PRESS COVERAGE

MP3 II: Curtis Mann, John Opera, Stacia Yeapanis
July 17 — September 13, 2009

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Midwest Photographers Project Volume II Now on View at MoCP

Join the three MP3 II artists for a talk about their work on view at the Museum of Contemporary Photography.

For his series Modifications, Curtis Mann collects found photographs depicting conflicts in the Middle East and Northern Africa. He then bleaches and scratches the surface of the images, removing information to create new meanings from his source material. John Opera investigates the uncanny in nature. Moving between representation and geometric abstraction, his works reference historical notions of the sublime and landscape as well as modernist photography. Stacia Yeapanis's interest in modes of entertainment and hobbies has led her to explore the simulated-reality computer game The Sims 2, and the craft of embroidery, as she stitches television screen captures of characters in states of distress.

MP3 II: Curtis Mann, John Opera, and Stacia Yeapanis
Artist's Talk: Thursday, July 23, 5:30 pm

Museum of Contemporary Photography
600 S. Michigan Avenue
"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 justly and drive these types of award shows while showcasing three germane bodies of work.

John Opera’s images appear brazen on first glance, shifting presumpuously 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 Yeapnis’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 Painting (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
The three approaches to photography taken by the three photographers currently on view in the Museum of Contemporary Photography's (MCP) exhibition "MP3II" demonstrate the breadth of current practice, sometimes even spilling over into realms one may not consider wholly photographic. On view is work made in the tradition of American Transcendentalism (John Opera); work that addresses the conflicts in the Middle East (Curtis Mann); work that mines pop culture hits like Dawson's Creek for the stuff of real life (Stacia Yeapanis). The result, MP3II, resembles our daily lives as we navigate our political, spiritual and personal worlds for meaning.

Entering the museum, you will be in the gallery devoted to Curtis Mann's Modifications series, and you will immediately notice that the images have indeed been modified. According to the exhibition notes, Mann gets his images from “online auctions, photo-sharing sites, and estate sales. These are already once or twice removed from their original authorship, form, context... He specifically looks for records of violence in places like Israel/Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq and Kenya.” Mann then manipulates these images slightly with Adobe Photoshop, orders conventional chemical color prints via an online service, uses varnish to preserve specific areas of the print, and bleach to remove other areas. The result is an image with preserved recognizable areas divided by bands of white-hot orange and red. These divisions represent borders, religious sects and violence.

Mann’s pièce de résistance, After the dust when you come over the hill (Beirut), 2009, is a grid of eighty-four images on the wall opposite the entrance, presented to best effect here without frames. Each image is a vignette of possible stories and meanings, but the overall presentation always rush back due to the composition and especially the inclusion of ground running the length of the bottom of the piece (more info on Curtis Mann’s website.) One can pick out a body or a piece of a car contained in this fiery red/orange/white composition. Gradually, it seemed to me as though I was looking at a massive explosion frozen in time. The images are disturbing; they remind us of the violence faced every day in these areas of the world, which many of us only know through the media, if at all.

The work of John Opera is also on the first floor of the museum and takes a more straightforward and realistic approach to photography. Writing last year on Opera's work for ArtSlant, Chicago, Erik Wenzel described it in terms of "mystery and danger." Opera's depiction of nature is "where the wooded areas get thick, where civilization stops and the wild begins." The works included at the MoCP continue to explore this feeling of mystery that Erik described. A smart curatorial decision to forego labelling each work, and instead listing multiple works at the corners of the gallery, cuts down the visual clutter and further increases the aura generated by these pieces all together.

Opera's *Rising Ice Disk* (2005) depicts an almost perfect circle of spinning ice, caught in a frozen crevasse. This attention to natural geometry is echoed in other pieces in the exhibition like Simon starmer's *Ammonite*, 2007, an image of overlapping squares that at once evokes the utility combination of a Josef Albers *Homage to the Square* series and the feeling of entering a cave. Opera's images do not yield their secrets readily and I found them to be the most intriguing in the exhibition.

Stacia Yeapianis. *Spice*. 2007 Courtesy of the artist and MoCP.

