

CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY AND ITS ISSUES OF MISREPRESENTATION

JONATHAN BALAZS

Sometimes we forget that photography is a craft of representations – recordings confined by the medium of their capture. When a photographer exposes a frame of film, there is a physical, chemical process and information is stored. As humans, we understand chemically based photo processes implicitly because of the tactile nature of the medium and we are able to recognize the potential to affect the procedure. When we decide to digitally manipulate the image (which we inevitably do in this day and age) and convert the analog process into a digital one, we strip away all of the apparently nonessential information.

Photographers have a tendency to focus on a very narrow band of photographic components: form, spatial relationships, light and exposure. The pragmatist might argue that photographers simply concern themselves with a broader picture: what the photograph can or will communicate and perhaps how it communicates. Democratization of digital creation and the ubiquity of digital photography have inadvertently distilled the medium into a superficial mode of expression – one simply concerned with pleasing aesthetics and instant gratification. When photographs are evaluated on these limiting terms, the elegance once associated with the craft is lost. As data-mining culture becomes the de facto system by which we codify our lives, the tangible aspects of our creations are being lost as the craft of photography nervously mingles with electronically based media.

Photography has, over time, retreated from the physical-chemical process it was predicated on and has shifted toward digital modes. The craftsmanship that used to be associated with making the perfect print or selecting an emulsion for a specific application are rapidly disappearing and increasingly being replaced by homogenized technologies. With the introduction of high-quality photo sensors, all photographers working digitally do so within an oligopolic framework where a few companies develop sensors for a wide array of users. Changes in the form and capture are founded on postproduction work-flows as opposed to physically machined components that render images differently (for example, the notion of interchangeable sensors for an array of applications). With every new electronic gizmo or innovation, we run the risk of letting our tools dictate the terms of our expression.

We can hold a piece of film, examine the negative; we can scratch it, tear it, colour it, chew it – if we are so inclined – and thereby physically changing the medium

of capture and storage explicitly. We take pictures, but we ignore the very basic, physicality of the film emulsion, its molecular make-up, how and why it reacts the way it does. We believe that this examination of the medium is useless because it does not physically affect the way we see the final image, even though it defines our very perception of it. If we do not understand the mechanics of our medium(s), then we are sloppy, irresponsible artists.



STEADILY DEPRESSING

JASON KAYE

“Steadily Depressing” is a project that I have been following my entire life. Having had direct access to a full-service car wash since I was young, I have had the unique opportunity to witness the transformation of people who have dedicated their lives to this industry. The employees come from various countries and from most unusual situations. It is hard to conceive of how the car wash industry can include both employees from distraught and destroyed backgrounds, while at the same time employing educated individuals such as doctors, bank managers, engineers and dentists. In addition, the car wash industry also includes those who are illiterate and who suffer from alcohol and drug abuse. The common thread that connects all of the employees, however, is a tragic flaw; nonetheless, they all possess a desire to work hard in an unpleasant atmosphere.

During the winter, the working conditions are harsh and cold while throughout the summer, the conditions are hot and humid. The extremes are unbelievable. However, it is the repetition involved in a conveyor production line that takes the ultimate toll on the human psyche. Employees are forced to repeat the same function over and over again for a ten hour work day; the tasks become mindless. Over a number years, the car wash experience sucks the life out of the individuals. At the end of the day, the scarring effects of this repetitive, mindless activity shows on the faces of the employees. Eventually, they all resemble one another, revealing the scars from a steadily depressing situation.







OPHELIA

RENÉE MUNN

This photograph is a reinterpretation of Shakespeare’s tragic heroine, Ophelia, from the play Hamlet. The image depicts the mental state of Ophelia as she drowns to her death.

Ophelia’s sense of grief is revealed by the collaborative use of mixed media. The torn edges of each print collaged over the actual play imitate her heartache and instability. Camera techniques such as double- and triple-exposures are used to suggest Ophelia’s anguish in her final moments. The visual narrative of Ophelia’s suicide is illustrated by the fragility of the torn collage. Ophelia appears to be fragmented, representing the dramatic transformation of her being from life to death.





