special to me, and the physical marks I make in the land are important. I started to make videos about this but I wasn't satisfied with anything I made. At the time, my personal life seemed to be falling apart, so I decided to make the work about that instead.

Amy: Getting stuck is good. It gives you something to react to, and gives you a state of mind. I love the idea too of starting over in a new medium. We talk a lot about the limits of photography, there is all of the potential in photography, but there are also limits.

Jordan: When I first started filming, I thought the videos looked boring and flat. I didn't want to just document a performance. My still work is very narrative driven, so I decided to make this video work narrative based, too.

In the video, you can see me making marks on the landscape, and then I begin to meditate. At this point, all of the negativity comes out of me, and it stays there in the earth, in whatever mark or form I am making. I had to make this work on the landscape that I grew up on because I am so comfortable there in the middle of nowhere.

Amy: You are creating this very dramatic sequence on this land. I feel like your still work is very calm, this is more confrontational.

Jordan: I wanted it to be dramatic. I think when you watch it, it's obvious that I am struggling with something, and it's obvious that it's not just the landscape. The landscape isn't hurting me. A tree doesn't fall on me, and a tornado doesn't come and take me away. It's obvious that I am comfortable there, but not completely so. There seems to be instability somewhere, and it's most likely in the mind.

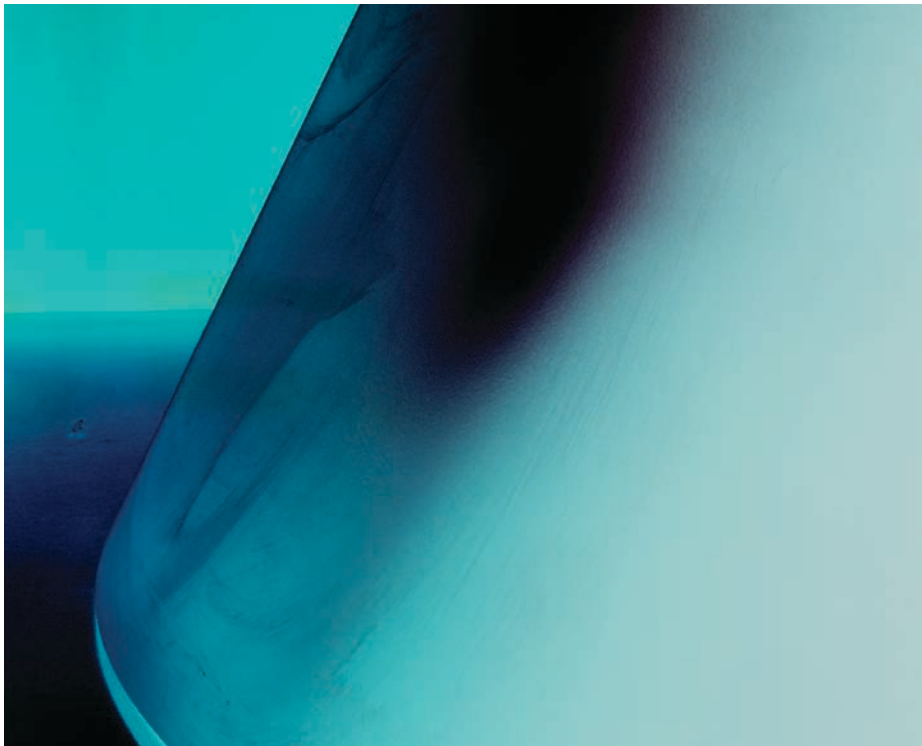
Amy: So many of these shot you are lying down in the earth and they seem to allude to death. Is that something you are doing consciously?

Jordan: Yes. The video is a cycle of a struggle with a type of death. I feel like that is what your brain has to go through to really get over whatever it is that is making you depressed. Something has to die so you can grow from it and move on.

Amy: Like a transformation.

- **Amy Stein** is a photographer based in Los Angeles, CA.

WOO-RAM JUNG



“Sometimes the choice is clear and there is no explanation needed.”



For sure, it still has its own position as an object of fine art, but it also holds an important responsibility in drawing attention to the things we want to document as people, as well as issues in the world around us. This is one of the most significant parts of photography to me.