Upstairs on the second level of the Museum of Contemporary Photography, the Yeapianis's *Spice*. These works are embedded screen shots from popular, prime-time television shows. Among the ones I could identify were *The Sopranos*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *The X-Files*, * Dawson's Creek* and *Battlestar Galactica*. Yeapianis chooses to depict moments in these shows where the character has an extreme emotional response; the result sometimes highlights the crisis-inducing setting, as James Van Der Beek demonstrates in Yeapianis's *Dawson's Leary* (2005). While that caused me an initial eye-roll, on further thought I found this to be part of the point: something obviously trite can have significance and meaning in no matter what. The hard embroidery of these TV moments speaks to the fanatical love of fans, their desire that these shows never end, that there's nothing to hold on to, premises whether it's the entire series in a boxed set or a personal tribute like Yeapianis creates. In this way, Yeapianis reimagines the Pop Art tradition by showing that these pop cultural moments have specific personal values to the viewers, though we bring these ourselves.

—Ahlanes Richie


Posted by Ahlanes Richie on 8/31

> COMMENTS (0) [add a new comment]
this is a three-step process, by first applying various to the parts of photographs he wishes to retain, then burning out the rest and finally adding a few fine pencil lines. What results are pictures of natural color tones, strangely colored people and other violence — burned-out skies, crumbling buildings, Even the photo paper acquires an effect, smeared to the point of rawness. The effect, when it works, is moving and poetic, as if photos of these places can't escape their combination of beauty and suffering, even when half their vividness is eliminated. When it occasionally doesn't, bad digital paintings result.

Yezanis tackles for news photographers in her ongoing series “Everybody Hurts,” in which popular television dramas provide the source material for meticulously embroidered series of characters like Fox Mulder and Buffy Summers. Captured in dramatic close-ups, these familiar faces resemble sentences, fear and concern. Moreover, the transition from pixel grid to cross-stitch sampler gives movement, down to the stitched-on sayings. From David Fisher, the HBO underwriter: “Why is this happening to me?” from Buffy, the teenage vampire slayer: “They say if you think you’re ready, you’re probably not, but I just don’t know anymore?” The whole provides a kind of home sweet home for today, reimagining a new kind of common ground, as well as the comfort of entertainment, living, even at the level of partial experience.

Various living occurs on another level entirely in the computer game “Spy: Secret 2,” which forms the basis for Yezanis’ multiple project “Spy Life as a Spy.” But while the possibilities for digital life seem to promise an endless array of expression, the extraordinary finds little place in the segment “Life isn’t Him. Life Isn’t This. It’s Living.” Yezanis’ character cleans the toilet, sits on the couch, eats a sandwich, goes on a treadmill and has the occasional breakdown. Also, Yezanis’ life as a Spy proves just as boring and familiar as most. Monumentalizing it as an event more collection than critique, a succumbing to ordinary life as just that, ordinary.

Except it isn’t — or at least it doesn’t. Opera proves as much in his oeuvre of photographs of sweeping bird, a small waterfall, a broken mirror, an expanse of land, a broken tree, and various stumps. More or less unremarkable, some of these organic situations seem to warrant photographic documentation — and yet each of them stands up to, and above.

Some do so through sublime effect: The birds, countless white specks against a black sky, bubble the viewer in their breaking zoom by. A few on the veranda: The metre-long photos — like those of snowly frozen and heavy snow. Others are more: An uncharacteristically semi-sunken young man uses bulldozers, but also gives them a sense of scale. Still others are just plain strange. A golden born from within a stereotypical picturesque waterfall.

Nowhere, however, in nature represented uncloudly or plainly. Through sensitive and imaginative observation, Opera finds the extraordinary in the ordinary — or, rather, he locates the potential for it to emerge through photography. The birds are priced as negative, the snow unpolished, the fire in a true geological phenomenon funnelled by a random Ezekiel moment.

Human perception — active, curious, bodily — is everywhere implicated, and the world is the better for it.

