

## ***Crime Unseen***

Featuring the work of: Richard Barnes, Corinne May Botz, Christopher Dawson, Deborah Luster, Christian Patterson, Taryn Simon, Angela Strassheim, and Krista Wortendyke

**October 28, 2011 - January 15, 2012**



Christian Patterson, *Storm Cellar*, 2008

## **Viewer's Guide**

This guide, which contains a curatorial essay, information on the works on view, and questions for looking and discussion, was created as a viewer supplement to the exhibition *Crime Unseen* and may be downloaded from the museum's website at [mocp.org/education/resources](http://mocp.org/education/resources). Free docent led tours of this exhibition are available. For more information see [mocp.org/education/viewings](http://mocp.org/education/viewings) or contact Allison Grant at [agrant@colum.edu](mailto:agrant@colum.edu). To learn about public programs related to this exhibition see [mocp.org/events](http://mocp.org/events).

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## ***Crime Unseen***

With the invention of the camera, society gained an effective tool for law enforcement—a seemingly infallible way of identifying criminals and garnering evidence. In fighting crime, the notion of truth is imperative, so we put photographs to work as a way of determining the actions and identities of perpetrators, though sometimes such judgments prove to be inaccurate. Furthermore, with its special capacity for implication and dissemination, photography gives us voyeuristic entry to traumatic events, usually *after* they have occurred. This unique access affects dramatically how we record and remember violent and unlawful acts, fueling both our outrage—and our fascination.

All of the artists in *Crime Unseen* grapple with a retelling of disturbing crimes. Using photography as their primary tool, the artists reactivate historical material and open it up to further contemplation. By drawing on techniques of photojournalism, forensic photography, and documentary landscape, the artists actively engage with myth and reality as they question the roles of memory, the media, and evidence in solving and remembering crime. Some of the artists document real places and objects associated with violent murder, exploring the notion of the charged landscape. Others take a less documentary approach, and inject past crime stories with fictional elements in order to probe the role of the imagination in reconstructing crimes.

All of the work in this exhibition has tragedy at its root; every artist deals with materials and stories that stem from extremely serious crimes and real murders of real people. Yet they approach the idea of violent crime obliquely. There are no graphic images of real dead bodies here. The artists did not witness the crimes, and their photographs were all made after the crimes occurred—in most cases, long after. Partly as a rallying cry against forgetting, they confront us with our perverse attraction to horror by skirting it slightly, bringing stories back to life, and demonstrating that the evil side of human nature unsettles our fundamental notions of security, humanity, and control. By transforming history into something new and current, the artists discourage us from being passive and distant, and in so doing perhaps leave room for an implicit, liberating acceptance that human nature is sometimes unpredictable and flawed. As Fyodor Dostoevsky, author of *Crime and Punishment*, reportedly once said, “Nothing is easier than to denounce the evildoer; nothing is more difficult than to understand him.”

Karen Irvine  
Curator

## ***Crime Unseen: Works on View***



CHRISTIAN PATTERSON

(American, b. 1972)

*Telephone*, from the series *Redheaded Peckerwood*, 2010

Christian Patterson's *Redheaded Peckerwood* presents a crime story through a complex mix of photographs, text, and facsimile documents. The project is based on the real-life string of eleven murders committed by teenage lovers, social outcast Charles Starkweather and fourteen-year-old Caril Ann Fugate, in the winter of 1957-58 in Nebraska and Wyoming. This notorious crime spree included the deaths of Fugate's mother, stepfather, and baby sister, and is one of the biggest stories in the history of Nebraska. The murders have taken on a folklore status that has ignited the imaginations of writers, film makers, and musicians over the past fifty years.

Though Patterson includes some appropriated photographs and documents that stem directly from the crimes, he does not identify them. Rather, he borrows certain points of fact and freely mixes them with fictional elements he creates using photography as his primary tool. By mining a historical archive, filling in holes where evidence and mementos cannot be found, and injecting the past with possibility, Patterson suggests that the most important implications of the crime are located not in the social or in the collective, but in the interior responses we have to it—emotionally, intellectually, and in our imaginations.



CORINNE MAY BOTZ  
(American, b. 1977)

*Red Bedroom (doll)*, from the series *The Nutshell Diaries of Unexplained Death*, 2004

Corinne May Botz photographs dollhouse models of crime scenes created by the female criminologist Frances Glessner Lee in the 1940s and 50s. Based on real murder cases, the models were used to train detectives to assess visual evidence. Lee had a complex relationship to the cultural and domestic expectations of women of her time; she practiced the feminine tradition of working in miniatures but enjoyed the atypical status of being the first female police captain appointed in the United States. Botz's photographs depict scenes of psychological drama and physical violence set in domestic spaces that simultaneously recall romantic and dystopian notions of home and family life.



