





# Sun Kissed



Photo previous page: Forrest MacDonald of the 2015 MFAs

# USF MFA 2015

With essays by students in the graduate Art History program  
University of South Florida School of Art and Art History <art.usf.edu>

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## Foreword

by **Wallace Wilson, Director and Professor, USF School of Art and Art History**

This publication features the collaborative efforts of the graduating Master of Fine Arts students and the Master of Arts students in Art History at the University of South Florida's School of Art and Art History. The project's scale and ambition is unprecedented for both programs.

The students self-selected the pairings of one studio graduate with one art history student based on writing preferences and research backgrounds. Once decisions were made, the artist and scholar shared dialogue, studio visits, written drafts, and edits—back and forth—until the final artworks and essays reached the ideal form and tenor. A final polish was achieved through cooperation with USF's Writing Studio.

The MFA at USF is acknowledged as a premiere program among its peers nationally. Students create artworks that embrace a vast range of materials and diverse, innovative art making strategies.

The USF MA program in Art History is unique in that the curriculum is based exclusively on small, writing-intensive seminars. Students engage in advanced research on current issues in art history.

Our eminent faculty in both disciplines are internationally distinguished for their scholarly and creative research achievements and as notably outstanding, inspiring teachers.

Sincere appreciation is extended to publication designer Don Fuller and to the generous donors who made the project possible. The catalogue is primarily the result of a social media fundraising campaign staged as a cooperative enterprise between our two graduate student organizations: MFAO (Master of Fine Arts Organization) and WHAT (Writing, History, Art, & Theory.)

Congratulations to our incredibly dedicated, gifted and talented graduate students for the entire production—from the original inception to this dynamic record that you hold in your hands!





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# Illogical Explorations: Considering the Work of Michael J. Bauman

by David Q. Loisel

*Sun Kissed*, the title of this year's MFA exhibition, warmly encompasses the themes that drive Michael Bauman's work. A third-generation Floridian and self-proclaimed "Jewish Redneck," Bauman draws much of his inspiration from his Floridian heritage, as well as the state's unique swampy topography and cultural prominence as America's premier travel destination, for the past century. In witnessing the transformation of what he derisively refers to as the "tourist's paradise," Bauman continues to create work that both challenges and questions the "bionic hybrid of natural and constructed elements" he considers Florida to have become today.<sup>1</sup> Themes of gender, commodity, urbanization, and the "absurdity of culture," specifically the hyper-masculinized expectation of the Southern American male, are all addressed in his three latest projects.

The cleverly compelling *North Beach Trophy Shop* is a collaborative work between Bauman and Kate Helms—an artist/environmental scientist. Immediately, viewers notice a barrage of brightly colored alligator skins and body parts scattered throughout a custom-fabricated trailer. The installation simultaneously acts as an interactive performance piece and a satirical commentary, imitating a roadside skin-trader offering purchasable souvenirs. These extremely detailed Dayglo molds cast from locally harvested alligators poke fun at "backwoods" hunters selling gator jerky and the inescapable tacky alligator heads, sold at every gas station and souvenir shop in the state. The process of creating impractical non-functional works to be sold as critiques of American consumer culture undoubtedly bares the imprint of Claes Oldenburg's *Store* sculptures, produced in New York City in 1961. In this campy mobile market, one can see a similarly suggestive critique of the Sunshine State's souvenir-driven economy, while allusions to the transient nature of Florida's

tourist populations are suggested in the portable nature of the performative installation.

The alligator molds are created from silicon rubber—a material used in the production of sex toys—eliciting a direct tactile referent to both alligator skin and sexual pleasure. Through this choice of materials, Bauman builds a juxtaposition between the violent and the pleasurable. The artist claims his work is "an attempt to satisfy [his] desire for the absurd... to create a mythos of the cruel and illogical."<sup>2</sup> This violence and cruelty are indeed manifested on multiple levels in the *North Beach Trophy Shop*. The viewer is inescapably forced to consider that in order to create the idealized "tourist paradise," the former landscape has to first be destroyed. Swamplands were gutted, filled, and paved to make way for theme parks, hotels and parking structures. The eradication of Florida's natural ecosystems is fundamentally linked to Bauman works, defining what can be understood as a second colonial expansion perpetuated through suburban sprawl and commercial gain.

Bauman's alligator molds, and the history to which they belong, truly embody his critique of Florida's rampant consumerism. Astonishingly, in 1973, the American Alligator was hunted to the brink of extinction and was listed under the Endangered Species Act. The ecological destruction caused by hunting and harvesting of nuisance wildlife, to the point of extinction, blatantly illuminates Bauman's ideas of absurd cruelty. This same violence becomes even more deliberate through the artist's work when one realizes that each alligator cast was originally created from a harvested alligator corpse the artist obtained through local nuisance wildlife catchers. The laughable silicone alligators quickly avouch their morbid indexical qualities, becoming eerily reminiscent of Victorian

death masks used to capture the deceased's final expressions. One wonders if Bauman's neon alligators will one day flippantly typify a prehistoric species that no longer exists in the rapidly eroding Everglades. The slow consumption of these protected wetlands equally inform his newest and most intrepid work *The World's Smallest Airboat*.

*The World's Smallest Airboat* is a work that is part conquest, and part emulation, of the late Dutch conceptual artist Bas Jan Ader's *In Search of the Miraculous* (1975), in which Ader attempted to sail across the Atlantic in a tiny twelve and a half foot sailboat. Bauman, mimicking a similar performative attempt, will pilot his personally constructed airboat (three feet, eight inches by five feet) across the Florida Everglades from the Western headwaters to Miami with only fuel and a shotgun in tow. The mere visual of a backwoods conquistador humming across South Florida's marshy wetlands seated atop a gator skin is enough to invoke the absurd machismo Bauman seeks to challenge while sardonically echoing Florida's colonial past. In channeling his performative "Don Quixote-esque" persona, the artist views his farcical exploration of the Everglades through a self-critical lens, embracing both the introspection and inspiration such ludicrous notions of unrestrained masculinity entail.

It is through these notions that Bauman, much like his art, is revealed to be a complex hybrid of cultural heritage, self-exploration, and illogical innovation.

<sup>1</sup> Michael J. Bauman, *Artist Statement*, February 5, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> "Artist Short Bio," accessed February 9, 2015, <http://www.michaeljbauman.com>.

<sup>3</sup> Michael J. Bauman, interview with David Q. Loisel, January 21, 2015.



