

and Andrew Harrison's depictions of New Jersey.

Harrison shows the state reconfigured along the planning systems of famous fictitious lands such as Oz, Eden and Atlantis. Another piece has the New Jersey state map sliced in pieces and recombined according to the principles at work in historical master-plans like Garden City, Brasilia, Radiant City and even Burnham's plan for Chicago. The result is a simple but forceful demonstration of the absurdity of imposing visions of better futures through urban planning that do not take into account the already-existing culture, geography and land use of a place. The only strange decision in this work is to use the map of a rather large territory (the state of New Jersey) as the base for these puzzle-like renderings of urban spaces of much smaller terrain. Why not pick a familiar city to re-work into the image of these fantastical and historical master plans?

Other notable works include Eric Smith's photographs of an abandoned Detroit train station; Christina Seeley's "Lux" portraits of light pollution in several cities; Simon Menner's series on Mumbai, Paris and Chicago, which utilizes contexts where the homeless populations have remade corners of the city for their own use.

"Edge of Intent" runs through July 5 at the Museum of Contemporary Photograph, 600 S. Michigan.

Over at Kasia Kay Art Projects on Fulton Market, a group exhibition entitled "The (Un)Real City" opened on May 15. Stefania Carrozzini curated this exhibit of predominately Italian artists. While half of the work is sloppy in its digitally edited composition, carefully handmade works by several contributors stand out.

Claudio Onorato's paper cut-out "Assassinio di un sindacalista Colombiano a Brooklyn" ("Assassination of a Colombian trade unionist in Brooklyn") addresses the ongoing murder of Colombian SINALTRAINAL (National Union of Food Industry Workers) unionists who work at Coca-Cola bottling plants — content which seems more pointed than the rest of the works, despite its fantastical and somewhat silly placement in a chaotic street scene in Brooklyn.

"City Dream nr1," a tall painting by Qin Fengling, has a three-dimensional quality. Fengling shapes and details straight-from-the-tube multicolor paint blobs into mad city scenes: people get pulled from their cars and buildings fly into the sky as if gravity has given way. People have to cling onto each other and their built environment for dear life, for fear of floating into space.

Pino Chimenti's paintings on wood combine iconic qualities of ancient Egyptian illustrations with the informational graphics associated with textbooks. He shows castles, palaces and churches in mythic environments with faces, fish, birds, clouds, machine cogs and snail tails — some merge into one another to create anthropomorphic or cyborg-type figures. Others float next to one another, some on a flat plane and others clearly with multiple dimensions. The effect is dizzying, the work calls for close examination and attention.

"The (Un)Real City" can be seen at Kasia Kay Art Projects, 1044 W. Fulton Market, through June 12.

At the West Loop's Monique Meloche Gallery, central Illinois-based photographer Joel Ross heads into the country to install curious, humorous signs on the side of the road. Imagine being on the last leg of your road trip, after driving past miles of monotony, and then on the outskirts of the suburbs, with farm fields mostly passing by, you see a colorful sign advertising a "Uni Sex Bordello" with an arrow pointing in the direction of ... nothing.

Ross erects the signs, often without permission, and then photographs them, most often at night. Some of the ads seek to entice drivers into a rural porn or fireworks store on the edge of a state border. Others make use of hand-painted or movable text signs used by churches or small businesses. The signs play on our expectations of advertising along rural highways.

"False Promises" is a 55" x 80" color photograph depicting a gravel side road at sundown with a handmade sign reading "False Promises" over a large arrow pointing one direction on a split direction road. If you went the opposite direction, would you find true promises, or no promises?

Ross's work at Monique Meloche Gallery, 118 N. Peoria, will be up through June 13.

If planting more community gardens will...

remember when we were at the u of i in...

Bonnie's wonderful piece should inspire...

I am dreaming of ... corn fields in...

I would love to tour through this...

The unknown basher needs to improve...

It's a Hot Dog stand, are you kidding...

