PRESS COVERAGE

Sarah Pickering: Incident Control
April 9 — June 20, 2010

1. Aperture, Spring 2010
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Sarah Pickering: Incident Control
April 9 – June 20, 2010
Forthcoming book co-published by the MoCP and Aperture

MoCP
Museum of Contemporary Photography
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Sarah Pickering: *Incident Control*
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Geissler/Sann: *the real estate*
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Columbia COLLEGE CHICAGO
Eggleston's America: Dyed, heavenly

By Lauren Viera, Tribune reporter

May 14, 2010

Like rediscovering an old photo album that's been boxed away for decades, browsing William Eggleston's nostalgia-drenched photographs at the Art Institute of Chicago reveals long-forgotten snapshots of backyards and hotel rooms and vacations past, minus that stale-attic smell.

Organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art and Munich's Haus der Kunst, "William Eggleston: Democratic Camera, Photographs and Video" is billed as a retrospective from 1961 to 2008, smartly split here between the Modern Wing's Abbott Galleries and the smaller Buckbaum Gallery across the hall. The most memorable images date from the late '60s and early '70s, the height of the Mississippi-born photographer's obsession with the dye imbibition (or dye transfer) process of photo making.

"I don't think anything has the seductivity of the dyes," Eggleston is quoted here. To understand that seduction is to acknowledge the courtship between the photographer and the process — one that, until Eggleston took a shine to it, was primarily used for print advertising and other lucrative work. It was both expensive and labor-intensive: From a single image, three separate negatives are required (from red, green and blue filters) to make three respective gelatin matrices, capable of absorbing and releasing dyes of those primary colors. Lined up just so onto gelatin-coated paper, the matrices release the dyes yielding a full-color image.

Imagine the possibilities of being able to manipulate those colors as individual layers before putting them to print, as opposed to putting your faith in a single sheet of light-sensitive paper washed in a bath of chemicals.

Eggleston was hooked, and viewers are the beneficiaries. A stationary tricycle waits patiently on a suburban sidewalk, the rust on its handlebars so gritty in color, you can almost feel it against your palms. Single blades of grass glow with late-afternoon sunlight next to a girl sprawled in a faded floral dress, her eyes shutting out the light. A woman with her face made up just so glowers from her perch on a dirty curb, its tire-smudged yellow paint offsetting her cobalt-blue knit dress.
These are the images captured by Eggleston's lens — "democratic," he has suggested, because in looking around for what to shoot, "nothing was more important or less important." A cluster of bowling trophies on a jukebox is treated in the same light as Elvis' piano at Graceland. Despite weighty assignments, including one for Rolling Stone magazine that sent the photographer to Jimmy Carter's hometown on the eve of his election, the resulting images are everyday Americana. The distinction? In the dye.


'the real estate' at Museum of Contemporary Photography

For those of us who hope to capitalize on the local housing market's current doldrums, shopping for a home is both exciting and heartbreaking. From all those foreclosures are reaped a bounty of affordable down payments — and along with it, the bad karma of someone else's shattered Great American Dream.

That tension — between the potential comfort of a new home and the emptiness of a house left abandoned — is the focus of photographers Beate Geissler and Oliver Sann's aptly titled "the real estate" exhibit at the Museum of Contemporary Photography.

Collaborating under the name Geissler & Sann since the mid-1990s, the wife-and-husband team relocated from Germany to Chicago in early 2008 and began their house hunt. As this exhibit's literature tells us, the foreigners found themselves feeling even more displaced in their new city, traipsing through homes hastily left for collectors, unearthing eerie remnants of residences left for dead.

Before long, they turned to their cameras for comfort.

The 60 color photographs selected for the exhibit are plucked from different homes but are arranged in a fashion that tricks the eye into thinking some of those dirty, paint-peeled walls were once shared with one another. While I'm not sure I like the effect, it adds a layer to this collection that might otherwise look too stringent.

The most arresting photos are those of rooms that offer more than a cursory glimpse into the past — representational of a broader theme commonly explored by this pair of artists. One pristine series of images, clearly taken from upper-market homes, are spotless save for footprints worn into dust on the hardwood floors. Another room's wood paneling is pristine save for a single K-Swiss sticker in its center. The oddest, and weirdly saddest: a perfect-pink bedroom vacant save for a tidy, magazine-clipped wall shrine to Paris Hilton.

Geissler & Sann, "the real estate" at Museum of Contemporary Photography, 600 S. Michigan Ave., 312-663-5554; mocp.org. Through May 23.

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ON THE COVER

SARAH PICKERING: INCIDENT CONTROL
April 9 – June 20, 2010
GEISSLER/SANN: THE REAL ESTATE
April 9 – May 23, 2010

The Museum of Contemporary Photography (MCOP) is pleased to present two exhibitions opening in April 2010: Sarah Pickering: Incident Control and Geissler/Sann: The Real Estate.