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"MP3 II: Curtis Mann, John Opera, Stacia Yezanis"
When: Through Sept. 13
Price: Free; 312-666-3534 or mcqap.org

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Conscientious
Jörg Colberg’s weblog about fine-art photography (and more)

Review: MP3 Volume II
By Jörg Colberg on April 17, 2009 8:46 AM

Produced in collaboration with Chicago’s Museum of Contemporary Photography comes the second installment of the Midwest Photographers Publication Project (MP3). MP3 Volume II showcases the work of three young photographers. Curtis Mann, John Opera and Stacia Yeapanis. Just like its first version, MP3 Volume II is a set of three separate books in a slipcase, so it seems best to discuss the individual books separately.

Curtis Mann might be the most innovative photographer of his generation, and his book alone makes MP3 Volume II a must-buy. Regular readers of this blog will be familiar with his work from our conversation with him. Curtis modulates photographs by using bleach and other physical means, which results in pretty astonishing, radical and brilliant transformations. With his willingness to push photographic boundaries, I would squarely place his work in the realm of innovators like Thomas Ruff, and seeing his work in print makes it absolutely clear why.

I wonder what we will think of “Second Life” art in twenty years. Of course, the graphics will strike us the same way ‘does today: As somewhat cute, maybe a bit quaint. But what will we think of efforts to use “Second Life” as art? Well… Anyway. Fortunately, Stacia Yeapanis’s book contains more than her “Second Life” work, namely photography (taken from TV) re-created as cross-stitched images. In a sense, this work is almost the exact opposite of Curtis Mann’s: Instead of producing photographic art by means of physical destruction it’s the production of photographic art by means of a literal physical creation from scratch. Truly wonderful.

Lastly, there is John Opera’s work, which combines landscapes with abstractions. For me, in the context of MP3 Volume II, this body of work lies somewhere in between the extremes of Curtis Mann’s art and Stacia Yeapanis’s “Second Life” work: It doesn’t excite me as much, either way. With the two other reference points it is maybe most conventional, and it doesn’t question what photographic images do and what they are in the same way the other two artists’ work does. It’s almost getting a little bit lost.

With its focus on more experimental work, MP3 Volume II is bolder than its first version. This boldness comes at the price of presenting work that will provoke reactions like those seen above. But via its exposure of the inventiveness of three young artists, MP3 Volume II successfully expands the discourse of contemporary photography. Given its price, it’s a total steal, and you really want Curtis Mann’s work in book form, trust me.

PS: As a format, MP3 Volume II will hopefully at some stage find imitators. There is a lot of photography that deserves to be seen in (affordable) book form, especially from younger artists (but also from some older hands), and creating sets of smaller books seems like a perfect way to do it.

Categories: Book Reviews
Tags: Aperture
Unique approaches to contemporary photography: Museum of Contemporary Photography

July 15, 1:44 PM - Jessica Kronika - Chicago Fine Arts Examiner

The current exhibit at the Museum of Contemporary Photography, MP3: Volume 2: Midwest Photographers Publication Project highlights a selection of cutting edge photographers. Whether working with standard photographic techniques and unusual subject matter, reinventing the process through use of chemical and physical editing, or translating photographic captures to the craft of embroidery, these three artists push the limits of the media into new realms. The exhibit is up from July 17th to September 13th, 2009. Museum hours are Monday through Friday 10:00am to 5:00pm. The Museum is located on the first floor of the Alexandroff Campus Building at 600 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL.

The subject matter of Curtis Mann's series Modulations, includes records of violence in currently war torn countries such as Kenya, Iraq, Israel/Palestine, and Lebanon. His resource material comes from photos found. His search includes estate sales, online auctions and photo-sharing websites. With these found photos, and a subtractive process, Mann creates original color prints whose surfaces bear the sense of loss. In Fragment 4, the limbs of a pair of youths lean over rocks, as the selected portion of this resource image lies as a rising wet drip across a plane touched with the white, orange and yellow of chemical and physical process. Mann received his MFA from Columbia College, Chicago, in 2008. He was born in Dayton, Ohio, in 1979. A 2007 Santa Fe Award nominee, Curtis Mann participates in contemporary photographic excellence with this body of work.

