



POST-PHOTOGRAPHIC FORMS, MUTATIONS AND DIGITAL HYBRIDS

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We are in a particular moment in photography's history where contemporary photography work references a diversity of genres and involves a broad range of image-making processes.

The contemporary photography work is too diverse and complex for any kind of simple generalization. As such, I start by introducing few examples of current trends in photography to convey feel for this diversity and to provide backdrop for discussion on what it means to be "picture making" in digital age – not exhaustive by any stretch of imagination, nor attributing any importance to the order in which it is presented. How we as artist digest and deal with this plethora of changes comes through our artistic practices not merely through what we say we do. A truism, nevertheless, this is a big part of my own experience, and I will use this occasion to relate how I am dealing with them in my artistic practices.



Figure 1. Index. Copyright © Sean Snyder, 2007. Inkjet Print.

An example of artist, who illustrates how far we have come away from traditional picture making, is US artist Sean Snyder. (Fig.1) He downloads amateur snapshots from the Internet, taken by American soldiers stationed in the current conflict in Iraq, and presents them systematically in a grid format. Most of the images depict stereotypical scenes: exotic desert sunsets, smiling children receiving sweets from US troops, and unveiled caches of rebel weapons. Perhaps they encourage comparisons and pose the question, is the photography betraying the ideology of the soldier-photographer who took them? However the image is perceived, Sean's role is collector and archivist whose work isn't so much about the images which after all is not even his own but "about the systems that make, produce, manufacture, circulate and exchange images, allowing them to exist in the world as images of the world, and how history, politics and ideology interact with those systems." (TJ, Demos 2008)



Figure 2. Untitled. Copyright © Elad Lassry, 2009. Inkjet Print.

Another example is Israeli artist, Elad Lassry, who culls generic images from vintage picture magazines and film archives, lifting them out of their original context and mimicking commercial photography yet at same time playing with double exposures, occasional blur or superimposition of multiple negatives. (Fig. 2) As he says, "I'm fascinated by the collapse of histories and the confusion that results when there is something just slightly wrong in a photograph." (Lassry, Elad 2010)

Then there is American artist Amanda Ross Ho who gathers apparently mismatched media, including found objects, photographs, sculptures, and paintings, video clips, into installation. She is "fascinated by large archives and databases because they index the overwhelming accumulation of stuff that makes up our world." For her, "an exhibition is a time and place where objects and images perform together like characters in a drama...where objects are not bounded by their physicality but instead occupy spaces larger than them." (Ross Ho, Amanda 2008)

As the examples show, photography simply as a picture in traditional view in its depiction is insufficient or too limiting in contemporary art world. In fact, both Ross Ho and Lassry claim that there is no longer any such thing as 'photography,' and one cannot extract a simple definition from the medium given the circumstances. "We have shifted to an immaterial time where the photography as a physical object has evaporated" according to Lassry. (Lassry, Elad 2010)

How can we maintain the status quo of photography in a time where its definition is being continuously blurred? But even if we want to, what is that mean and is that even relevant or possible? Considering the last five years of photographic practice alone, reconsideration of the term "picture making" in a digital age does not seem out of question.

But has Photography finally met its end, transforming into so many post-photographic forms and digital hybrids? The answer is no: however photography has to be redefined as it denotes a wide range of imaging practices sharing a common social, cultural, historical and technological tradition dialectically enmeshed with the construction of practical reality and need to respond to massive shifts that are now occurring in image-making cultures. We have exhausted with the rhetoric of the images and the 'politics of representation,' now we need to reconfigure other challenges such as how to unload and engagingly relate photograph's pluralism in a ways that is relevant to



contemporary lives. (Paglen, Trevor 2010) Paradoxically, it is this diffusion of photography medium across a varied mix of conventions, materials and technologies and how it continuously challenges the definition of photography is what's keeping photography alive. As I stated in the beginning, I will discuss how I deal with the current shifts and trends in photography in my own artistic practice.

Reinventing Familiar Photography: Documentary, Performative, Commercial, and Fine Arts

What I have explored is an arena within which photography not only reflects upon the real world and the lived experience within it, but also recognizes the difference between that perceived reality and representation. In my work, *Zummarella*, (Fig. 3) I have incorporated quality of performance art that redefines the relation between reality and representation. It complicates the nature of women's identity by showing the body in a range of roles, pose and gesture to define the mythologies of culture surrounding women. The photographic models appear increasingly sensitive to the process whereby bodies materialize in front of the camera at singular and representative moments that are themselves necessarily incomplete and transitory, which photography not only depicts but creates.