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1. *Trident*, 2014  
Cast silicone alligator skin, t-8 florescent lights, electrical tape, parracord, marine grade expandable foam, steel, mylar 50 x 48 x 20 inches
2. *Inflate*, 2013  
Nuisance caught three leg alligator, neon palm tree, drywall Digital print of installation
3. *North Beach Trophy Shop*, 2014  
Cast silicone alligator skins, custom built installation trailer, t-8 florescent lights, neon, astro-turf, performers 102 x 240 x 180 inches
4. *North Beach Trophy Shop* (detail), 2014
5. *FL2907EL*, 2014  
Vintage Boat, cast silicone alligator skins, wood, moving blankets, rope, t-8 florescent lights, plastic stake, extension cord 108 x 150 x 120 inches
6. *Decoy (One)*, 2014  
Cast silicone alligator hides, T-8 fluorescent bulbs, rope, construction floods, aluminum, vintage survey transit, sable palm, steel, plastic drum, mudded drywall, lifting straps, camo moving blankets, neon, blue tarp, parracord 72 x 196 x 84 inches

Images Courtesy of the Artist



Photo: Christine Comple

# Flashes of Mortality: The Video and Photographic Works of Katina Bitsicas

by Erin Wilson

Katina Bitsicas addresses complex emotional and psychological concerns with an elegance that often belies the difficult nature of her subject matter. Her video works seek to capture the beauty in the unusual and provide challenges to traditional interpretations of the world around us. They are simultaneously accessible and multivalent, addressing issues that many of us have encountered in one form or another but have rarely considered at length. Often employing metaphor as a vehicle for interpretation, she highlights themes such as murder, assault, and emotional or mental instabilities in ways that cause us to reflect, not turn away.

Both in content and depiction, these video works pull from an array of sources. Inspired by the studies of Nobel Prize winner Santiago Ramón y Cajal, a neuroscientist whose artistic background gave him the ability to create intricately detailed drawings of cells and neural connections, Bitsicas utilizes art as a means to probe the reactive underpinnings of our brain.<sup>1</sup> She strives to visually express the nature of memory in relation to how we think and feel. Yet, unlike Cajal's technical sketches, her work is not conveyed through a strictly scientific manner. She also looks to an art historical past and integrates the aesthetic preferences of seventeenth century Italian painter Artemisia Gentileschi. These elements can be detected through her employment of heavy shadow and bright light.<sup>2</sup>

Playing off the notion of memory, Bitsicas has, over the course of her career, shifted from the specific to the universal. Instead of asking viewers to consider a particular incident in all its varying facets she now requires us to grapple with broad, overarching concerns. In order to achieve these aims she shifts focus away from personal experiences to probe those fears that affect us all. In her piece, *Vitreous*, Bitsicas asks us to

contemplate the larger issues of mortality in a descriptive but oddly indeterminate way.

Although no longer the subject appearing on screen, Bitsicas is still very much intertwined with her work. Acting as videographer, producer and composer she poses a scenario that is not immediately accessible. Through the use of both photography and video, we are given multiple avenues for contemplation. Working in tandem, these elements serve to enhance our overall experience and interpretation of the work. As the video begins so, too, do our questions. Small droplets of blood hit a white porcelain background and we wonder about its origins. The photographs, seemingly a foil to the mystery of the video, instead increase our queries as we linger on images that stubbornly refuse to reveal their secrets. Through music, cinematography, and photography Bitsicas develops a complex psychological scenario with multiple avenues of inquiry, but only one real answer. It is only with prolonged viewing that we can puzzle out the intent and come face to face with the fragile and fleeting nature of our own life.

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<sup>1</sup> Katina Bitsicas, Interview with Erin Wilson, January 21, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



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1. *Vitreous*, 2015  
HD Video  
9:56
2. *Vitreous*, 2015  
HD Video  
9:56
3. *Vitreous*, 2015  
Archival Inkjet Print  
36 x 30 inches
4. *Vitreous*, 2015  
Archival Inkjet Print  
36 x 30 inches
5. *Vitreous*, 2015  
Archival Inkjet Print  
36 x 30 inches
6. *Vitreous*, 2015  
HD Video  
9:56

Images Courtesy of the Artist



Photo: Forrest MacDonald

# Rethinking Bodies: Christine Comple's Contemporary Male Icon

by **Laura R. Colkitt**

Since antiquity the male form has captured the attention of artists. As the centuries progressed the male nude became integral in Greco-Roman depictions, Renaissance era revivals, Nineteenth Century history painting, and postmodern pop. Through time the meaning of the male nude icon shifted drastically from ideas surrounding myth and heroism to outright ridicule. The artist, Christine Comple, astutely aware of the past art historical references, takes the male nude in a contemporary direction. Through drawing, Comple reworks archetypal male figuration into a synchronously complex narrative, simultaneously layered in conflict and harmony, while rooted in highly detailed visual acumen.

Comple works both in small-scale compositions and overwhelmingly large arrangements. In her art, there is a highly refined use of space and compelling interweaving of forms. Her subject matter may be constant, but each artwork generates a novel space of dialogue and intrigue for the observer. The male body duplicates and transforms, transmuted traditional understanding, while shifting from body to object to landscape in the viewer's mind.<sup>1</sup>

The compulsion to depict the male body is echoed in Comple's artistic process. Utilizing pen on paper, she painstakingly renders each individual line over and over again. Large-scale drawing becomes both an act of fixation as well as devotion. The fundamental medium harkens back to the primal and consummate theme portrayed. The lines twist and turn on a two-dimensional plane while giving form to highly rendered anatomy which seem to interact with the spectator in three-dimensional space. The obsessive nature with which Comple renders her forms, reiterated both in process and in subject, demands that the viewer fully engage with every part of the composition.

The interaction between artist, artwork, and viewer becomes integral. The audience's gaze stands as a referent to both classical appreciation and the uncovering of a voyeuristic impulse. The work functions as a means of female agency through the female artist's subversion of Western culture's long ingrained gender roles of a muse. The male body is under consideration, its formal attributes scrutinized.