For information about the Santa Fe Photography Prize: www.visitcenter.org/programs.cfm

The lyrical and abstract forms John Opera employs in his abstract landscapes include works of ambiguity, such as the work Untitled, 2009 on loan from the collection of Victor Shanchuk, Jr. This work suggests the silhouette of cityscape or ruins, while revealing itself as an ice flow and running water, lit by ambient and flash produced light. Opera received an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2005. He was born in Buffalo, New York, in 1975. Among the photographs featured at Shane Campbell Gallery, Chicago in January and February of 2008, were two of Opera's Black Sun series. Working in digital photography and producing archival pigment prints, such as Black Sun II, 2006, which appears in the current exhibit, Opera pushes the limitations of photography.


Inspired by pop culture and the universal struggle of humanity in the realms of identity and emotion, Stacia Yeapanis starts with photography. Her mixed media process translates television screen captures from popular sitcoms, through her series of embroidered portraits Everybody Hurts. Video, performance and computer simulation are utilized in her My Life as a Sim, a video-computer simulation which explores identity through a triptych screen view. She was born in Newport News, Virginia, in 1977 and earned her MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2006. Examples of Yeapanis work are in the collection of MoCP. Samples of the Everybody Hurts series and Comercial Free: The Museum of TV on DVD are available for members to view on the Rhizome Arthouse online archive.

To view images or register for membership at the Rhizome Arthouse: www.rhizome.org/art/by_artist-list.php

MP3: Volume II, the Midwest Photographers Publication Project Co-published with the Museum of Contemporary Photography, Columbia College Chicago features the work of Curtis Mann, John Opera, and Stacia Yeapanis. Including essays by Rod Slemmons, director, MoCP; Natasha Egan, associate director and curator, MoCP; and Karen Irvine, curator, MoCP the book is available at the following websites.

www.aperture.org/books/books-new/mp3-vol2.html
Art: Photography

**MP3 II: Curtis Mann, John Opera, and Stacia Yeapanis**

**When**
July 17 – Sep 13
Mondays–Wednesdays (10am–5pm)
Thursdays (10am–8pm)
Fridays–Saturdays (10am–5pm)
Sundays (noon–5pm)

**Where**
Museum of Contemporary Photography (600 S Michigan Ave, 312.663.5554)

**Price**
FREE

**Details**
http://www.mocp.org/exhibitions/2009/07/mp3_ii_curtis_m.php

*MP3 II* presents works by three Midwest-based photographers, their divergent approaches united by the transformative nature of their pieces. Curtis Mann bleaches out elements of existing photos, then adds his own drawn forms. His works go beyond mere appropriation to become sweeping recontextualizations, while also playing with the selective nature of viewing itself. Stacia Yeapanis' three-channel video *My Life as a Sim* gathers isolated moments from the universe of her video-game avatar, exploring identity through a lens of meta-mundanity. Her series *Everybody Hurts*, also on view, comprises embroidered reproductions of TV screen grabs, siphoning genuine emotion from prime-time genre fare like *The X-Files* and *Dawson’s Creek.* Finally, John Opera juxtaposes landscape naturalism with recondite abstraction, taking cues from the intellectually vigorous spirituality of American Transcendentalism.

— Stephen Gossett

**Get to know us**
Flavorpill covers cultural events, art, books, music, and world news.

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Among the works of the six emerging photographers here, representing the Museum’s Midwest Photographers Project, Brian Ulrich’s color images of abandoned shopping emporia attract the eye immediately by virtue of the stark impenetrability of their subjects. Casualties of the economic recession, Ulrich’s stores, which were intended by their owners to be friendly and accessible, now appear to be fortresses, wastelands, or—on the inside—inert dioramas. To the defenders of capitalism who are wont to praise its proclivities for “creative destruction,” Ulrich’s exquisitely composed deadpan yet emotionally charged studies respond with a reminder of the system’s excess, waste and spoilage.