Incident Control is a monographic exhibition featuring the work of British artist Sarah Pickering. While appearing to exist between reality and fantasy, Pickering's images are actually documents of simulations. The exhibition will present photographs from four recent series of Pickering's work, spanning from 2002 to the present: Explosions, Fire Scene, Incident, and Public Order.

"Sarah Pickering's photographs jar our sense of security and illustrate the ways in which we cope with traumatic events that are beyond our control," says MCOP curator Karen Ishizuka. "Her pictures depict environments and events crafted for the purpose of training policemen, firemen, and soldiers for calamities such as terrorism, civil unrest, and war. By exposing the absurdity and controlled nature of these environments, Pickering's images reveal the predictability and plan for it—and our tendency to process it by turning it into narrative."

The photographic series The Real Estate (2008-2009) by Chicago-based artists Beate Geissler and Oliver Sann, depicts homes in foreclosure, evoking the absence and loss of former homeowners with unembellished portraits of empty living spaces. Oliver Sann and Beate Geissler moved to Chicago from Germany in 2008 just as the economic downturn hit and home foreclosures became widespread across the economic spectrum. Sann and Geissler document homes in Chicago, usually after they have been vacated, in a straightforward manner, capturing both the stark emptiness and the traces of human occupation, from structural architecture to decoding choices.

Support for the exhibition and publication Sarah Pickering: Incident Control is provided by The Lannan Foundation and the British Council. Support for the exhibition Geissler/Sann: The Real Estate is provided by the Consul General of the Federal Republic of Germany, Chicago.

For more information about the exhibitions and events at the MCOP visit mcop.org.
REVIEW

Sarah Pickering/Museum of Contemporary Photography

April 2nd 6pm-10pm
Chicago's Flat Iron Arts Building

NEW CITY Art
Reviews, profiles and news about art in Chicago

RECOMMENDED

British photographer Sarah Pickering has devoted herself to documenting in color and black-and-white the sites where first responders train for disasters and civil disorders in environments constructed for the purpose of simulating the dangers that they might have to confront in the real world. Pickering has a special taste for shooting modest rooms that have been set on fire for her and controlled explosions and gas clouds in the fields, but her premier endeavor is her series on Denton, England, a stage-set microcosm of a mid-size city existing only to be the scene of riot training for SWAT teams. When Pickering is around, Denton is depopulated, but signs remain of what the police are meant to control; a barricade of shopping carts, tires and construction boards blocks off an alley framed by dismally working-class flats that are simply facades. Although she has a socially critical intent, Pickering's images turn out to be politically neutral; those who support the state will be happy that the security forces are sharpening their skills, and opponents of the ruling order will detect the mechanisms of malign power. (Michael Weinstein)

Through May 23 at the Museum of Contemporary Photography, 600 S. Michigan.

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Art review

Sarah Pickering
By Lauren Weinberg


No bedrooms or living rooms were harmed in the making of “Fire Scenes” (2007), but that doesn’t make Sarah Pickering’s photos easier to confront.

The English artist created the series at the British Fire Service College, which constructs detailed domestic interiors in shipping containers, then torches them—rots, toys, overstuffed chairs and all—to teach students how to identify the causes of fires. Pickering captures these fiery tragedies just as the fires catch. While we know real people won’t be hurt because they forgot about a cigarette or tried smothering glue, the sets are so realistic the flames frighten us anyway.

The artist isn’t congratulating us on our empathy, though. Her powerful work forces viewers to consider their delight in disaster porn. The “Explosion” (2004-present) series turns the smoke clouds and sheets of flame generated by napalm and terror NCIs into stunning objects for aesthetic contemplation. Curator Karen Jiroux’s wall text explains that the companies demonstrating the explosives cater to both the film industry and the military, which makes us feel guilty about enjoying the fictional destruction.

Pickering’s simulated settings are as torridly unanny in color. (A black-and-white series, “Incident” from 2009 is the show’s weak link.) “Public Order” (2002-05), which depicts the false certainties where British police officers learn to cope with soccer hooligans (among other threats), introduces a class consciousness that the artist develops in “Fire Scenes,” as she focuses an cramped rooms strewn with discarded beer cans. In one piece what Pickering’s work says about security and preparedness, but it prompts us instead to consider how easily other people’s problems become entertainment.
Center for Book and Paper Arts
FREE Columbia College, 1104 S Wabash Ave, second floor (312) 666-6261, bookarts@cf.columbia.edu. EE 600, Red, Green, Purple (church) to Roosevelt, Bus: 1, 3, 4, 12, 29, 60. Mon–Fri, 10am–6pm.