KRISTA WORTENDYKE

(American, b. 1979)

*Killing Season: Chicago, October 28, 2010 – January 15, 2011* (installation at the Violet Hour)

In *Killing Season*, Krista Wortendyke photographs the site of every homicide that occurred in the city of Chicago between October 28, 2010 and January 15, 2011 (the dates of the *Crime Unseen* exhibition, one year ago). The photographs are installed as a chronological graph that mimics a city skyline. When an image is repeated, that indicates that more than one person was killed in that incident. By shooting the crime scene locations as they are today—void of any trace of the violence that occurred there—Wortendyke hints at how quickly the events slip from the headlines and popular consciousness, as she creates a sober record of Chicago's elevated murder rate.

For more information on the deaths represented in these images see <http://killingseasonaddendum.blogspot.com/>



CHRISTOPHER DAWSON

(American, b. 1972)

*Bernard Madoff, New York, New York, 2009* from the series *Coverage*, 2004-present

Christopher Dawson's *Coverage* chronicles the elaborate production required to televise crime stories on 24-hour news channels. His photographs explore the public's obsession with media events such as the recent Casey Anthony murder investigation or Zacarias Moussaoui's 2006 terrorism trial. His images focus on the television trucks, satellite dishes, and crowds that accumulate and create hype around high profile criminal cases. Without including images of the implicated criminals, Dawson reveals the extent to which our perception of these events is controlled by media conglomerates. Dawson uses a 4 x 5 large-format camera to capture the massive infrastructure and chaos that remains mostly concealed when news stories are reported to the general public. His images call attention to the ways certain individuals are thrust into the forefront of the nation's attention through the media, as they reveal our public fascination with illicit notoriety.





ANGELA STRASSHEIM

(American, b. 1969)

*Evidence No. 2*, 2009

Originally trained as a forensic photographer and later receiving an MFA in photography, Angela Strassheim combines both her investigative and fine art backgrounds in her project *Evidence*. Through extensive research, Strassheim finds homes in which violent acts and murders within a family have taken place at some point in the past. She then approaches the people living at the locations and asks for permission to photograph the room in which the violence occurred. She uses a chemical spray called “Blue Star” to render the remnants of blood visible by activating the remaining proteins on surfaces even after they have been thoroughly cleaned and repainted.

Strassheim learned to use Blue Star while working for the Miami Forensic Imaging Bureau. She uses only ambient light to expose her images for as long as ten minutes to one hour, capturing the physical presence of blood as a bright, garish glow. Her long exposures allow the rest of the room to be dimly visible as well, creating an eerie portrayal of a past violent action in a cozy domestic space where the occupants are sometimes unaware of details of the home’s lurid past. After months and years of repeated attempts with 140 homeowners, Strassheim has only been granted permission to photograph in eighteen homes. Her team works to complete the image in about three hours without the family in the room. Most homeowners choose to not view the resulting image when it is finished. Strassheim feels that the stain of the victims struggle for life becomes a memorial to their life and will to live.



TARYN SIMON

(American, b. 1975)

Still from *The Innocents*, 2004

This documentary follows Taryn Simon through the making of her project, *The Innocents*, which portrays men and women who were mistakenly identified by a crime victim or eyewitness, wrongly convicted, and then exonerated through DNA evidence. Photography, often in the form of mug shots, plays a significant role in these convictions. Photographs, composite sketches, and line-ups rely on an eyewitness's memory, which can be swayed by repeated viewings of images, meaning that photography, when used as a tool for identification, has sometimes aided in the prosecution of innocent people. Simon's interest in this subject began in the summer of 2000 on assignment for *The New York Times Magazine*. She photographed people who had been wrongfully convicted and served time on death row, but had been proven innocent through DNA evidence and finally freed. She continued the project by contacting numerous wrongfully convicted men and women through The Innocence Project, a legal advocacy group founded to assist prisoners who could be proven innocent through DNA testing.





RICHARD BARNES  
(American, b. 1953)  
*Unabomber Exhibit A*, 1999

Richard Barnes photographs the cabin once inhabited by The Unabomber, now known to be Ted Kaczynski, who threatened the country from 1978 to 1996 by sending untraceable handmade bombs to various locations across the nation. Born in Chicago in 1942, Kaczynski was a child prodigy who eventually earned a PhD in mathematics. In 1971 he moved to a remote cabin in Montana and lived off the grid, attempting to be self-sufficient. As a form of protest against development that was destroying the wilderness and technologies that he thought eroded human freedom, Kaczynski started his bombing campaign. His bombs killed three people and injured twenty-three. After his capture, Kaczynski's cabin was transported across the country to a storage facility in order to be used as evidence, but was never used in court. In 1998, Richard Barnes photographed the cabin for the *New York Times Magazine* in an empty warehouse reminiscent of a modern art gallery, and combined it with a photograph of the location in which the cabin once stood, its placement now delineated by a chain-link fence. His black-and-white images of the cabin, meanwhile, treat the cabin as evidence. Interested in both the idea of displacement and the ambiguity of representation, Barnes highlights the disconnect between the banal appearance of the cabin and the infamous status it has acquired through circumstance.