UNTITLE

ANDREW MYERS

Visually and conceptually, this project is a mash-up and reflection of ticker-tape parades, those pseudo-indie Bravia commercials, video art in slow motion, movies in which it magically snows in Los Angeles on Christmas day, confetti, and common imagery of the September 11th terrorist attacks. About half of my work takes this confusing and dark course, in which my thought process isn't linear, small bursts of ideas come here and there, and in the end, I find it rather difficult to explain how or why I came to a conclusion so specifically, besides making sure to tell people that "I used film."



UNTITLED

MARK PECKMEZIAN

For the past 4 years, I’ve carried a small point-and-shoot camera with me at all times. I used inexpensive film, bought in bulk, and made a rule of letting myself indulge any and all creative impulses I had, always erring towards shooting rather than not. My conscious motivation for doing all this has generally trended towards the trivial -- to practice, to kill time, to paper-over social awkwardness -- in what amounted to, in the beginning at least, a sort of creative sleepwalk. To date, I have accumulated something in the vicinity of 6,000+ photographs in this mode.

Until a few months ago, I regarded this work -- internally referred to as “the snapshots,” distinct from the more-serious “photographs” that I was also producing -- as something silly and irrelevant. I thought these snapshots amounted to, at best, a photographic sketchbook or play-pen in the service of more serious, worthwhile work, but nothing of any significant merit of its own.

Maybe it was simply the distance provided by time, or the broader patterns and ideas that become apparent with a great enough volume of work, but, I think, the actual-fact significance of these snapshots started to confront my indifferent attitude towards them -- there is more to what I’m doing here than what I will or understand, I realized.

I still don’t understand that significance, but I know it’s there. I know that when I look at these photos I feel weird things, powerfully. I know that, together, these photos paint a very detailed (selectively detailed, granted) picture of my life these past four years, these strange university years. And, critically, I know that other people find resonance in these images, real or imagined.

I don’t know what else this work means -- and I don’t know if I need to know what else it means, if I’d benefit from knowing what it means, or if I even can know what it means. I’m not even sure if I care. This work has taken on a life of its own, of sorts, and I’m content to just follow it.

