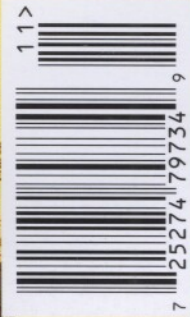


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The Videos of Kent Anderson Butler  
A Conversation with Alejandro Cartagena  
The (Non)Destinations of Augmented Reality Art (Part II)  
Carnegie Mellon's CREATE Lab

# PHOTOGRAPHY IN CRISIS?

## Perspectives 2010

International Center of Photography

New York City

May 21–September 12, 2010

“Today, photography is in crisis. The traditional tools of the medium have been dismantled and its conventional locations and distribution points have been displaced.”<sup>1</sup> Thus began International Center of Photography (ICP) Chief Curator Brian Wallis’s introduction to “Perspectives 2010,” an annual exhibition highlighting the work of contemporary photo-based artists. Wallis’s statement echoed the same apocalyptic prediction made about painting after the invention of photography, and the subsequent prediction about analog photography after the invention of digital. While it is true that the tools of production and distribution have radically shifted, these transformative shifts are not necessarily negative or indicative of a crisis. As technology continues to open up new possibilities for both imagemakers and viewers, our understanding of photography’s role in constructing history and its relationship to visual culture shifts. The five featured artists in “Perspectives 2010” approach imagemaking from diverse points of view, but all conceptually addressed political and social issues.

Carol Bove creates shelf installations with found objects. Her work “Das Energi” (2005–06) features books, a peacock feather, shells, an acorn, and a strange print of a red-breasted, winged demon crouching over a screaming angel. At first glance, this minimalist piece resembles someone’s living room shelf. Bove’s artistic process—collecting, archiving, and arranging—is akin to that of a visual anthropologist. Bove’s found objects function as artifacts, documenting human patterns of consumption and social exchange. Most interesting are the books and what they reveal (or do not reveal) about our socialization. Books by William Butler Yeats, Sigmund Freud, Le Corbusier—all iconic figures—are interspersed with small relics from our natural world. Easily overlooked in nature, Bove draws our attention to the fine details of pattern, texture, and color found in a single acorn, shell, and feather. Bove ruptures high-brow intellectualism by collaging the demon/angel print over a muted abstract painting. Through her careful arrangements, Bove subtly invites the viewer to draw connections between nature and culture, faith and science, and image and text.

Unlike Bove’s work, Ed Templeton’s wall installations are not minimalist. “30 Seconds in My Shoes” (2006) consists of 139 unique unmatted, black-and-white photographs in simple wooden frames. Each image is flush against the next, the overall result resembling a large jigsaw puzzle. Chronically friends, family, and suburban youth, Templeton’s diaristic photographs evoke a range of emotions. They juxtapose religious imagery with edgy, uncomfortable images: a man carrying a cross on wheels and a painting of Adam and Eve

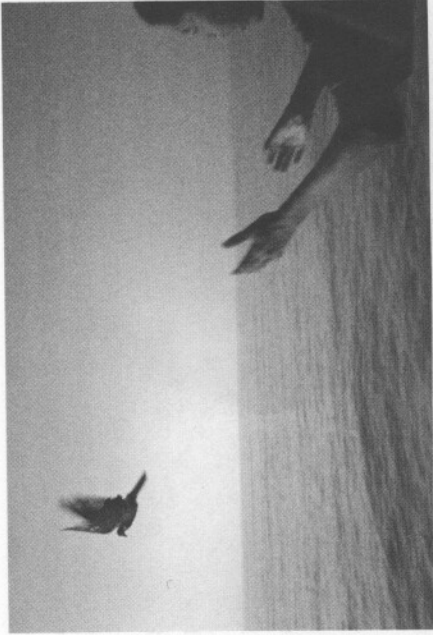


coexist uneasily with a young woman on an ob-gyn table, naked from the waist down, with the text “bed of unhappiness” and a close-up of an erect penis next to a young girl’s face. Some of the photographer’s subjects confront the viewer, others look away or appear unaware. Templeton’s work can be difficult to behold, but it does not leave the viewer in despair. Within the messiness that comprises our lives, he bestows small moments of hope and beauty such as an image of a bird in flight or the exalted freedom expressed in an image of a boy jumping off a bridge into the water.

Embracing the cinematic moment, Matthew Porter’s photographs question the veracity of the photographic image. Displayed as a series, the disparate images frustrate the viewer’s attempts to create a coherent narrative. A silhouetted horse and rider echo the iconic Marlboro Man advertisements. A muscle car hovers in mid-air, suspended between power lines. An image of the Hindenburg is situated near an interior photograph of a navigation room. It is impossible to determine what is real and what is simulated. Are we looking at stage-set constructions or “real” photographs manipulated and reassembled in Photoshop? One imagines Porter laughing at the viewer’s gullibility. His photographs suggest an invented, masculinized history, one fraught with adventure.