DEBORAH LUSTER

(American, b. 1951)

*Tooth for an Eye, Ledger 06-17 Location. 1300 S. Saratoga St. Date(s). July 26, 2008 9:30pm Name(s). Ryan Tate (20) Notes. Multiple gunshot wounds, 2008-2010 from the series Tooth for an Eye, 2008-2010*

In 1988 Deborah Luster's mother was murdered. This event influences her work to this day, with violent crimes, specifically murders, being a reoccurring theme in her photographs. In *Tooth for an Eye*, Luster researches police homicide reports in New Orleans, a city with a homicide rate that is nearly eight times the national average. She photographs locations where murders have taken place—a meat market, an empty lot in the Lower Ninth Ward, the City Park. The images are circular, mimicking the shape of a gunshot hole or the view through a gun sight. The victim's name and age at the time of the murder are part of the title, providing a fragment of information that transforms the photograph into a sort of memorial, or in the artist's own words, "takes a close look at something that no longer exists—an invisible population—in the only way in which one can approach such things, obliquely and through reference."



CHICAGO DAILY NEWS PHOTOGRAPHS  
Chief of Detectives Colonel John J. Garrity and Police  
Captain James Mooney firing handguns  
Chicago, 1920  
Courtesy of the Chicago History Museum

The *Chicago Daily News* was a daily newspaper published in Chicago between 1876 and 1978. These images represent a selection of diverse crime stories that appeared in the newspaper during the first few decades of the 20th Century, such as murders, bootlegging, gambling, and organized crime. One group of images are from the 1904 murder of William Bate, whose body was found in his own automobile; and another set relates to the 1909 trial of Dr. Haldane Cleminson, who first claimed his wife had been murdered by a burglar, and later retracted his story and tried to convince the police that she had committed suicide. Most of the photographs are taken from the heyday of crime in Chicago—the Prohibition era of the 1920s and early '30s, a time in when gangsters controlled much of the city and abused their power through extortion and threats. Mobsters such as Al Capone, Frank Nitti and “Bugs” Malone became famous and helped shape Chicago’s worldwide reputation as a haven for gangsters and organized crime.

## **Crime Unseen: Questions for Looking and Discussion**

As you look at each image and body of work on view consider the following questions.

- Look carefully at the photograph. Describe what you see.
- What can you tell about the choices the photographer made in creating this image? Consider factors such as the design of the photograph, camera angle, scale, setting, lighting, contrast, color and focus and the installation of the work.
- What do you think this picture is about?
- What do you see in the picture that leads you to believe that?
- How does this work make you feel? Why?

### **Other Questions:**

1. Consider the role that evidence plays in the works on view. Compare and contrast the diverse approaches that Angela Strassheim and Christian Patterson take in physically and conceptually utilizing evidence of crime in their work.

2. Detectives often use photography to document evidence at crime scenes. What is the role of photography in criminal investigation? How do the artists in this exhibition use photography in ways similar to or different from photographs of crime scenes that you have seen in the past?

3. Many of the works in this exhibition record a location where a tragic event occurred without actually showing the event or physical evidence of the crime.

- Why do you think these artists made these images?
- Do you think a place can somehow be marked or scarred by a tragic event? If so, how?

4. Deborah Luster made some very specific choices in the way she depicted scenes of violent crimes that happened in New Orleans including creating soft-toned black-and-white prints, using soft focus and blurred motion, and a vignettted frame.

- What do these images look like or remind you of?
- What do they evoke?
- Why do you think she made these choices?
- What if any relevance do you think the fact that Luster's own mother was the victim of murder has to this work?

5. All of the work in this exhibition has tragedy at its roots.

- What ethical issues are present in each body of work in terms of the content represented as well as choices made by the artist?
- Are there any images in this show that make you feel uncomfortable for ethical reasons? Which images? Why?

6. Krista Wortendyke's work is in the form of a site-specific installation, meaning it was created specifically for this exhibition and with the dimensions and layout of the gallery in mind.

- Describe the installation.
- What is it comprised of?
- What does each part add to the whole visually and conceptually?
- What do you think her goals were here?

6. What role does the imagination play in each body of work included in this exhibition? How is imagination engaged here?

- Consider the imagination of the artist, the viewer of these images, and of the general public in terms of our fascination with crime and tragic events.

7. In what ways and for what reasons are and tragic events recorded, remembered, and revisited? Why do you think crime and tragic events are so often a focus of the media, and popular culture?

8. Many of the artists in this exhibition use details from crime scenes to reconstruct a narrative account of criminal activities.

- Looking at the works on display, can you tell from what point of view each event or story is being told? If so how?
- How does the photographer influence your understanding of a crime through point of view?

## ***Crime Unseen Bibliography***

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