The orange glow cast over the fictitious city in Aaron Delehanty's new painting/installation "Visible City," at Finestra Art Space, is eerie and dramatic. It is unclear if the sun is setting or rising. The city center is built up while the edges face into farmland and fog. And in the foreground the viewer is confronted by a flock of birds cutting across the large painting from top to bottom and side to side. The messy flock resembles a cross between birds in flight and the mythical dust "monster" from the popular television show "Lost." Delehanty elaborates in a written manifesto for this series about this imaginary city being within our reach. Perhaps this work would move more forcefully in that direction if it was directly engaging an audience. I see murals in his future, and I hope his murals are in our future.

Delehanty's work is shown at Finestra Art Space, in the Fine Arts Building at 410 S. Michigan, Suite 516, through May 30. The human-operated elevator in this building is worth a trip in and of itself.

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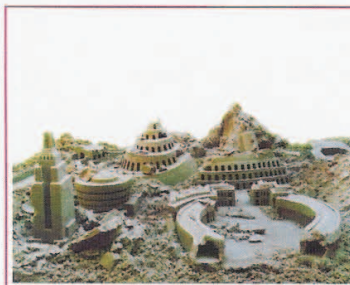


## MoCP reveals urban planning's rough edges, good intentions

As part of the Burnham Plan Centennial Committee's year-long celebrations, the Museum of Contemporary Photography (MoCP) has brought together several artists known for their interest in urban issues in its new exhibit, *The Edge of Intent*.

By [Derrick Teo Wee Ghee](#)  
Published: May 5th, 2009

PRINT EMAIL SHARE



Liset Castillo's "Pain is Universal but so is Hope." So is the sadness of your sand masterpiece's destruction. / Courtesy of Liset Castillo

In this centennial year of Daniel Burnham's sensational plans for the city of Chicago, a walk around the Loop bears witness to his continued presence in our lives. You can see Burnham's legacy as you stroll down the boulevards of North Michigan and Grant Park, or along the North Bank with the two-tiered Wacker Drive in view.

These downtown landmarks are the products of Burnham's vision of a planned city. But of all Chicagoans, perhaps University of Chicago students know best that there's a wide gap between theory and practice. The imposition of a "plan" on a city, an entity that we have come to view as organic, almost never manages to translate all of the planner's ideals into reality.

As part of the Burnham Plan Centennial Committee's year-long celebrations, the Museum of Contemporary Photography (MoCP) has brought together several artists known for their interest in urban issues in its new exhibit, *The Edge of Intent*. Offering an incisive exploration of the gap between urban planning and urban reality, *Intent* is true to MoCP form in its sensitive and critical appraisal of the impact of plans such as Burnham's on cities and their inhabitants. Its nuanced standpoint sets the exhibit apart from the rest of the mostly self-congratulatory Burnham celebrations.

The works in *The Edge of Intent* reveal the fine line urban planners walk between constructive idealism and plain, misguided utopianism. In "(new) jersey," Andrew Harrison rearranges torn-up road maps of his native New Jersey into would-be maps of utopian cities both mythological and theoretical, drawing a provocative parallel between famous city plans, and fairy-tale locales like El Dorado, Eden, and Xanadu. Christina Seely's "Lux" series of long-exposure photographs of twilight in the most intensively lit global cities casts light on artificial luminescence as a useful human invention that nevertheless is inherently artificial, generating an alien, artificial glow that looks more sinister than illuminating.

*The Edge of Intent* also depicts the devastating consequences when urban planning strays to the wrong side of the utopian divide. Liset Castillo's "Pain is Universal but So Is Hope" uses the simple why-didn't-I-think-of-that concept of sandcastles to illustrate the non-viability of cities built primarily on the glory of landmarks. Her sand structures of imaginary super-cities featuring the Taj Mahal, the Empire State Building, and the Coliseum, among others, crumble into ruins. David Maisel's aerial X-rays of Los Angeles highlight the malignant shadows cast by skyscrapers on an otherwise organic landscape. Dionisio González and Tim Long's panoramas register the effects of urban areas on various surrounding regions, charting the continuum from the favelas to the projects in São Paulo, from the Loop to the Mississippi in the Midwest.