Gahlberg Gallery/ McAninch Arts Center

Evaston Art Center
FREE 3693 Sheridan Rd, Evanston (847) 475-5300, evanstonartcenter.org. EE Purple to Central, Bus: 201. Mon–Thu 10am–5pm; Fri–Sat 11am–6pm; Sat 1–5pm. $3 suggested donation. * 20th Century and Vicinity Biennial. Andrea Fischer, Scott Fortino, Martina Nedregod and David Roberts are among the 47 exhibiting artists, whom jurors John Himmelfarb (artist) and Museum of Contemporary Art curator Julie Rodrigues Wold selected from a pool of more than 500 applications. Through Jun 27.

Graham Foundation

Hyde Park Art Center

International Museum of Surgical Science

Intuit: The Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art
FREE 756 N Milwaukee Ave (312) 243-9088, intuit.org. Chicago, Bus: 56, 59, 66, Tue, Wed, Fri, Sat 11am–7pm; Sun 11am–7:30pm. $3, kids under 12 free. * The Drawings of Charles Steffen. Forced to leave LTV and an international boycott, Steffen (1928–96) began making art during the 15 years he spent at Elgin State Hospital undergoing treatment for schizophrenia, and continued his practice while living with his family on Chicago’s Northwest Side. Opens Fri 4, 5–7pm. Through Aug 25.

Lincoln Park Conservatory

Loyola University Museum of Art (LUMA)

Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art
FREE Northwestern University, 40 Arts Circle Dr, Evanston (847) 491-4000, blockmuseum.northwestern.edu. EE Purple to Foster, Bus: 201. Tue, Thu 10am–5pm. Wed–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat, Sun 10am–5pm. * The Brilliant Line: Following the Early Modern Engraver, 1480–1680. Edith A. Fischer’s work bore the constraints of engraving, which required its first practitioners to depict biblical scenes, classical in mythy, sexy witches and aristocrats solely through lines and dots. Curated by the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design. This survey of mostly 86 works by Dürer and other early European engravers reveals how their medium allowed for a range of technical means. Wall texts about the "swelling line" and other refinements go into detail only a printmaker might appreciate, but anyone can marvel at the virtuosity of the artists’ imaginative, light, shadow and movement. And, for novice connoisseurs, we mean connoisseurs. Through Jun 29. 1–LW

Museum of Contemporary Art
220 E Chicago Ave (312) 220-2200, mcachicago.org. EE Red to Chicago, Bus: 3, 10, 36, 66, 125, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 150, Wed–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun 10am–5pm. $12 suggested admission, students and seniors 65 free. * USS LX 12:2: Caleb J. Lyons. Lyons’ ‘Real Pirates’ paintings and...
Five things to do today: May 9

DANCE
AROUND TOWN - Celtic Fest Chicago
There are all kinds of events on tap for this weekend celebration of Celtic culture—yes, we’re admitting being sickled for the Min in Kilts contest—but the dance lineup alone is enough to keep you busy. Every 15–30 minutes on the south promenade, Irish, Scottish highland, and a handful of Spanish dance groups will storm a stage dedicated to fancy footwork. Millennium Park Chee Promenade, 55 E Michigan Ave, El PRA, Orange, Green, Brown, Purple (rush hr) to Randolph. Blue to Washington, Red to Lake. Bus 3, 4, 14, 124, 145, 151, 157. noon–9pm. FREE!

ART & DESIGN - "Sarah Polking: Incident Control"
Sarah Polking’s amazing photos of fires and explosions make us consider our delight in disaster porn. Museum of Contemporary Photography, Columbia College 600 S Michigan Ave. Noon–5pm. FREE!

AROUND TOWN - Backward Spelling Bee
Hey, spelling-bee champ, this ain’t the fourth grade. Think you’ll get by spelling vocab culture correctly? Think again. Mosestard and Stuttering Theatre team up to bring you Backward Spelling Bee. Gone up on backward words like locore, tarsus, tomcat, and—yes—tomcat. Mosestard, 1219 W Monroe Ave, 773-784-8900. 7pm. contestants $16, spectators $5. Sign up in advance at Mosestard.com

MUSIC - The Holmes Brothers + Harlan Terson
The Holmes Brothers, among America’s greatest musical treasures, have been bringing gospel–blues to adoring secular crowds for more than two decades. Tonight, the trio is celebrating a characteristically joyous new CD, Feed My Soul. Old Town School of Folk Music, 7pm. $15–22.

THEATER - The Body Snatchers
Jaki Finney’s 1955 SF novel, with its vision of friends and neighbors silently replaced by emotionless replicants, created a modern myth. In his latest new stage version, adaptor-director Paul Edwards wisely preserves the book’s paranoid buzz and plucky momentum, sparringly adding decorative touches of self-aware camp. City Lit Theatre. 3pm. $25.