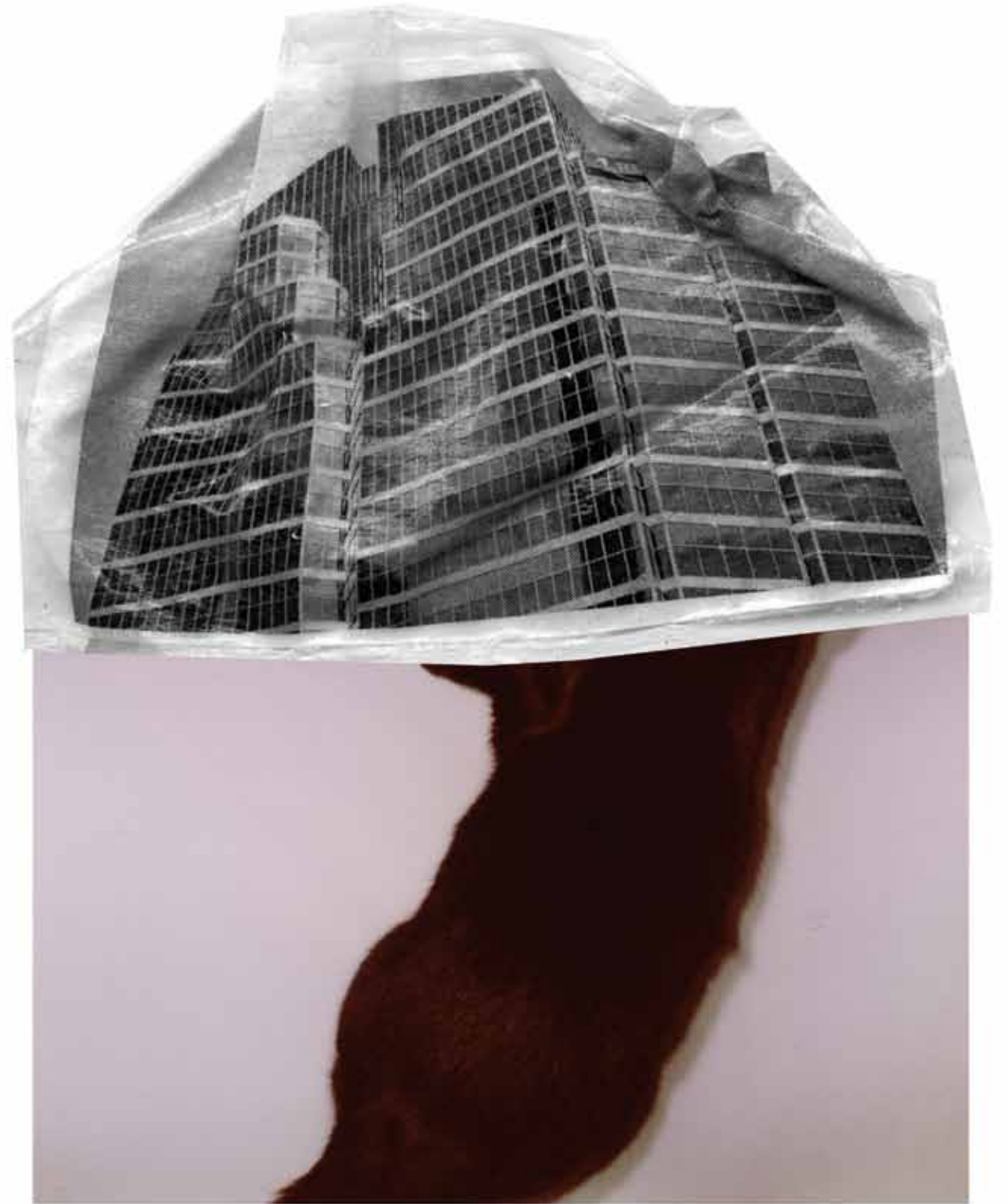




OF SMALL CITIES AND BIG CATS

DEANNA PIZZITELLI

Of Small Cities and Big Cats is a story about a cat. It is not meaningful. It is functional, based first on design and then on the photograph and what that implies. The narrative is not fathomable, nor is it explanatory. A fiction accepts that a cat would grow to such proportions, and fictions are usually reasoned in some way. This is not the case with our character; Fred grows big and small when the timeline requires it. The emphasis is on the aesthetic—the niceties of colour, the forms of the animal. The variety of materials reinstates this— a mixture of acrylic lifts, colour photography, and fibre prints.



The following pages are documents.
They record the great adventure of a cat
named Fred, who escaped from his
Toronto apartment in the month of
September, on a day that was a Tuesday.

Upon his leave, Fred understood that
he was, in fact, quite sizeable,
and not the little cat he thought himself
to be.



After using the city how a shark might



use a seal,



Fred decided that his newfound size was
not preferable.



ATLAS

EUGEN SAKHNENKO

Atlas is a photographic index of interesting people. Presented online in the form of a blog, Atlas is a yearlong project resulting in fifty two portraits of interesting individuals. The project is updated once a week with a new portrait, a description of the subject and their contact information. At its core, Atlas was conceived to function on three levels; conceptual, informative, and experimental.

Conceptually the project is about celebrating individualism, creativity, and the pursuit of passion. The thread that binds the project is the people who are photographed. All of them chose to stray from the beaten path, follow their dreams and live their passions. Atlas holds up these people on a pedestal and points to them as examples of how life should be lived.

From the viewer's perspective, Atlas is an informative resource. Visitors to the website are able to meet and connect with the individuals photographed. Through comments on posts, as well as direct contact information, a discussion can form around and with the subjects. Atlas is also a source of inspiration, through real examples, rather than abstract quotes, viewers will see that anything really is possible if you want it to be.