Ultimately, *The Edge of Intent* concerns itself with the status of the city citizen in these utopian plans. The exhibit brings home the point that it's not the city-planner but the city-dweller who determines the prospects and outcome of his city. This focus on the citizen is present in Simon Menner's triptych of photographs of the homeless in Paris, Mumbai, and Chicago. In Eric Smith's illuminating rendition of the reclamation of Detroit's Michigan Central Place Station—a contemporary of Chicago's own Grand Central that has been lying in disrepair for over two decades—the resilience of humanity manifests itself in sprawling works of graffiti art festooning the station's walls bathed in Renaissance-esque golden sunshine. With Chicago's growth now poised to cross a watershed one way or another, *The Edge of Intent* provides a conceptually provocative, refined perspective on the possibilities of the city.

[MoCP's website for Edge of Intent](#)

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Eric Smith "Untitled," from the series "Michigan Central Train Station," 2008. Pigment Print, 20 x 30 inches. Courtesy of the Monroe Gallery of Photography, Santa Fe, NM

The Museum of Contemporary Photography is proud to present "The Edge of Intent," an exhibition looking at the utopian aspirations of urban planners, and how their idealistic visions sometimes become static and incapable of adapting to changing environments and systems. The works in this exhibition warn us of the hazards of "thinking big," while urging us to consider the centrality of dynamism in successful urban design.

"The Edge of Intent coincides with the centennial celebration of Daniel Burnham's 1909 plan for the city of Chicago. The exhibition will reflect the centennial celebration's statement of "advancing bold new plans" by encouraging and inspiring viewers to look at the ways urban planning has been instituted in a variety of settings and to learn from the past successes or failures in implementing these plans.

The exhibition will present the work of ten artists whose works offer diverse perspectives on urban planning:

**Liset Castillo's** (Cuban, b. 1974) photographs of sand castles document her construction of a fictitious city, a utopian microcosm where particular aspects of

## SPOTLIGHT

# THE EDGE OF INTENT

Liset Castillo, Dionisio González, Andrew Harrison, Tim Long, David Maisel, Simon Menner, Danielle Roney, Christina Seely, Eric Smith & Joel Sternfeld

On view May 1-July 5, 2009

Opening reception  
May 1, 2009, 5 - 7pm

Curator's Tour and Artist Talk  
Natasha Egan with Christina Seely,  
Tim Long and Andrew Harrison  
May 1, 2009, 5pm @ MoCP

The Museum of Contemporary Photography  
600 South Michigan Avenue Chicago IL 60605  
312-663-5554 fax 312-344-8067  
mocp@colum.edu www.mocp.org  
mon-sat 10-5, thurs 10-8, sun 12-5 (free admission)

different world civilizations converge and fuse in the universal experience of creation and destruction. The resulting images resemble dilapidated cities surrounded by rubble, mountains, and craggy terrain.

**Dionisio González** (Spanish, b. 1965) pieces together images of the "favelas," or shanty towns, of São Paulo, Brazil into long panoramas to which he adds bits and pieces of pristine, contemporary architecture. A reaction against a re-urbanization scheme that has recently been criticized for not living up to its goals, González conceives of his works as proposals for new social centers.

**Andrew Harrison's** (American, b. 1970) work explores the utopian aspects of urban planning by reconstructing the current layout of cities and states into unobtainable and fictional settings through the systematic transformation of idealized forms into maps, models, photographs, and short films.

From a kayak and along the shore, **Tim Long** (American, b. 1951) records the balance between industry and recreation along the Illinois Waterway to the Mississippi River. Initially flowing east



Simon Menner "Chicago Images: Wells and Harrison," 2005, Courtesy of the artist

into Lake Michigan, the Chicago River was reversed in 1900 due to the massive amounts of sewage and pollution that were poured into the river. While the pollution remains a constant, Long's photographs document the awkward proximity of leisure and commerce in this environment.

Seen from the air, **David Maisel's** (American, b. 1961) "The Lake Project" photographs of the Owens Valley in southeastern California appear otherworldly. The history of this region is the stuff of California legend: a story of engineers, politicians, and big land owners working together to divert water to the rapidly growing desert city of Los Angeles, generating a thriving agricultural industry and an environmental disaster in the process.

**Simon Menner's** (German, b. 1978) project "Metacity" records the informal structures of the homeless in the cities of Bombay, Chicago, and Paris while asking whether or not there exists connecting elements to this kind of poverty in different cities around the globe.