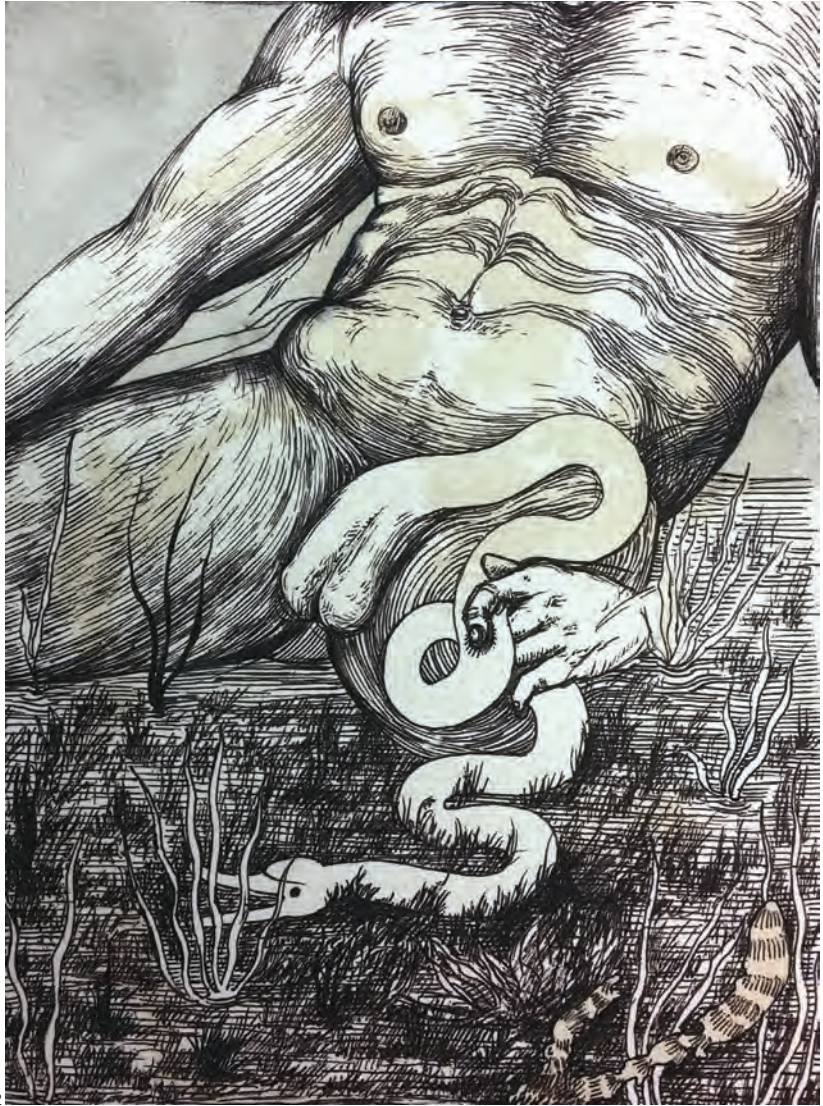
Comple also pushes the boundaries of traditional figure studies. She incorporates surreal and symbolic elements related to the phallus, hinting both satirically and candidly at Freudian and Lacanian theories of sexuality. Expertly cropping and truncating her subjects, Comple creates an emotional impact within the overall formation. Planes of space morph as the body becomes compartmentalized and eroticized. The physicality of anatomy gives way to an unconscious appreciation of sensuality and carnality. An inclusion of mixed classical elements rethought through a contemporary lens complicates the traditional understanding of the nude. The male anatomy deconstructs, simultaneously becoming a fractured mass of body parts while maintaining a cultivated structure rooted in repetition.

Thus Comple stands within the great artistic tradition of representing the male nude. She reworks the quintessential paradigm into a mix of traditional, surreal, and contemporary evolution. Comple's art serves as the fulcrum of the palpable corporeal world and the mind's abstracted imperceptible internal motivations.

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<sup>1</sup> Christine Comple, Interview with Laura Colkitt, February 9, 2015.





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Photo: Michael J. Bauman

1. *Medal*, 2015  
Monoprint  
20 x 20 inches
2. *Untitled*, 2014  
Mixed media on paper  
6 x 9 inches
3. *Benedict*, 2014  
Etching  
6 x 9 inches
4. *Untitled*, 2015  
Ink on paper  
20 x 26 inches

Images Courtesy of the Artist

# Intimate Views: Marcus DeSieno's *Cosmos*

by Amanda Preuss

Viewing the photographs of *Cosmos* is akin to an experiential encounter of dynamic forces: luminescent, saturated colors press forcefully against the picture plane, forming metamorphosing systems that hold the ambiguous view of distant galaxies in acute tension. These oscillating macrocosmic and microscopic views, such as *A Photograph of a Star Cluster Eaten by Bacteria Found on a Lightswitch*, come from the insatiable curiosity of photographer Marcus DeSieno. The fecund photographs that populate this series are captivating and sordid, holding in equal measures a seductive tactility and the palpable unease of a world unseen.

*Cosmos* teems with an invigorated use of photographic materials. Invisible microscopic bacteria are applied to photographic film of outer space, such as popularized images from NASA's Hubble telescope. As DeSieno cultivates the bacteria atop the film there is both growth and decay, altering the images into abstract patterns of color and texture.

The specific configurations of bacteria and film are revealed in classifying titles, such as *A Photograph of the Little Dumbbell Nebula Eaten by Bacteria Found on My Gym's 20-Pound Dumbbells*. Immediately, the title invites viewers to envision the performative action of collecting and growing the bacteria. DeSieno's literalistic titles also ascribe dry humor and wit that move the images from the realm of clinical sterility into something distinctly human. Yet the effect of this revelation can be disconcerting upon further visual inspection. Seemingly benign samples, such as ones from DeSieno's own iPhone, decay the film with an alarming amount of bacterial growth. Other more "exotic" samples—bacteria grown from an anus or a vagina—form astonishingly beautiful collisions with the cosmic imagery.

Although the photographs of *Cosmos* are carefully orchestrated arrangements of micro-and-macro, DeSieno cannot fully predict their results. The role of chance embedded in the experimental patterns of bacterial growth undermines complete control, creating a subtle tension between order and chaos. This perhaps invokes hyperbolic metaphors concerning man's persistent desire to control the unruly forces of nature—an ultimately futile endeavor, DeSieno adds.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, in scanning these miniature systems to make archival prints, the photographer destroys the bacteria he so carefully cultivated. There is something sublime in this push and pull between creation and destruction, in the desire for order on forces ultimately beyond control.

On the surface then, comparisons of DeSieno to a scientist appear apt. A separate photographic series by DeSieno titled *Parasites*, which includes magnified portraits of parasitic organisms, invites similar associations between artist and scientist. His work clearly demonstrates reflections upon certain canonical photographers, especially Henry Fox Talbot and John Adams Whipple, to investigate the historical tension in photography between traditional representation and unseen phenomena.<sup>2</sup> Yet his engagement with science is grounded in and bolstered by historical and aesthetic inquiry.