Atlas is experimental in nature. Most photographic projects are created for the gallery wall or the printed page. I wanted to explore the implications of a project that manifests itself on the internet. Through comments on each image a new level of discussion is possible between the photographer, the subject, and the viewer. A system for nominating subjects to be photographed allows viewers to become active collaborators in the project. Additionally, the slow release of images, due to the weekly update format, creates a habitual relationship with the viewers rather than a one off impression that exists in traditional mediums.

Atlas is an idea and experiment. Its success will ultimately be measured by how the various tools - comments, nominations, and sharing - are picked up by the community that the viewers create. Subscribe to updates, leave opinions in the comments section, and nominate exemplary individuals that you know. You can follow Atlas at: <http://www.atlastheproject.com>



Karin Abromova

- Social Media Strategist, Foodie, Art Lover, World Traveler



Keri “The Canadian Explorer”
- Creator and Webshow Host



Kiana Hayeri
- Photographer



Tosha Dash
- Producer & Vocalist of “Candy Coated Killahz”



Susheela Ramachandran
- Founder of Elephant Tale



Christien Pérez
- Sr. Story Producer at eTalk

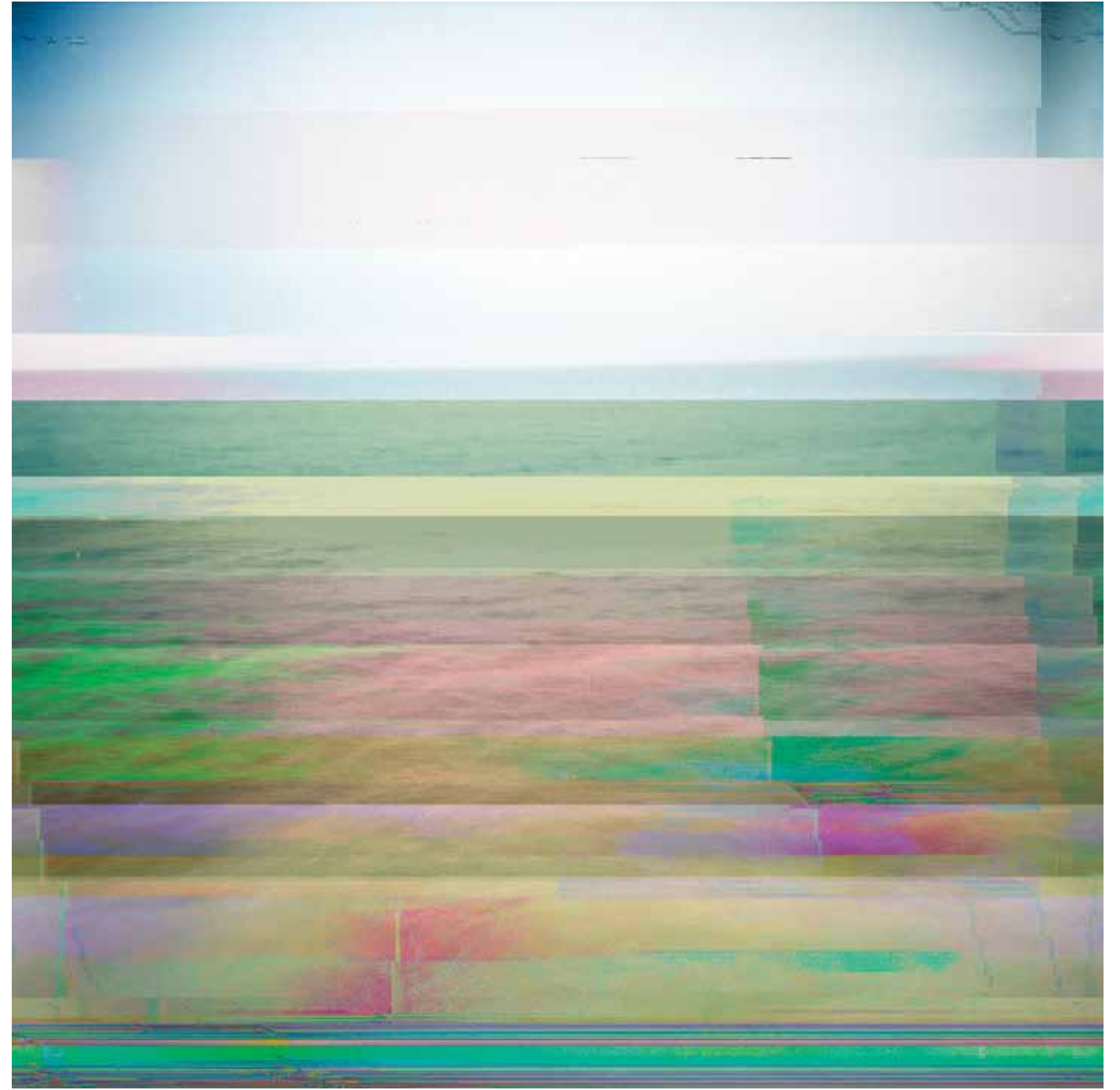
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KYLE TAIT