**Danielle Roney's** (American, 1968) three-channel video installation "eGoli" imagines a fantastical landscape in a mythical "city of gold" and utilizes imagery from the African

countryside and Johannesburg's environs to craft a hyperreal, digitized cyber-city that evokes the city's struggles and its place in a growing global community.

**Christina Seely's** (American, b. 1976) series "Lux" examines the disconnect between the immense beauty created by man-made light through satellite maps of the world at night and the carbon emissions that are created by the world's wealthiest countries which show up as the brightest areas on the map.

**Eric Smith's** (American, b. 1947) photographs record the Michigan Central Train Station in Detroit, once a vibrant hub of transportation, but now an abandoned, neglected and graffiti-strewn monument to Detroit's past. Built in 1913 in the Beaux Arts Style and closed in 1988, the building's marble walls and Doric columns are solidly intact and the space retains its majestic scale.

Over the past few years, artist **Joel Sternfeld** (American, b. 1944) has documented the degraded landscape of Manhattan's High Line -- the abandoned elevated tracks that run between the West Village and 34th Street originally built in 1934.



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MAY 25

## Review: The Edge of Intent/Museum of Contemporary Photography

Michigan Avenue, Photography

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### RECOMMENDED

In an unsparing onslaught of photographic social criticism, curator Natasha Egan offers us ten artists with messages questioning the depredations of modern civilization whose images never fail to be beautiful. Top honors for deadly wit go to Dionisio Gonzalez, who confects color panoramic images of shots of rude shanties in Sao Paulo, Brazil intermixed with bits of that city's postmodern architecture to create an impossible street in which the wealthy and the wretched come cheek to jowl. On a more metaphysical plane, Liset Castillo takes on the age-old commentary on vanity, constructing sand-castle cities in her backyard, shooting them, destroying them, and then shooting the ruins that she has wrought. On the museum's top floor, Christina Seely reaches the acme of irony by providing us with a world map showing where the mega-carbon footprints are, and then serving up scintillating large-format color photos of the cities that produce climate change taken from afar at night, gleaming with unearthly brilliance. Postmodernists always try to have it both ways. (Michael Weinstein)



*Through July 5 at the Museum of Contemporary Photography, 600 S. Michigan.*

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## Exhibition Review

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# The Edge of Intent

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Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago, May 1–July 5, 2009

Curated by Natasha Egan

Artists: Liset Castillo, Dionisio González, Andrew Harrison, Tim Long, David Maisel, Simon Menner, Danielle Roney, Christina Seely, Eric Smith, Joel Sternfeld

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## Reviewed by Luke Strosnider

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Daniel Burnham, famed architect and urban planner, is remembered for his bold credo: "Make no little plans. They have no magic to stir men's blood." Designer of New York City's Flatiron Building and Washington, DC's Union Station, his "Plan for Chicago" may be his greatest endeavor; Burnham sought to transform the burgeoning Midwest town into a world-class city complete with ornate, European-style rail stations and wide boulevards. His vision of a "Paris on the Prairie" was never fully realized, but key elements were implemented and remain: we owe the open, accessible shore of Lake Michigan to his grand scheme.

Burnham's vision for Chicago turned 100 years old in 2009, and many of the city's cultural institutions took time to reflect on its legacy. Many rightly hailed it as genius, but a nagging question undercut the nostalgic mood: can a plan as swollen as Burnham's ever make good on its utopian promise? Or are such grandiose visions just mirages, perfect but impossible? Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Photography joined the discussion with "The Edge of Intent," an exhibition exploring the impacts—both tangible and perceived—of urban designs around the globe.

In her essay, offered as a takeaway pamphlet and published on the museum's website, MoCP Assistant Director and Curator Natasha Egan set the mood, bluntly: "[This exhibition] considers how, once implemented, these idealistic visions fail to deliver ... ultimately incapable of adapting to changing circumstances." The artists appeared to feel likewise. The photographers of "The Edge of Intent" revealed today's cities as catalysts of social disparity, insatiable resource hogs, and crumbling, erstwhile places, while the show's more conceptual image-artists used digital scissors to rearrange urban landscapes. Far beyond cheery Burnham boosterism, "The Edge of Intent" unflinchingly confronted the gulf between the fever dreams of urban visionaries and their resulting realities.