However, for DeSieno, the central questions in contemporary photography revolve around the importance—or irrelevance—of anachronistic photographic processes and the tactile nature of photography. His work is infused with articulations of experimental photographic techniques meant to inquire into the nature of the medium itself. DeSieno explains that he wants to explore how historic tools "can be molded into a twenty-first century ideology in order to expand the vocabulary of the photograph."<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, his

photographs are reminiscent of contemporary photographers Marco Breuer, Adam Fuss, or Jeremy Bolen, and his aesthetic inquiry recalls art historical discourses such as Rosalind Krauss's perceptive interrogation of the "imaginative capacity" of analog technologies.<sup>4</sup>

In the end, *Cosmos* provides its viewers with spectacular collisions between unseen worlds. But the surface tensions are nuanced by DeSieno's critical investigation of the medium. By exploring phenomena beyond the range of normal human perception via unconventional photographic processes, the photograph is unencumbered by what it *should* be for what it *can* be. DeSieno writes: "The nature of photography itself is called into question as the bacteria eats away the image into material abstraction... the conventional use of the photographic film is subverted and manipulated by the unforeseeable forces of nature as the work ultimately interrogates the material possibilities of photography."<sup>5</sup> The results of these interactions between static images and unpredictable patterns of growth are thus rendered as alluring—and perhaps alarming—photographic objects.

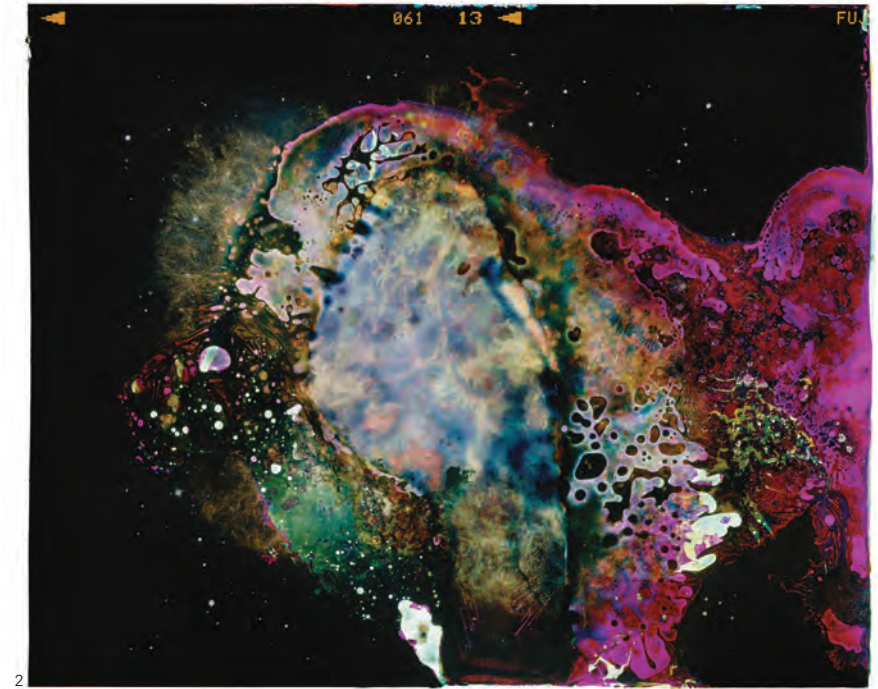
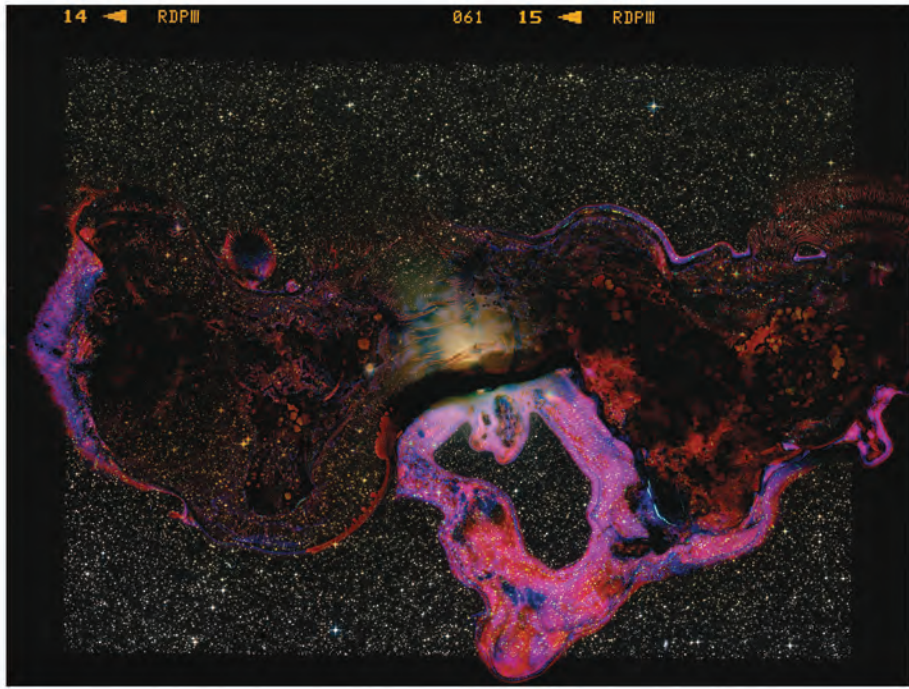
<sup>1</sup> Marcus DeSieno, Interview with Amanda Preuss, January 19, 2015.

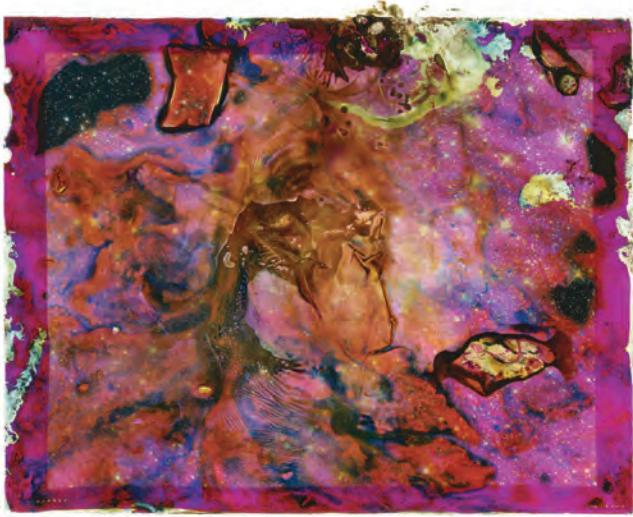
<sup>2</sup> Henry Fox Talbot (1800–1877), inventor of the calotype process, is credited with some of the first microscopic photographs by affixing a camera a microscope; John Adams Whipple (1822–1891) famously captured photographs of the moon using the Harvard College Observatory telescope between 1847 and 1852.

<sup>3</sup> Marcus DeSieno, interview with Amanda Preuss, January 19, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Rosalind Krauss, "Reinventing the Medium," *Critical Inquiry* 25 (Winter 1999), 304.