Iksoo: *How do you deal with this responsibility in your own work?*

Woo-Ram: I am dealing with questions regarding the meaning of contemporary architecture. In the beginning of Deconstructivism, which is a development of postmodern architecture that began in the late 1980s, architects had a lot of questions about the meaning of architectural elements. Along with those questions, Nomadic phenomena, which is about the function of architecture, were turned up and discussed as a new need of contemporary architecture. My work is about finding my own personal understanding of those conditions. Overall, my first duty as an artist is to reflect and manifest the many aspects of our lives in a simple and delightful way.

Iksoo Lee: *Hi Ram, can you introduce yourself briefly?*

Woo-Ram Jung: My name is Woo-Ram Jung and I am from South Korea. I have a background in architecture. It's because of this that I am interested in handling issues related to architecture in my photography work.

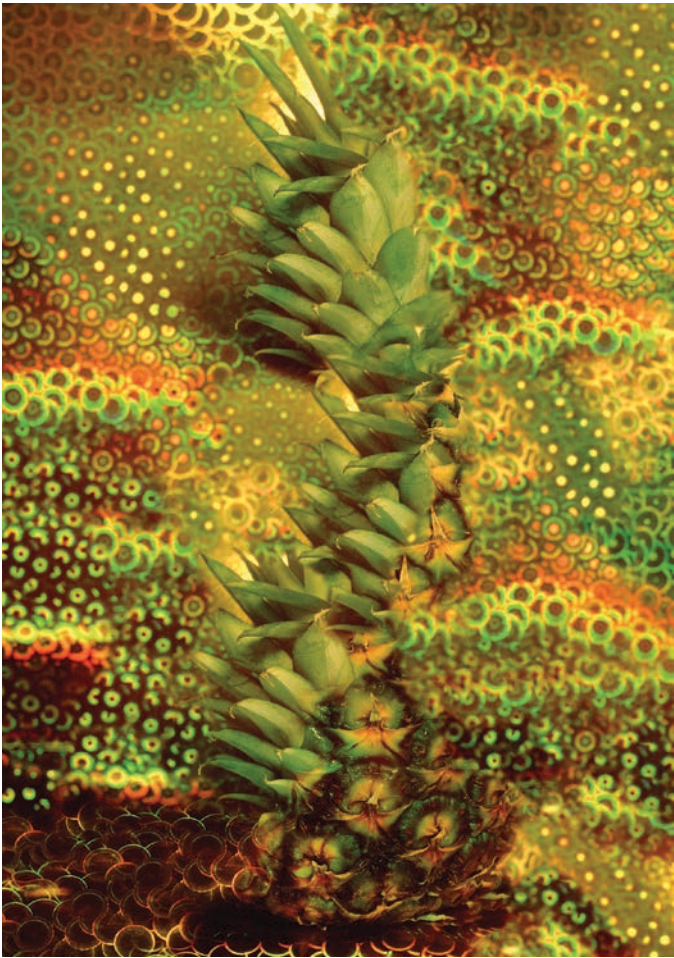
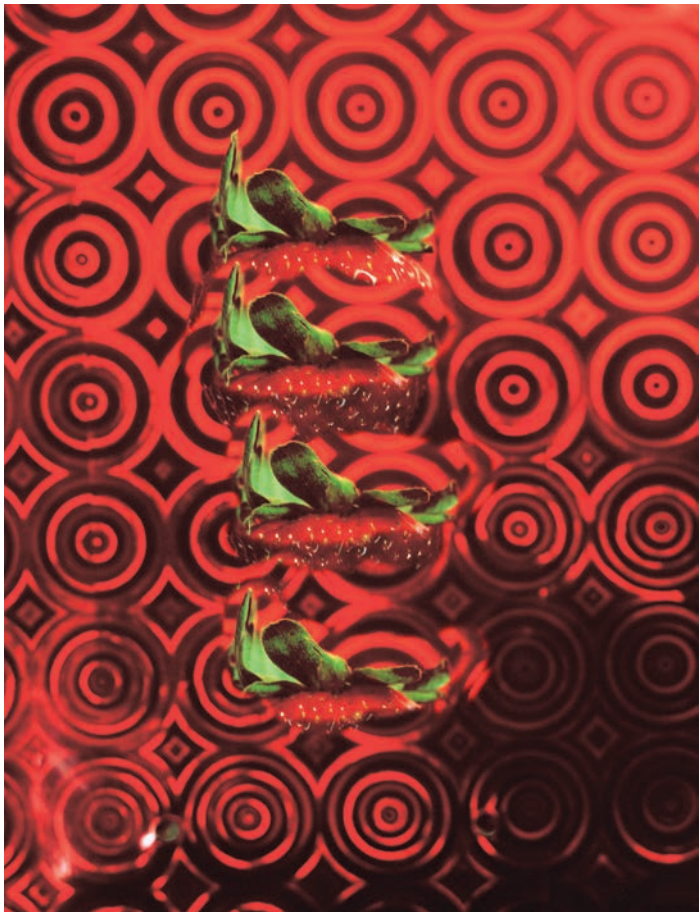
Iksoo: *How did you jump out from architecture to photography?*