Cities strive for sustainability, but their voracious consumption—and waste—still awes. Christina Seely's color photographs jab at the comfortable lifestyles of the world's "haves." Her cleverly titled series "Lux" shows the night skies above the United States, Western Europe, and Japan glowing with the hues of a science-fiction atmosphere. In *Metropolis 36°10'N 115° 8'W* (recognizable as Las Vegas), power lines span the day-blue nocturnal sky while the Luxor casino launches a geyser of wasted electricity up and out of the frame. (See Figure 1.)

Simon Menner observes the makeshift shelters of those left out of the comfortable Western lifestyle. His project "Metacity" addresses the homeless communities of Chicago, Paris, and Mumbai. A small tent city lines the Seine, benches and storefront stoops become beds in downtown Chicago and the Indian capital. In choosing these three cities, Menner acknowledges a dispiriting truth of urban planning: despite the majestic designs of Burnham and Haussmann, Chicago and Paris face the same issues of displaced poor as the rapidly swelling, largely unplanned city of Mumbai. Plan or no plan, Menner would have us believe that poverty and struggle remain unavoidable.



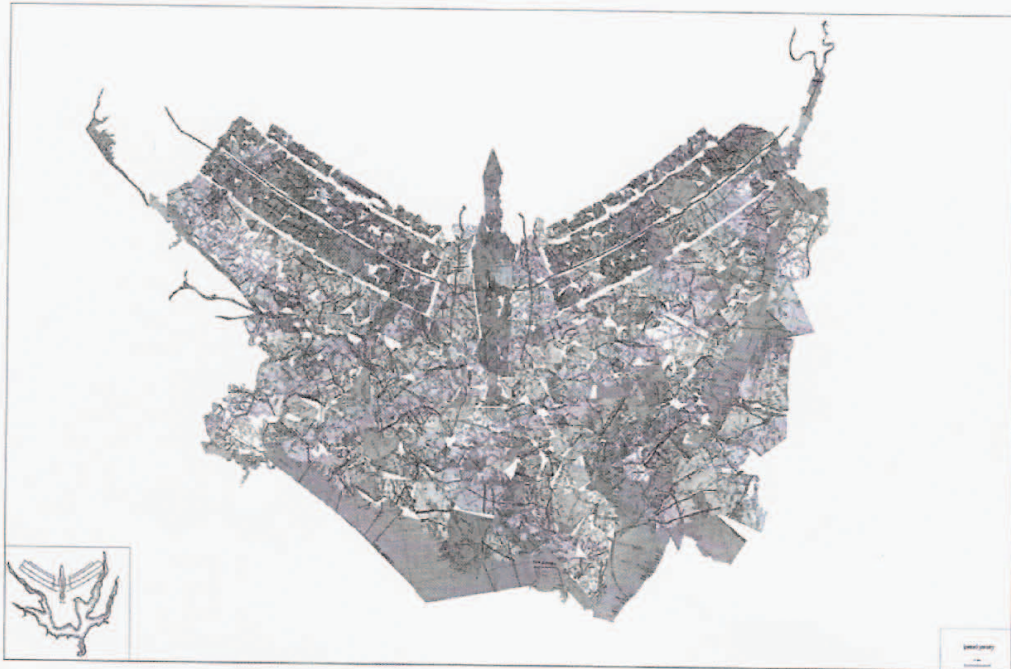
**Fig 1** Christina Seely. *Metropolis 35°00'N 135°45'E*, 2007. Courtesy of the artist.

Selections from David Maisel's "The Lake Project" and his "Oblivion" series reveal the environmental toll of irrigating Los Angeles. Diverting water from Southern California's Owens Valley to the city's aqueduct left a dry, mineral-dense salt flat, the site of persistent, polluted dust clouds. Maisel's aerial views of the forsaken land are carefully framed abstractions of deep crimson, gray, and purple: the colors of bruises and lacerations. "Oblivion" looks down upon portions of L.A.'s snaking highways, angular streets, and remaining natural features. Printed as negatives, Maisel's work makes his opinion clear: Los Angeles may have a ready supply of water, but the cost is the city's soul.