Having advanced in this series, “Dark, Stores, Ghost Boxes and Dead Malls,” to a higher level of aesthetic sensitivity, Ulrich unites cultural criticism and redemption of the ruins in “Dixie Square Mall,” where the gutted shopping center at dusk takes on a post-apocalyptic guise. (Michael Weinstein)

Through September 13 at the Museum of Contemporary Photography, 600 S. Michigan Ave.
familiar evidence, grasping what we prefer to see and allowing the unfamiliar and unknown to disappear.

When asked how he would like people to perceive this work, Mann states, "I want them to move through the pieces slowly, maybe on different levels. Minimality from a distance, some odd color on closer inspection, different textures — what’s going on here, painting or photography?" Then they see the more subtle handmade marks, wrinkles, relief of the varnish resist, then details of the original appropriated photograph, then start over with, "What is going on here?" in a larger sense.

Curtis Mann holds an MFA in Photography from Columbus College Chicago and a BS from the University of Dayton. A 2008 solo show of Mann's work was exhibited at Kasenavl Gallery in Anwerp, Belgium, along with exhibitions at the Hyde Art Center, Chicago; the Silverstein Gallery, New York; Lisa Boyle Gallery, Los Angeles; and Jan Bokman Gallery, New York. Also in 2008, his work was exhibited at the New York Photo Festival in an exhibition curated by Lexy Martin of Aperture. Mann is currently represented by Kasenavl Gallery in Anwerp, Belgium.

Stacia Yeapanis uses pop culture as a platform for navigating a world of ubiquitous media. In an effort to destabilize cultural assumptions about using media as a vehicle to find meaning, she makes art that uses a language familiar to a generation capitvated by pop culture and cunningly exposes her own search mechanisms - television and computer games - to create works involving photography, video, performance, computer simulation, and the Internet.

This publication addresses two projects in her large body of work: My Life as a Sin, 2005-2006 and Everybody Hates, 2004-2008. In the first series, Yeapanis explores identity through simulated life in the computer game The Sims 2. Within the game, the artist explores the daily life of her avatar much as she would document her own life with a camera. Using an in-game camera function, she moves throughout the three-dimensional space to take snapshots that emphasize the character's mundane life. The second series of her work presents a collection of embroidered television screen captures of well-known characters in emotionally charged fictional moments. In an effort to relieve this gained moment, Yeapanis digitally superimposes TV characters experiencing sadness, guilt, fear, or instances in which their worldviews are shattered. She then elaborately embroiders a reproduction, freezing the fleeting moment of television anguish. In both Everybody Hates and My Life as a Sin, Yeapanis pushes the boundaries that divide art from craft and public from private.

Stacia Yeapanis was born in Newport News, Virginia. She holds an MFA in studio art from the School of Art Institute of Chicago (2006) and a BA in German from Oberlin College, Ohio (1999). In addition to her solo show Addict at Gallery X, Chicago, Yeapanis' work has also been exhibited in Spinn From the Web, Gallery 2, Chicago; Mox Real Than Real, L.U. Space, Chicago; and the 4th Annual Pingyao International Photo Exhibition, Pingyao, China.

John Opera makes photographs in the spirit of transcendentalism, the idea of emphasizing the importance of the individual soul, and promoting a form of self-knowledge that can be acquired by experiencing divinity directly through nature. His photographic landscapes and abstract abstractions are made to co-exist but also to affect one another in a push and pull of form and content, surface and depth, specificity and abstraction. His landscapes can deliver powerful depictions of nature. Yet for all their picturanque quality, they are not always spectacular. Opera's landscapes are not intended to communicate the grandeur of nature in the tradition of the European Romantic painters. Rather, like the American Transcendentalists, Opera goes to nature for inspiration, exploring the power of the mundane to elicit a feeling of interiority and an awareness of the subjectivity of experience. He then sets up a dialectic between representational and abstract work as a vehicle for expressing these broader concerns, as a way to probe the powerful links between emotion, intellect, and perception. John Opera received an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a BA in Photography from the State University of New York at New Paltz. His work has been shown at Shane Campbell Gallery in Chicago; the Albright-Knox Gallery in Buffalo, New York; and Kavi Gupta Gallery in Chicago. Opera received the Weinstein Fellowship from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2005 and a Special Opportunity Stipend from the New York State Foundation for the Arts.