

“MP3, II: Curtis Mann, John Opera, and Stacia Yeapnis”

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY AT COLUMBIA COLLEGE CHICAGO

600 South Michigan Avenue

July 17–September 13

Chosen for their innovative handling of photo-based media, Curtis Mann, John Opera, and Stacia Yeapnis—three emerging artists selected for volume 2 of the Midwestern Photographers Publication Project series—are featured in solo shows at the Museum of Contemporary Photography. The “MP3” exhibitions are an extension of the project, which promotes established and emerging artists and aims “to give greater recognition to photographers on the verge of national and international prominence.” Remarkably divergent in their technical and conceptual strategies, the pictures featured here allow the museum to smartly evade the politics of regionalism and career categories that justify and drive these types of award shows while showcasing three germane bodies of work.

John Opera’s images appear brazen on first glance, shifting presumptuously between hard-edge abstraction and romantic representation. Yet his juxtapositions of enraptured pictures of nature with geometric design place the artist securely in step with trends in contemporary photography. Simple symmetrical compositions such as *Purple Diamond*, 2007, face off with *Baraboo*, 2007, a landscape that depicts a small figure amid an imposing slope of craggy rocks. While Opera’s work brings to mind that of Karl Haendel, Garth Weiser, and Anthony Pearson, it remains out of reach of the perceptually curious practices of James Welling and Barbara Kasten, whose decades of abstract and representational pictures avoid analytic language games and aesthetic riddles. Stacia Yeapanis’s embroidered images of television screens with images of Fox Mulder or Tony Soprano also extol the pleasures of paradoxes, but in her works it is the tension between identity construction, media fluency, and the politics of craft that is at play.

The jarring pictures illustrating Curtis Mann’s output are remarkable in their similarity to watercolor painting. Wiping away large areas of information from photographic images gathered from the Internet, Mann distorts our ability to read his work and to understand the images’ original purpose. For example, *Man Pointing (Olive Harvest, Palestine)*, 2007, is a poetically charged piece that evokes not a seasonal routine but an emotionally pitched image of distress. The indeterminate white area that Mann introduces into found photographs offers undetectable threats and existential voids that make them more like watercolors of Samuel Beckett plays than products of photojournalism.

— Michelle Grabner



Curtis Mann, *Abstract #6, soldier (Baghdad)*, 2007, acrylic varnish on chromogenic development print, 18 x 19”.