Woo-Ram: After graduating from my Masters program at Virginia Tech, I did a short internship in New York. This is when I started to take pictures on the street. Of course, my work now is totally different, but people always ask me why I switched from architecture to photography. My answer is always the same: sometimes the choice is clear and there is no explanation needed. You just know.

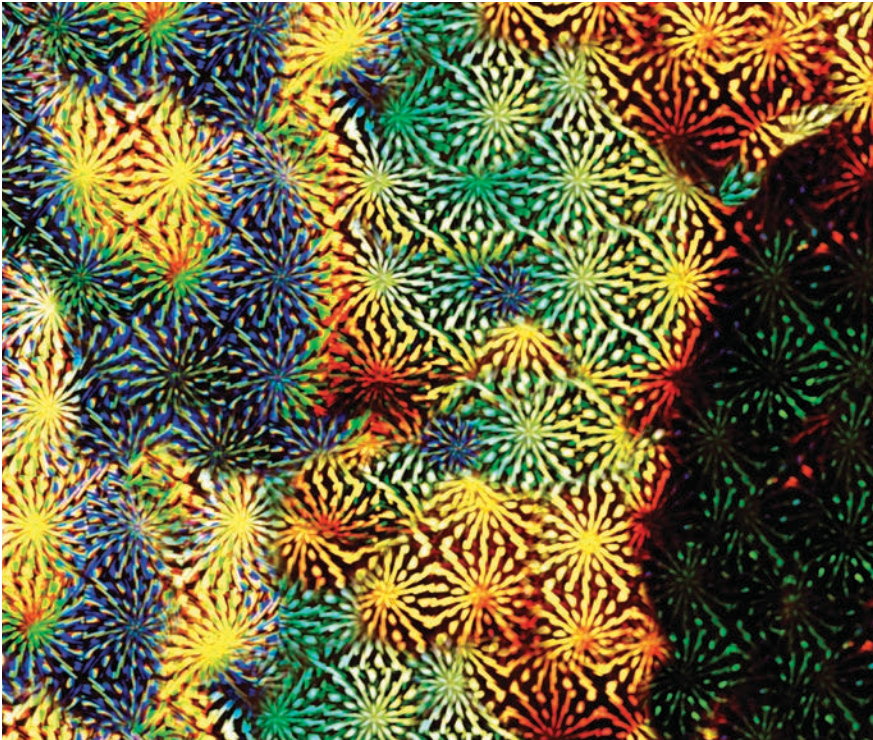
Iksoo: *What is photography's role in the contemporary era?*

Woo-Ram: After post-modernism in photography, it took its role as an apparatus for artists to create a dialogue with the things around them. I think the meaning of photography is getting more and more broad and complicated.

- Iksoo Lee is an architect based in Seoul, South Korea.



“Photography is a saddle for taming the phenomenon of light.”



Picture after picture, I would look up and observe absolute beauty, then peer down in sheer disappointment. Perhaps it was on that pier that first I realized the feral nature of light. Moments like this still occur for me, I'm not ashamed to admit. But I now understand that “photography” is nothing more than a saddle for taming the phenomenon of light. Experience and patience became crucial for me to comprehend the medium, but most importantly in understanding that photography is much greater than all of us.

I'm here reminded of a story in which Aristotle witnessed a magnificent solar eclipse over Athens. It was then that he noticed a faint image of the eclipse being projected through small openings between tree leaves. What he found was a rudimentary form of photography, a camera obscura—but here also lies a rather humbling notion. That long after we are all gone—our cameras, the moonlit piers, and perhaps the moon itself—photography will continue to exist without our saddles, between the small cracks and holes in the Universe.