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ON THE SURFACE...

MICHELLE WILSON

Facial expression is an important signifier of human emotion. When the time is taken to study a subject's face, much can be revealed about how they are feeling.

Expression can become extremely subtle, and meaning can change entirely with a small shift in facial muscle. The eyes and mouth are the most expressive regions of the face. Consider the age-old adage: "the eyes are the window to the soul," which illustrates the complexity of possible facial articulation.

A smile, usually perceived as the outcome of happiness, can have many varied and complex connotations. A smile can be forced. Often smiles are presented as a barrier between the subject and the rest of the world, put forth in order to shift the perception of their feelings; to act as a mask. However, when studied closely and left to extended contemplation, the face can reveal all the intricacies of human emotion.

Asking people "how are you?" has become a casual and polite conversational tool. Nine times out of ten, the response is, "fine." The question was never meant to derive a convoluted, intricate answer; this illustrates that there are many layers of human emotion. This image is about the public self versus the private self, an illustration of the mask we all present to the world.





THE DEATH OF “HAPPILY EVER AFTER”

ALICE ZILBERBERG

When you think of fairy tales, you might think of a beautiful princess with long golden hair, a handsome prince with shining armor, or perhaps a fairy godmother performing miracles. Think again. These sweet, blissful tales known today did not always end with “happily ever after”. Older versions of fairy tales collected by the Brothers Grimm were thematically dark and ugly. They often included harsh punishment of characters, sexual implications and death. These tales were passed down orally for many generations, often altered by their teller. Criticized as unsuitable, they were edited and ‘fixed’ through time, all ugliness and sexual connotation removed, ending, in this century, with Disney. I used image composites to create new versions of Walt Disney’s Cinderella, Snow White, Alice in Wonderland, Sleeping Beauty, Rapunzel and Thumbelina.

The dark aesthetic takes the stories back to their origins, mocking Disney for its unrealistic, happy endings. Contrasting the tale of Alice in Wonderland, my own image presents Alice as a girl with mental illness, a state of mind suggested by her environment. The repetition of certain visual elements enhances the true nature of these stories. For instance, while most female characters are portrayed with golden hair, I portrayed them with dark hair. I chose to narrate the story as well as participate in it, placing myself as the dark haired heroine. She is not saved by a prince, but alone and in despair. Playing the role of the female character, I challenge conventional ideas about how women should act and look.

My inspiration for this series came from female writers of the 17th century. Writing primarily for adults, women used these stories to create alternate realities and an ideal which could only exist in the imagination. Their stories criticized cultural ideas, such as choice of spouse, inheritance rights, and the woman’s right to education. Their tales challenged both literary and social conventions at a time when they lacked political power. These heroines embrace their sexuality, breaking away from the expectations imposed on them.