<sup>5</sup> Artist's statement, quoted from: "Cosmos" portfolio, *Marcus DeSieno Photography*, accessed January 12, 2015, <http://marcusdesieno.com/cosmos/>.

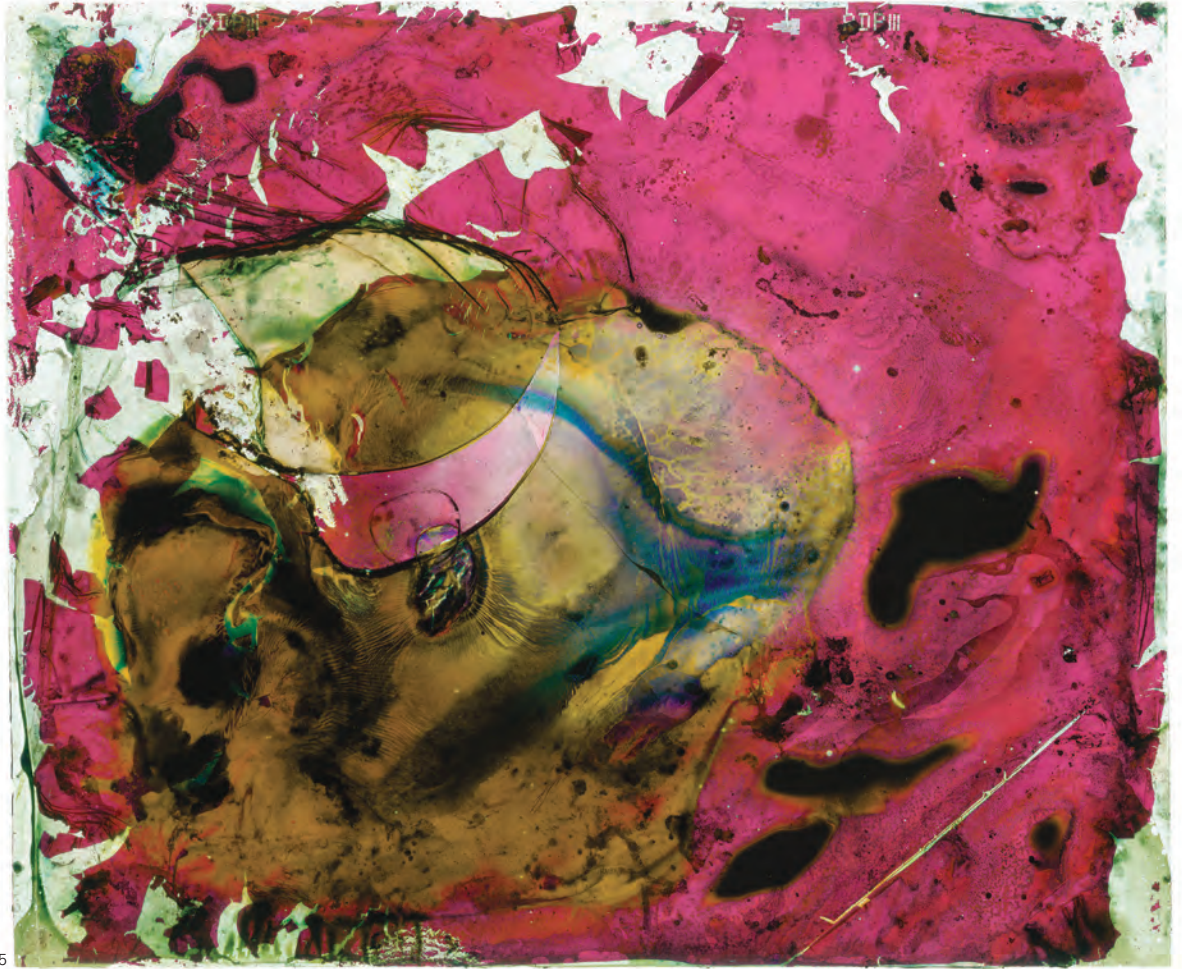




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Photo: Jaroslaw Studencki

1. *A Photograph of the Little Dumbbell Nebula Eaten by Bacteria Found on My Gym's 20-Pound Dumbbells*, 2014  
Archival Pigment Print of Bacteria Grown on Photographic Film  
18 x 24 inches
2. *A Photograph of the Crab Nebula Eaten by Bacteria Found on a Table at a Red Lobster Restaurant*, 2014  
Archival Pigment Print of Bacteria Grown on Photographic Film  
16 x 20 inches
3. *A Photograph of a Star Cluster Eaten by Bacteria Found on a Light Switch*, 2014  
Archival Pigment Print of Bacteria Grown on Photographic Film  
32 x 40 inches
4. *A Photograph of a Star Cluster Eaten by Bacteria Found on My iPhone's Screen*, 2014  
Archival Pigment Print of Bacteria Grown on Photographic Film  
40 x 60 inches
5. *A Photograph of the Medusa Nebula Eaten by Bacteria Found on a Mirror Inside a Sephora Store*, 2015  
Archival Pigment Print of Bacteria Grown on Photographic Film  
11 x 13 inches
6. *A Photograph of Pandora's Galaxy Cluster Eaten by Bacteria Found in My Cat's Litter Box*, 2015  
Archival Pigment Print of Bacteria Grown on Photographic Film  
32 x 40 inches

Images Courtesy of the Artist

# Laughter is the Best Medicine: Colonial Friction in the Art of Roberto Márquez

by Shanna Goodwin

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, artists working in diaspora have entered into conversation on colonialism within an increasingly globalized environment. Questions have arisen regarding the effects of past colonial powers on the cultures and countries they colonized. For some cultures, the effect of the colonizer is a very present reality.<sup>1</sup> As an American territory for more than five hundred years, the culture of the commonwealth of Puerto Rico is separate, yet simultaneously ingrained within American social, political and religious culture. The divide between resistance and acceptance of the colonizer's remaining presence in Puerto Rico is a major theme for the artist Roberto Márquez, a native-born Puerto Rican and naturalized citizen of the United States. As the relationship between American and Puerto Rican cultures is still a hypersensitive issue, questions about methods on approaching the colonial subject have been discussed within the art historical milieu. Márquez's oeuvre uses humor to bridge the borders of being the colonized 'other', creating a common plane that both colonized and colonizer can relate to.

Márquez's trans-cultural identity is reverberated in the ambiguous nature of his chosen medium: a ceramic mold of a painter's canvas. Traditionally trained in painting, Márquez has recently branched out into other media, such as ceramics. This act of exploring unknown territory is akin to Márquez's experience as a Puerto Rican artist in America. The constant battle of reworking and reforming the shape of an object alludes to his personal struggle to reconcile his own role as a colonized individual within the world of the colonizer. The frustration of perfecting the ceramic medium reflects the pluralism of the self, forming from two conflicting identities—colonial subject and colonizing power. Thus, the ceramic medium becomes an extension of Márquez's own malleable identity.