Kelly Turner: *What was your first memorable experience with photography?*

Gabriel H. Sanchez: There are a couple of experiences in my youth when the potency of photography revealed itself, and I knew that I had little power over the medium. Today, I understand the physics of light and the manner in which images are perceived, but at age seven, photography was mysterious and somewhat frightening. To be honest, it still frightens me—which may explain why I persistently dedicate my time to it.

I once borrowed my mother's digital camera with no intention but to feel more adult, and snuck out to a moonlit pier near our coastal home in South Carolina. I can still see a buttery moonlight on the sand, the thick indigo cast of shadows, and a distinct inspiration of needing to photograph the sky above me.

My mother's camera lacked the proper optics for such an image and would render the moon as a tiny yellow dot in a vast expanse of black—nothing at all like what I saw with my eyes. I was frustrated and hated photography. I hated the camera for not doing what I wanted and I hated time for continuing to pass. I knew that the longer I struggled, the more likely that a cloud would soon swing through and obscure my sight.

*- As told by M.A. Museum Studies candidate,
Kelly Turner.*

KRISTIN SIGURDARDOTTIR



Video still from -1,0,1



Video still from -1,0,1

“Time is ours to spend, but I’m always looking at my watch.”



Rachel Guardiola: *I know you came from a fine art background. How has studying photography at Parsons changed your practice?*

Kristin Sigurdardottir: The use of vivid and figurative languages to represent objects, actions or ideas has always been a part of my art. Learning how to control and apply those actions to photography has been the biggest challenge so far. It has changed my practice, and it has definitely changed the way I organize my shoes.

Rachel: *Can you tell me about the concept and themes that reoccur in your work?*

Kristin: I often introduce the act of play into my work through subtle innocent gestures. As children, we frequently speak nonsense. Maybe it’s because we are less afraid of being wrong. In most of my work, I imagine that everything I’ve been told about the world is not necessarily true. I focus on changing my perception of mundane things.

Rachel: *You are originally from Reykjavik, Iceland. How did moving to a large urban environment like New York City affect your work?*

Kristin: I definitely had to rearrange my perception of things in order to take in the vast amount of information and visuals that make up this city. I did struggle at first, often arguing out loud in Icelandic to rocks and trash. I suppose my interaction with the environment somehow found its way into my work.

Rachel: *What role does the sense of place and time play into your work?*

Kristin: I have always obsessively thought about time and how it should be spent. Time is ours to spend; yet I’m always looking at my watch. I feel very disoriented and lost as this repetitive act is always told in numbers. When you live in a place like Iceland, nature tells you more about time than your Casio, so you immediately start to question your place in time.

Rachel: *You spent some time working at home in Iceland this year. How did that trip affect your ongoing practice in New York?*

Kristin: By going back, I started to make connections between images made in New York and the landscape and seasons in Iceland. You could say that returning home enhanced my perception of the work I was doing previously.

Rachel: *Can you describe how your ideas will resonate in your final thesis work?*

Kristin: In using myself as a subject, as well as my interaction with everyday life, I’ve been able to research different techniques of approaching the present. I have introduced research into concepts of psychology, and these elements have allowed me to gain a better understanding of the past. The act of manipulating and folding an image (as I have done in my recent work) addresses the different ways our future floats in the infinite unknown.

- Rachel Guardiola is an MFA candidate at Maryland Institute College of Art.

JONATHAN DAVID SMYTH



Video still from *Work Out*



“You have to live outside of something.”



Video still from *Obstacle Race*

Amanda Alfieri: *One of your most significant works is the documentary I'm Telling On You, where you interview your parents and sisters. How did you feel about moving to New York, a place where you were unable to document your family?*

Jonathan David Smyth: It was tough because I'd spent the guts of four years working on that project. When I first arrived at Parsons, I thought about creating a new family with lookalikes. I quickly realized that I shouldn't do that, because it could appear insincere, or even take away from my previous work. Ultimately, I always want to make work that is honest, so I began to photograph myself instead.