Figure 3. *Zummarella*. Copyright © Min Kim Park, 2011. Inkjet Print.

I am interested in photographic forms that state something like the sense of the medium's ending, a dispersal that is also-strangely, paradoxically-a form of return, to lost or forgotten potential of photography, 'photography's expanded field,' as George Baker terms it. My work expands on the idea that the meaning of an image taken of anything today is so exhausted. What makes a picture? How much of the picture is based on cultural histories? Is it about feminism? And how are one's perception reestablished? I am interested in the collapsing of histories and confusion it creates by combining many different genre of photography and playing with authorship and originality, in the ghosts of history that persist in images long after they have been lifted out of original context.



Figure 4. *Women Photography for Design*. Copyright © Min Kim Park, 2012. Inkjet Print.

This project examines how photography influence and reshape sociocultural phenomena embedded in contemporary women's lives: from fashion/commercial photography and the reality television 'make-over' genre of entertainment to snapshot poses and 'illegible rage.' Photography offers a powerful and nuanced investigation into the experience and expression of women's identities and reveal how the conventions of representation of models are shaped by media culture and idealized taste. (Fig.4)

The models in the photographs presented aesthetic clichés that have become part of everyday design which you would identify in nude photography, fashion/commercial photography and indexical/non-identifiable overflowing images we encounter in daily basis. These photographs make use of the attractiveness of the familiarity of these images. They are then subverted through intense coloration, abstract and chronic staging. By combining commercial and object photography, photography and erotica, studio portraiture and collage, Photoshop and issues of design, appropriation and photojournalism, the photographs have no intended single 'home.' Is it conversations about contemporary media culture, feminist spectatorship, or sheer politics of visual pleasure? (Fig.5)



Figure 5. Women Photography for Family Portrait. Copyright © Min Kim Park, 2012. Inkjet Print.

Another example of my work, *Finding a Pose*, (Fig. 6) is my exploration of issues concerning the circulation, perception and media history of moving image and photography, and problem inherent in its image making process; the problem of their instability, malleability, vulnerability, their limitations, the question of truth, the question of representation, the question of the space in the image, the question of visual pleasure and perception, and what they really teach.



Figure 6. *Finding a Pose*. Copyright © Min Kim Park, 2011. Video Installation

The videos are initiated by many young nubile woman models performing for the camera, who are given no detailed direction except the simple instruction of 'finding a perfect pose which best describes them.' All external cultural baggage has been eliminated including props and clothes. In this project, I manipulate depictions and perceptions of the female body based on my own stereotypes of Western Culture as a way of destabilizing traditional forms of viewing and understanding female nude. There is a duality that fascinates me in this project between the possibility of speaking of the subject, its individuality and authenticity, and the abstraction of models, the figure and formal aspect of models in a video taking over the subjectivity of the models. These videos never answer the issues of the address of it. The videos also strain filmic conventions and act through the heightening of the fields of tension between realism and abstraction, narrative and abstracting visual language, still photography, camera movement, and poses. It does not provide insight into choreography, a stage set or a story but renders tangible process of seeing, that is the complex experience of the seeing subject to the seen subject. In the process, I reconfigure common assumptions such as the commoditization of the body, body as fetish, its relationship to three-dimensional space in gravity and reciprocities between video and photography.

Contemporary artists have used medium of photography in an extremely diverse and provocative way in which invite us to contemplate forms of visual experience beyond the framework of a single truth, beyond the static definition of subjectivity. By doing so, the current directions of photographic practice intersect at a point where they offer an inconclusive new source of freedom, and renewed compassion and tolerance. The photographs become images of destruction and resurrection, loss and potential rebirth simultaneously, and invite ongoing transformation. In such cases, the photographic medium transcends what is beyond itself-including text, design, sculpture, painting and video-which invite experimental ways of perceiving and responding to otherness. Perhaps, what the Brazilian artist, Rivane Neuenschwander said in the 2012 New Museum Triennial regarding the propensity of his generation of artists is also appropriate here for rest of us: "Once we stop moving, we are a simple picture. When we move, we produce constant reflections on many circumstances. We adapt. We interfere. We provoke." (Neuenschwander, Rivane 2012) Because of our interrelation with photography, new models of behavior are created but exist in a realm of hybrid realities. Artists can also take advantage of this method and use the associated concept of truth in photographs to create wholly new realities or propose possible futures.

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