Painted on these ceramic canvases are small drawings that typically incorporate themes of the male body and masks. The mask, in Márquez's own words, "acts as a metaphor for the struggle with identity."<sup>2</sup> This identity battle is easily relatable, regardless of the viewer's native cultural association. Every individual, not just the colonial subject, is in a constant state of identity flux, assuming various masks depending on the situations or groups they encounter. By clustering a sizable amount of ceramic canvases together, Márquez expands the narrative possibilities, projecting his interpretation of the many masks people wear on a daily basis. Despite the eclecticism of multiple narratives, the central figure of a masked male dominates the picture plane in most scenes. The cartoonish figure dons a disproportionate mask, possibly signifying the awkwardness of assuming another's identity. By utilizing ambiguous scenes with very subtle hints of the 'other', Márquez allows his work to be colonized by the viewer's humor, thereby creating a humorous melting pot of narratives where the discussion of the effects on the colonized can activate.

Following the initial laughter, the viewer is enticed to meditate further on the meaning of the masked figure. At times, the figure's melancholic expression and black tears reveal that this scene may not be as playful as initially thought. The viewer senses a need by the male figure to wear the mask in order to fit in with the identity of another, coupled with an aversion to the act of adorning the mask. The subtle, but powerful emotions of the male figure prompts the viewer to question why this seemingly whimsical figure is depicted with the languishing expression of the mask. The humor in these scenes initially dissolves the abrasive boundaries that are typically projected within the post-colonial discourse. Through the utilization of masks and

questioning of identity, Márquez is actively "prompting the spectator to internally examine these stereotypes."<sup>3</sup> By making the situation laughable, Márquez creates an arena for uninhibited conversation and reflection.

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<sup>1</sup> Felicia Fahey, "Beyond the Island: Puerto Rican Diaspora in America," Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan Publishing, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Taken from an interview with Roberto Marquez by the author. January 27, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



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Photo: Jaroslaw Studencki

1. *Something cute inside the mask*, 2014  
Mixed media on ceramics  
7.5 x 9.5 inches
2. *Intimidación artificial*, 2014  
Mixed media on ceramics  
7.5 x 9.5 inches
3. *Check this trick out*, 2014  
Mixed media on ceramics  
7.5 x 9.5 inches
4. *Reminder*, 2014  
Mixed media on ceramics  
7.5 x 9.5 inches
5. *When know one is looking, into the woods*, 2013  
Mixed media on ceramics  
7.5 x 9.5 inches

Photos: Jennifer Miller

# Hair of the Dog

by Alison Terndrup

Beth Plakidas rescues the discarded, the broken, and the forgotten. She scours Craigslist, dumpsters, and animal shelters for new acquisitions, combining them in the collages and assemblages that make up her cabinets of curiosities. Her aesthetic is, in a way, biographical, informed by her blue-collar upbringing in Pittsburgh and the DIY communities of the Tampa Bay area.<sup>1</sup> Yet her practice is not rooted in geographic constructs, but in an imagined history that exists only in her shamanistic reading of the objects' indexical marks and semiotic value.<sup>2</sup> In arranging found articles, Plakidas creates compositions that speak to her background in painting while embracing her tendency towards the sculpturally immersive.

Plakidas' *Go Home*, built in collaboration with her partner, Alison Terndrup, is an enterable shanty blanketed with and comprised of collected items. The exterior uncannily recalls a hunting cabin or hermit's lodge in its apparent cycles of neglect, marked by earnest, but amateur repair jobs. Simultaneously relic and reliquary, the structure houses dilapidated stuffed animals, ruined taxidermy, and meticulously collaged cutout images of beloved pets. In this claustrophobic environment, viewers are tempted to decode the overlapping organizational schemes by which seemingly unrelated objects are juxtaposed.<sup>3</sup> This rationalizing exercise forces viewers to confront their own systems of understanding and ordering the world around them. By recognizing the small but significant connections between items, viewers bring themselves into oblique contact with the disparate auras of combined objects.

Plakidas' idiosyncratic mashup of treasured keepsakes and detritus forms a web of interconnected allusions to the psychological experiences of obsession, addiction,

illness, decay, and recovery. This underlying web manifests itself within the very guts of the shanty, as its insulation: dog hair. The use of dog hair—a dirty, abject, disgusting material—reinforces the uneasy feeling that the viewer has just entered into the home, or even the mind, of one unhinged. At the same time, the material is sincere, loved, and honest—harvested from a living being as part of a natural phase of regrowth. *Go Home* leaves us to question our own psychological and emotional relationships with such cycles of decline and recovery—have we entered into this experience as a whole being, or one yearning for our own placement in a madman's collection?

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<sup>1</sup> Beth Plakidas, Interview with Alison Terndrup, January 20, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Plakidas looks to Joseph Beuys' work for methods of divining spiritual and talismanic associations from unconventional materials, in particular, animals or animal products. For more on Beuys' shamanistic character, see Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys*. (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2010), 37; Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol," *Artforum* 18, no. 5 (January 1980): 35 – 43.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Rauschenberg's "Combines" were the initial driving force behind Plakidas' push to augment her painting practice into the sculptural realm. She fell in love with his work while reading about it in Calvin Tomkins, *Off the Wall*, (New York: Picador, 2005).









1. *Boots With Da Fur*, 2014  
Collected Dog Hair  
on Found Boots  
12 x 3 x 12 inches
2. *Pour Some Sugar On  
Me (Detail)*, 2014  
Collected Dog Hair  
and Found Objects  
24 x 36 inches

Images Courtesy of the Artist

Photo: Forrest MacDonald

## Crossing the Edge

by Christopher Patrick Long

Rusted steel bars lean against a wall in Janett Pulido's studio. Large globs of paint mixed with some type of resin are affixed to the top of what was once a fence or gate. It is not quite a painting in the conventional sense, but it is not completely a found object either. The plan for this project shows a painted wall, similar to those political advertisements painted on the sides of public and private buildings throughout Mexico. The political candidates utilize any space for these seemingly random advertisements, using the cover of night or broad daylight to publicize their image in the upcoming election. Its place on private buildings frustrates Pulido, a first generation child of Mexican parents raised in the city of Chicago. "People in Mexico let this happen. It's just something that happens. This shouldn't be something that *just happens*."<sup>1</sup>

This "just happens" mentality is not restricted to painted walls. Rampant misogyny, public investigations of missing persons, corrupt government and police officials, and subjugation to drug cartels is part of the everyday life in a country with an ancient and beautiful culture. Beautiful vistas and colorful celebrations are in constant juxtaposition with, or completely overshadowed by, the consistent issues of daily problems south of the United States. Pulido's work draws the viewer into this collision of cultures and her own "constant state of limbo, of being in two different edges."<sup>2</sup>

This state of limbo is apparent when viewing Pulido's paintings/not-paintings in her series *Fortaleza del Pueblo* (in English, *Fortitude of the People*). Found objects from man-made materials like steel to natural materials such as rocks and charcoal are combined with the artist's manipulations of paint. Mixing paint with combinations of plaster, resin, wire, and other unconventional media, Pulido reconstructs the use of paint towards a sculptural end while maintaining

the overall status of the work as painting. The definitions for all of the individual parts are in a state of constant flux—the inclusion of the artist's statement and textual guides further confuse the state of the work as painting.