Amanda: *Whether you're falling to the ground in Obstacle Race, or struggling to stay balanced in Work Out, it seems as though struggle and failure are major themes in your work. Are they?*

Jonathan: Failure is a huge part of it, and I use it as a starting point for everything I make. For instance, in *Obstacle Race*, I'm using the humiliating memory of being disqualified from a childhood game. There is a struggle that is real, too, because I have absolutely no dance or athletic training whatsoever.

Amanda: *You've been working on a new piece where you ask strangers to cry. Can you talk about the decision to turn the camera away from yourself?*

Jonathan: My father passed away in early 2014, and a friend of mine died a year before that. I wanted to make work about the loss I felt, but I realized what I was experiencing was not unique to me, but actually a shared and common emotion. This led me to consider groups of individuals.

Amanda: *Do you think one must suffer in order to create great work?*

Jonathan: I don't know about suffering, but I believe that in order to be a great artist you have to live outside of something. I always felt as though I lived outside of my family – being adopted. I also lived outside of what was considered “normal” society in high school – being gay. So, these experiences have made me want to create great work.

Amanda: *Do you think that your work will always be autobiographical?*

Jonathan: I've been thinking about this a lot recently because I got married and my life is changing. I don't know if “autobiographical” is the correct word to use, but I know I will always make work about things that I go through.

Amanda: *Would you ever do a live performance?*

Jonathan: I don't think so. My videos are set in very particular locations, and they are shown in slow motion. I don't even call them performances actually; I see them more as still images with motion.

Amanda: *With my work, the more direct I am, the more people question my authenticity, or the authenticity of the piece. Do you ever encounter that?*

Jonathan: The question of authenticity is never the issue, but I'm often asked why my work is so personal. In other words they find my work depressing. My answer is always this: we do not live pain free lives. I understand that some people have boundaries about what they choose to share, but that is not going to stop me from telling stories that are painful or sad. My work is cathartic, and it's really important for me to be truthful. Otherwise, what's the fucking point?

- Amanda Alfieri is a performance artist based in New York City.

DANIEL L. WILLIAMS (1987-2013)



Portis

stacey held onto my hand sometimes when we;d go driving. nothing huge, but we had been watching reality television that dictates close friends to hold eachother in such a way uncommon. like loose folds of chinese hollister jersey wattleing to our fingers interlaced. but anyway the car was full of cigarettes. i liked days like this where we'd just drive around smoking and playing cds. the way the sky looked like a cloud of cigarette smoke we had exhaled together over the past years. of course i thought that, my simple mind. it sounded like cool lyrics

we went to the drive through and got drinks and i felt the headrest molding my skull in the most endearing way. stacy took her hand off mine to get the drinks but i left mine on the console psilently. i didn't take my head off the cushion , feeling the curves on the back of my brain. stacy said we'd go to the mall saturday so this felt like a build-up toward an important day where we'd go somewhere exciting. she pulled into the highway going kinda slow. there was no traffic behind us but it felt appropriate. i felt the slow acceleration in the back of my head gently climax

i didn't know where we were going but we left town the trees. i hadn't even seen the drink i got but out of the corner of my eye. stacy said we'd go to the park we found last year. it felt important. i felt the CD in the back of my skull spinning. the clear green yellow silver CDR in my brain. my sexy teen brain

we went to the park we found a long time ago. it was in the middle of some young woods that had grown up over an old jail after it was demolished, save for the traces of concrete and exercise yard. the gravel made me raise my head from the poly cushion and observe my drink. the water on the outside made it undesirable for a moment but i thought of the woods and took that first sip of coke. we left the car and started the slower trip to the concrete edge where we'd stick cigarette butts in the ground and heat up stray ants with a lighter. the burns like little fingerprints

some guys came out of nowhere and we got hit hard on the back of my head (her back of her head too, i guess) and i felt a tense moment opposite of the trip here. i couldn't quite articulate it into my brain. the CD was skipping but i couldn't move or fight back. i couldn't hear the music either. the CD kept skipping... seeking. they flipped me over my cheek on the ground. i could see stacy she was fighting. something must have hit my head or maybe "my spine." i couldn't feel anything but i could tell i was moving back and forth a half-inch at a time. the rocks and cigarette burns by my face. i could taste the coke again.