Hong-An Truong addresses the contested role of imagery as historical record in her four-channel video work *Adaptation Fever* (2006–07). Using found film footage of French-Colonial Vietnam, Truong loops, mirrors, and truncates the subtitles to recontextualize the footage from a postcolonial perspective. Altering linear time by fast-forwarding and reversing, soldiers march forward and back, never progressing to their destination. Mirrored images morph and disappear into one another. A small boy repetitively forms the sign of

**Above**  
*Untitled #11, Vrolijk Museum, Amsterdam* (2008) by Lena Herzog; © Lena Herzog; courtesy of the artist



the cross. Isolating and looping this single gesture renders it iconic. On the far wall, an exploding white flash obliterates the screen. While viewing the video, I was reminded of a passage from Tajana Soli's recent novel, *The Lotus Eaters*: "That was the experience of Vietnam. Things in plain view, their meaning visible only to the initiated."<sup>1</sup> Truong's video presents an uninitiated Western audience with an alternative history, filtered and reconsidered through time.

The highlight of the exhibition was Lena Herzog's work, which comprised an entire gallery. Entering the darkened room, viewers encountered twenty black-and-white photographs and two display cases. Black walls and spotlights on each image enhanced the theatricality of the experience. Herzog gained permission to photograph some of the European Wunderkammer (Cabinets of Curiosity) collections. The resulting images of malformed babies are

haunting and ethereal. Suspended in time and space, the babies exist in limbo, a brief life interrupted. The infants' faces convey an alien-human hybrid: Siamese twins wrapped in a tight embrace, and a fetus, trapped in its glass prison, eyes upward, hands in a prayer pose. What are we to make of these small, wondrous beings, born without a chance to survive? The display cases featured photographs of a mouse skeleton orchestra. In the 1860s, E.J. van der Mijle constructed an elaborate tableau of fifty mouse skeletons outfitted with instruments. Herzog discovered and photographed this creation at the Anatomical Museum in Leiden, Netherlands. The playfulness of the mouse tableau contrasts the somber beauty of the infant images.

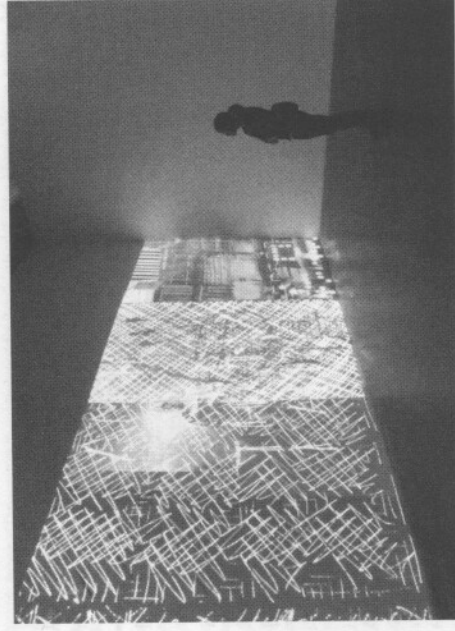
"Perspectives 2010" demonstrated the scope and multiplicity of current photographic practice. While the tools of photography continue to change, artists embrace both the new and the old. Whether using sourced images or footage, exploring found objects, creating photographs with a computer, or shooting photographs to document the world around us, the artists in "Perspectives 2010" communicate the continued importance and power of the photographic image in visual culture.

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*NOTES* 1. *Tajana Soli, The Lotus Eaters* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2010), 7.

#### Above

*Bird Release, San Clemente* (2007) by Ed Templeton; © Ed Templeton; courtesy of Roberts & Tilton, Culver City, CA



expressing facets of individual consciousness. Following World War II, Gysin's muse was the ephemeral experience that had not yet been considered significant within the practices of postwar art. His collaborations with William S. Burroughs, beginning in Tangier in 1954 and continuing in Paris and New York, paralleled the emergence of Fluxus in both Europe and New York. "Dream Machine" featured a significant display of Gysin's paintings, photographs, sculpture, filmed performances, collage, and writing—each reflect-

## A STREAMING DREAM

### Dream Machine

By Brion Gysin

New Museum

New York City

July 7–October 3, 2010

In 1924 Brion Gysin moved from Alberta, Canada, to Paris, where he launched an extensive artistic career that was both geographical-ly and materially complex. The New Museum's "Dream Machine" was the first retrospective in the United States of this innovative and influential artist. New Museum curator Laura Hoptman describes Gysin as, "a true subversive. Gay, stateless, polyglot, he had no family, no clique, no fixed profession, and, often, no fixed address."<sup>1</sup> Having lost his father to World War I, Gysin joined the artists of old Europe in a frantic search for new meaning that included questioning the very viability of art. The ideals of the fin-de-siècle had been shattered by an arms race that upheld the beast of humanity over its virtue. Figurative painting was gradually losing ground as the significance of metaphor began to slip away. The surrealists, whom Gysin admired early on, continued their focus on object-based work