Pulido's newer work focuses on the relationship between text and the object displayed. Her recent project, *#YaMeCanse*, which debuted at the University of South Florida's Oliver Gallery focused on the disappearance of a college group in Mexico of September 2014. The subsequent investigation, or lack thereof, by both police and government officials revealed the deep-seated and problematic nature of the "it just happens" mentality that Pulido finds issue with. Each sculptural painting and the accompanying wall label represented an individual student and told the story of the investigation up until the point of the show. In combining both the natural rock and the manipulated paint, Pulido created a memorial object that reflected the natural beauty of both her home country and the people who inhabit it.

These totems represent the new direction of Pulido's artistic focus for her art and seemingly her identity as a Mexican-American artist coming to terms with the problems her family faces on a day-to-day basis. In utilizing both found objects and paint, her sculptural forms bring forth the state of limbo of her own experience inside and outside of the United States. These are paintings that question the concept of painting and highlight the conflict of a dual-identity.

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<sup>1</sup> Janett Pulido, Interview with Christopher Patrick Long, January 22, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> "Artist statement", *Janett Pulido Zizumbo*, accessed January 20, 2015, [www.janettpulido.com/about/](http://www.janettpulido.com/about/).



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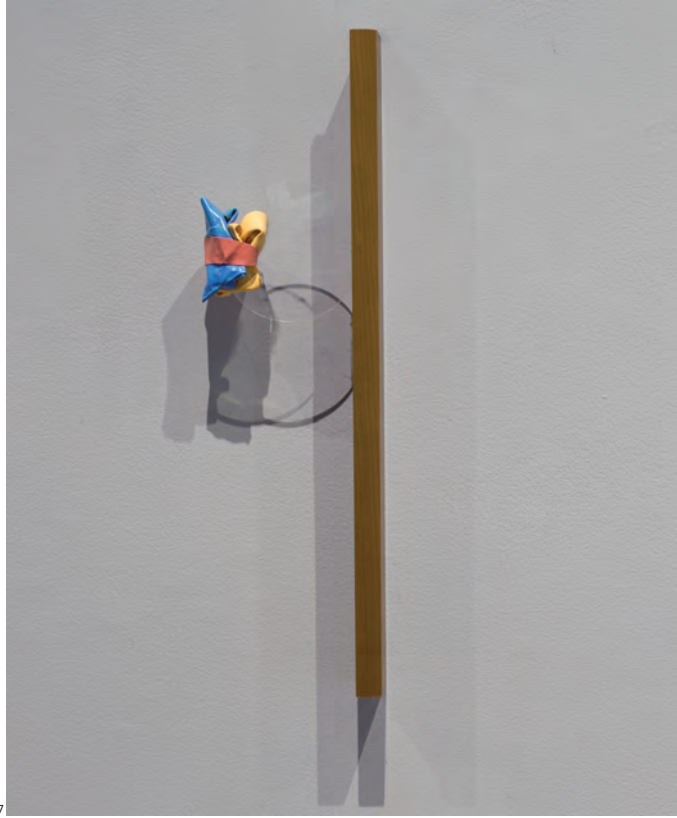
4



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1. *Israel Caballero Sanchez*, 2015  
Acrylic, Stone and Charcoal Powder on Plexi  
3.25 x 5 x 5 inches  
This object was a homage to one of the 43 college students who went missing in Iguala, Guerrero, Mexico.
2. *Abel Garcia Hernandez*, 2015  
Acrylic, Stone and Charcoal Powder on Plexi  
4 x 5 x 5 inches  
This object was a homage to one of the 43 college students who went missing in Iguala, Guerrero, Mexico.
3. *Alexander Mora Venancio*, 2015  
Acrylic, Stone and Charcoal Powder on Plexi  
4.75 x 5 x 5 inches  
This object was a homage to one of the 43 college students who went missing in Iguala, Guerrero, Mexico.
4. *Christian Alfonso Rodriguez*, 2015  
Acrylic, Stone and Charcoal Powder on Plexi  
3 x 5 x 5 inches  
This object was a homage to one of the 43 college students who went missing in Iguala, Guerrero, Mexico.
5. *Julio Cesar Lopez Patolzin*, 2015  
Acrylic, Stone and Charcoal Powder on Plexi  
8.75 x 5 x 5 inches  
This object was a homage to one of the 43 college students who went missing in Iguala, Guerrero, Mexico.
6. *Everardo Rodriguez Bello*, 2015  
Acrylic, Stone and Charcoal Powder on Plexi  
2.50 x 5 x 5 inches  
This object was a homage to one of the 43 college students who went missing in Iguala, Guerrero, Mexico.
7. *Yo No Te Pido La Luna*, 2014  
Acrylic and Plexi on Wood  
13 x 6 x 4 inches
8. *Robado*, 2014  
Acrylic, Styrofoam on Metal,  
72 x 39 x 20 inches
9. *A Todo Dar*, 2014  
Fabric, Wire and Acrylic on Wood  
58 x 36 inches

Photos: Leslie Reed



Photo: Forrest MacDonald

# Residual Side Effects: Reconstructing *Unseen Performances*

by Marlena Antonucci

School bus. Chain link fence. Porta-potty. Telephone pole. Shipping container. Hill. Fire escape. Backhoe. Drain pipe. Park sign.

What connects these seemingly arbitrary objects?

They have all been climbed by artist Curt Steckel.

*Unseen Performances* is Steckel's ongoing project. Beginning as private performances, they are then deconstructed and re-presented in the form of visual information. A photograph of the back end of a yellow school bus is an example of one iteration of the series titled *Performance Location*. The bus is tightly cropped and central to the composition, compressing its form. Decals warning of intermittent stops and actions in case of danger are legibly fixed to rectangular blocks of yellow and black. The image alone is commonplace, an empty, ambiguous space.