Modern sanitation has improved the waterways around Chicago, but pollution from the city's once-putrid river remains. This doesn't stop leisure-seekers along the Illinois Waterway, as seen in Tim Long's black and white panoramas. Kayaks and pleasure boats replace the barges that once sailed these former corridors of industry. Long's images were the exhibition's least "contemporary" photos, favoring a staid documentary style, but the images subtly pointed to the astonishing transformation of urban areas in the last century. Plans be damned: one era's open sewer may well become the next generation's playground.

Artists have an advantage over urban planners when it comes to city design; the limits of reality need not apply, a fact ably demonstrated by "The Edge of Intent." Andrew Harrison uses no bulldozers, stone, or steel to create urban utopias. Instead, he lays out classic cities (real and imagined) using highway maps of his home state of New Jersey. The resulting digital collages are hysterically clever: look closely and you might find a segment of the Garden State Parkway in the Lost City of Atlantis or a plot of the Pine Barrens replanted in Central Park. (See Figure 2.) Danielle Roney's video "eGoli" digitally reshapes and animates her photographs of Johannesburg into a hallucinogenic vision. Working with animator Jeffery Conefry, Roney's images become an





**Fig 2** Andrew Harrison. *(new) jersey; brasilia*, 2008. Courtesy of the artist.



**Fig 3** Liset Castillo. *Pain is Universal but so is Hope (White)*, 2007. Museum purchase.

anchorless, swirling journey through a Second Life-like landscape, complete with a soundtrack of spaced-out music grown from her own field recordings. Liset Castillo builds cityscapes of sand and photographs them in her studio. Peppered with iconic structures—the Empire State Building, the Vatican—these aren't the fun seaside constructions of young beachgoers. Crumbling and broken, they signal the inevitable mortality of civilization and its architectural triumphs (Figure 3).

Booming or shrinking, urban populations face challenges of infrastructure; one demands rapid growth while the other presides over a slow decay. Working digitally, Dionisio Gonzalez fuses elements of contemporary architecture to the humble structures of the shantytowns of Sao Paulo. The streetscapes become Gehry-esque jumbles of abstract line and expressive color; and the additions are by no means aesthetically out of place atop the helter-skelter of the street-level storefronts.

Architectural masterworks, so often the hallmarks of grand city planning, face peril when those plans cannot be sustained. Using the techno-gimmickry of combining exposures (known as "high-dynamic range" or "HDR" digital photography), Eric Smith explores the dim, cavernous interior of Detroit's abandoned Michigan Central Train Station. HDR is already a tired trick, but it helps Smith cram a wide range of tones into one print, revealing the full gamut of both the sumptuous architecture and the wildly colorful graffiti. The resulting images are as expected: off-putting but fascinating in an "uncanny valley" sort of way.

Not long after seeing "The Edge of Intent," I found myself in New York City during the opening week of the High Line Park. Formerly used for transporting freight, this elevated rail line weaves its way through Manhattan's West Side, from the West Village, through Chelsea, and up to 34<sup>th</sup> Street. When Joel Sternfeld began photographing the High Line in 2000, it had been abandoned for twenty years, and what he found was a forgotten landscape of weeds and wildflowers. "The Edge of Intent" featured four of his High Line photographs, and I thought of them as I ascended the stairs to the new park.

Looking down on the Manhattan bustle, I realized what was missing from "The Edge of Intent." While not altogether dismal, the show's singular focus was the troubling results of wide-ranging urban plans. But the maligning of past mistakes overwhelmed any discussion moving forward. At MoCP, Sternfeld's photographs of the rusting High Line looked like eulogies; standing in the new park, I saw them as a call to adapt. Once considered an obsolete eyesore, the High Line is now an artfully designed promenade, a monument not to grand urban vision but to focused, rational urban revision. Yesterday's colossal plans leave a complicated legacy, but within them reside a bevy of incredible opportunities.

Luke Strosnider is a writer, artist, and educator based in Chicago, Illinois. His coverage of US and international photography exhibitions has appeared frequently in *Afterimage: The Journal of Media Arts and Cultural Criticism*, where he serves as Online Editor.