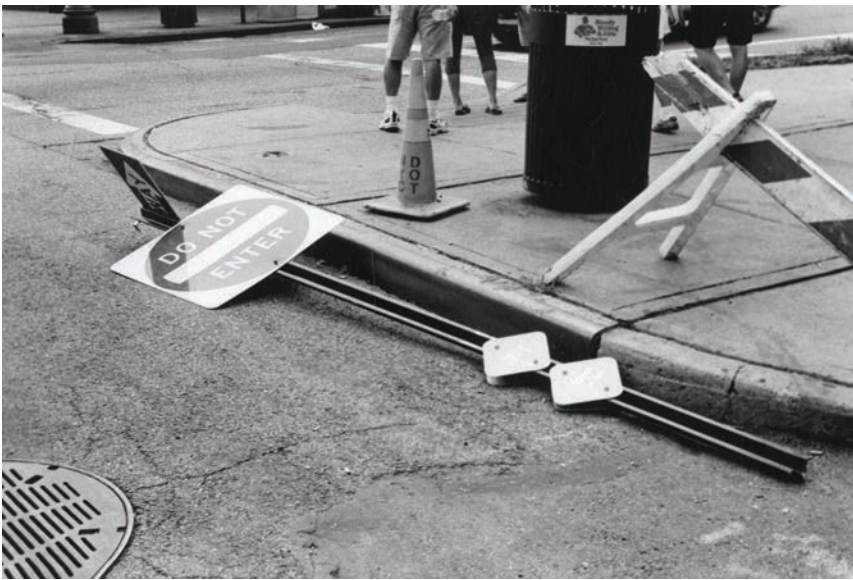
i wondered about my spine... the way it was resting. it couldn't be good but i couldn't feel anything bad going on with it. it seemed fine. it felt like i was back in the car. stacy and i were holding hands, sweatshirt wristcuffs kissing. we'd go back home and watch tv. something about the coke we got by her house at the gas station was always so good after it had been in her refrigerator. those big glasses her mom had bought a long time ago when we were little. we put them in the freezer once to make it really cold for a sleepover but it broke one of the glasses. it was pretty how it broke but stayed the same shape

Daniel L. Williams

MICHAEL WINFREY



“I don’t use any special techniques, I really just explore.”



Naomi Vaughan: *What is your photography about?*

Michael Winfrey: I put multiple photos together, making comparisons or stories with montage or sequence. I grew up with painting and drawing, so I have always enjoyed having something to create. For me, photography is about seeing what already exists. I take pictures to share and to communicate with others. I think that multiple photographs reveal more than just one image alone.

Naomi: *What do you look for in terms of culture?*

Michael: I like to see a variety; especially when I find different groups of people who create a thriving community. For example, I really enjoy discovering a new neighborhood.

Naomi: *What techniques and tools do you use?*

Michael: I have about fifteen to twenty cameras; everything from digital models to half frame and 8x10. I don’t use any special techniques, I really just explore. When I was younger, my grandmother on my dad’s side had a farm and I’d go looking for interesting things in the fields and barns. On my mom’s side, my grandfather took me for bike rides all over town. Sometimes we’d make social visits to friends, but mostly we’d go exploring.

I always found stuff to look at and investigate back then, and I guess I find that stuff now with a camera.

Naomi: *What do you like to do in your spare time?*

Michael: I enjoy drinking coffee and listening to the radio with my dogs.

Naomi: *What are your lifelong dreams?*

Michael: I’d like to publish books, and become established amongst my peers as a successful artist. I’d also like to have a kid, buy a farm, do some gardening, have more time to ride my bike, and have enough money to be comfortable.

Naomi: *If you were interviewing a perspective student for the photo program at Parsons, what traits would you look for?*

Michael: Experience and skills, but most importantly motivation. You need a lot of that.

Naomi: *What’s the last book you read?*

Michael: I’m always reading a variety of books depending on my mood at the time. Some favorites are, Miller, Barthes, Conrad, Keillor, and other classic stuff like that. I don’t often read them from start to finish, I read chapters, and then I stop and go back later. It’s like having conversations with different friends.

Naomi: *What’s the best movie you’ve seen in the past year?*

Michael: I’ve been watching a lot of Ingmar Bergman movies lately. My favorite is one called Persona.

Naomi: *What do you like to do for fun?*

Michael: That’s simple; I love to ride my bike.

- Naomi Vaughan is a photographer based in New York City.

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James Ramer, Director MFA Photography, Parsons The New School for Design

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