The title to this photograph, *Performance Location #4 (Climbing)*, offers a key to decode the temporal and spatial suspension of the unobserved performance. With the narrative removed, the viewer is left questioning how this static moment can capture the energy and action of a live performance. Employing the power of suggestion, the audience is then granted the freedom of creating the action in their own mind, vacillating between the artist's intention and their own reception.

Steckel employs performance to interrogate his own identity. Personal expressions of competition and athleticism are the guiding force. This highly personal catalyst would make the experience meaningless to the viewer; the action is executed for him alone. Experiencing the performance would

be equivalent to viewing Roland Barthes' *Winter Garden Photograph*. Barthes writes, "I cannot reproduce the Winter Garden Photograph. It exists only for me. For you, it would be nothing but an indifferent picture."<sup>1</sup> By removing himself from the performance altogether, Steckel is eliminating any defining parameters. The viewer reconstructs Steckel's act with her or his own cultural tools.

Photography is a trace of something past; in this case, the act of climbing the posterior side of a school bus. The actionless quality of the image offers time for mediation and interpretation. In my mind, I see Steckel oscillating his weight to and fro as he grasps the back door latch, then the brake lights, converting them into hand-holds. I imagine that it is effortless for him to swing his body to the top of the school bus. It is a sensational moment made all the more thrilling when constructing the possible risks from the safe vantage of a gallery. I then compare this imagined performance to my own ability to climb—my clumsy efforts limited by my stunted limbs and even more so from my fear of being caught. The artwork functions between these dualities of past and present, or, as the artist coined, between the "live and the non-live."<sup>2</sup> The work begins as a performance, yet reveals its meaning in a photograph.

Steckel expands the potential of *Unseen Performances* in a series titled *Performance Object*. He employs photography to present an object, such as a tree stump, which is then manipulated. The visual information is augmented by the physical presence of the object that bears the residue of the performance. The material presence intrudes into the viewer's space, increasing awareness of her or his corporeality. Reconstructing the pieces of *Unseen Performances* is a game. The sensory information is compartmentalized, awaiting

a participant to combine the material with his or her own memory, culminating in a subjective understanding. Steckel maintains control by choosing the moment and format in which his unseen performances will be seen and experienced. He creates a working relationship between the performance and the visual information, wherein they enter a discourse. The environment would secede into the background had the performance been experienced in real-time or even photographed during the act. Existing between the live and the non-live, it becomes a stage for the participant to create a simulacrum.

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<sup>1</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: reflections on photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 73.

<sup>2</sup> Curt Steckel, Interview with Marlena Antonucci, January 22, 2015.



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1. *Performance Location #9 (Climbing)*, 2014  
Archival Inkjet Print  
10 x 15 inches
2. *Performance Location #11 (Climbing)*, 2015  
Archival Inkjet Print  
10 x 15 inches
3. *Performance Location #15 (Climbing)*, 2015  
Archival Inkjet Print  
10 x 15 inches
4. *Performance Location #4 (Climbing)*, 2015  
Archival Inkjet Print  
10 x 15 inches

Images Courtesy of the Artist



Photo: Curt Steckel

# Jaroslav Studencki's *Good Samaritans*: Remnants of "Home"

by Tracey Cole

Presented as poetic sequences of intimate moments, Jaroslav Studencki beautifully captures the remnants of life and the rawness and vulnerability of the human experience. Working with a large-format analog camera, Studencki demonstrates that photography goes beyond the production of an exemplary image by slowing down the process in order to focus on the photographic experience and the intimacy it creates with the subject. This return to an antiquated method of capturing images allows Studencki to investigate how photography functions as a meditative medium in an age of instant photographic production. In turn, decelerating the process allows for a silent dialogue to emerge between photographer and subject, as the subjects are consciously aware that they are being looked at and are able to consider how they want to present themselves to a potentially critical lens.<sup>1</sup> However, within his process Studencki is constantly questioning his ideas of identity, the motives behind his selection of subject matter, and his responsibility to the subject; thus enabling a respectful and consensual representation of people within the comforts of their own environments.

Inspired by photographers such as Barbara DeGenevieve and Alec Soth, Studencki similarly disengages with formal portraiture and provides public access to private moments, unseen fragments of life or the disenfranchised.<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, his combination of formal elements and human connection results in ennobling images of the vast demographic of lower and middle class America. Each image is a product of a successful collaboration that is powerfully composed and lit in available light. This lack of manipulation only further enhances the authenticity of each captured moment. The viewer can then experience each striking image as a large print in a gallery setting and in book format. Through these different presentations, it becomes evident that the images are

able to stand alone and communicate their own stories, but Studencki also strives to weave each individual account into a larger interconnected narrative. In this way, he stresses the importance of sequence within his photographic enterprise.

Studencki's current work, *Good Samaritans*, is inspired by his parents' delayed attempt to move away from life in the Midwest in exchange for their newly acquired home in Florida. Studencki works through deconstructing the illusion that happiness and fulfillment stem from material possession, new geographic location, and a reassigning of "home." Moreover, in his work, environment is just as significant and carefully composed as every portrait. Here the environment functions as portrait and has its own story to tell, further enhancing the interconnectivity of his sequence.<sup>3</sup> Within this series Studencki explores the themes of escape, search for happiness, fear of death, comfort, spectacle, and ultimately confronts how we present ourselves to the world. His images prompt an interaction with the viewers who should not only listen to the stories that they are telling, but also engage in a dialogue that inspires self-reflection. More importantly, perhaps this intimate dialogue causes us to ask: "What is the cure to unhappiness in today's society?"

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<sup>1</sup> Artist's statement, from: "Awaiting your Response" portfolio, *Jaroslav Studencki Photography*, accessed January 24, 2015, <http://jaroslavstudencki.com/Awaiting-Your-Response>.

<sup>2</sup> Barbara DeGenevieve (1947-2014), was a Chicago based interdisciplinary artist and passionate teacher, whose work on the subjects of gender, sexuality, censorship, ethics, class, and pornography challenged the heteronormative standards of society. Alec Soth (1969-), based in Minneapolis, is notable for his 'on the road photography'. He uses a large format camera to capture people and landscapes of suburban and rural communities throughout the Midwest and the South.

<sup>3</sup> Jaroslav Studencki, Interview with Tracey Cole, February 13, 2015.



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Photo: Forrest MacDonald

1. *Bride in Winter Haven*, 2014  
Archival Inkjet Print, Variable dimensions
2. *Lady before Work*, 2014  
Archival Inkjet Print, Variable dimensions
3. *Jack*, 2015  
Archival Inkjet Print, Variable dimensions
4. *Untitled*, 2014  
Archival Inkjet Print, Variable dimensions

Images Courtesy of the Artist

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