



***Futurity and
Photography***

Futurity and Photography



WESTLAND GALLERY

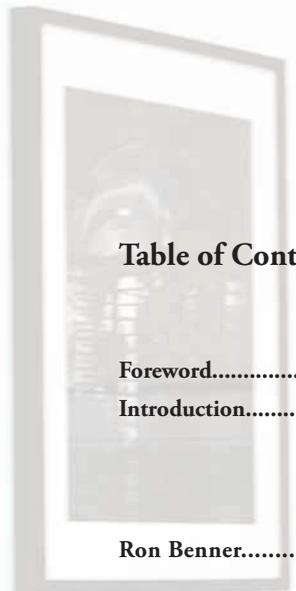


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Futurity and Photography

August 26 - September 13



FOREWORD

As human beings we are naturally dialogic. Our efforts to negotiate the various terrains of daily living are supported by processes of making meaning and making sense. These processes are both inherent and necessary to how we are in relation, where this notion of being in relation is regarded broadly.

A number of scholars (e.g. James, Jung and Bakhtin) have argued that the self exists almost entirely in relation – self in relation to self, self in relation to other, self in relation to environment, self in relation to objects. This philosophical perspective speaks to our natural, nay necessary, inclination towards processes of making meaning and making sense. We function further in this way, according to the various and competing factors of influence that surround us in an almost constant state of convergence that serves to establish the contextual realms we rely upon to enable us to be in the world.

In our unending quest to express ourselves, we experience regular collisions of encounter as our ideals and our values clash repeatedly with the many harsh and traumatic realities that have been spawned by our state of collective turmoil. In *Futurity and Photography*, Troy David Ouellette has curated an exceptional exhibition of works. Together, these series of photographic images create a dialogic exposé that depicts the inarguably fractured nature of our human experience, and our deeply embedded need to capture and chronicle all that cuts away at the very fabric of the understandings that are core to our existence.

Through *Futurity and Photography*, we are invited into the fore of some of our own vulnerabilities. Ouellette encourages us to stand steady and still in these spaces of psychic tension, with the hope that we will be inspired to enter into, and continue these most important dialogues.

Marnie Wedlake, PhD

(previous page) partial installation view, RS Pennee, *Structures of Faith*

FUTURITY & PHOTOGRAPHY

“The illiteracy of the future, someone has said, will be ignorance not of reading or writing, but of photography.”¹ Walter Benjamin, *Little History of Photography*

Benjamin understood the influence that photography would come to have in our visually mediated world, yet his statement begs the question: does photography have the power to change the way we think about politics, economics, social structures and the like? Since the inception of photography, processes were devised to fix an image for future reflection; by extension, futurity is something that continues to plague the medium. As they accompany our time here on earth as material objects and documents, photographic representations become the residual evidence of an event magnified through its reproducibility. Theorist Charlie Gere acknowledged that photographer “William Henry Fox Talbot, working at the same time as Daguerre, produced the solution to the major drawback of the daguerreotype process, that it could only produce one image. Fox Talbot’s calotype, by contrast, allowed numerous positive images to be produced from a single negative, which meant that it, rather than Daguerre’s method, subsequently became the basis of almost all photography, despite the latter’s higher quality.”² Indexical reproducibility gave photography its authority, but, like all forms of art, photography is connected to a lineage. Photographer Allan Sekula has argued that “Photography is haunted by not one, but two ‘chattering ghosts,’ the spectre of bourgeois science and the spectre of bourgeois art.”³ The history of the quasi-scientist and gentleman scholar applying the craft of photography to register images outside the scope of the human senses is well documented. Radiographic and macroscopic photography, and early motion studies, may be seen as early examples of scientific pursuits. As Sekula suggests, the other “spectre” is comprised of the popularity and affordability of a burgeoning middleclass photography that began in the early twentieth century. Once Eastman

Kodak, and later Polaroid Corporation, started to manufacture camera technology for the masses, accessibility produced a multitude of genres and generative capacities. This reproducibility is pervasive today where digital single lens reflex cameras facilitate the production of images that are manipulated, cropped and otherwise skewed by anyone willing to circulate and promote them. Images today are seldom subject to peer review. As digitized entities photographic images may ultimately have many authors who continually update a picture’s status within the sphere of social media, which is not just “social” but political, economic and cultural. Photographic diversity is multiplied exponentially through the vast trade in a digital sea of visual information. As the philosopher Jacques Derrida once remarked “[T]he technical structure of the archiving archive also determines the structure of the archivable content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event.”⁴

As a young student I remember my black and white photography classes where all manner of equipment was put to use to procure a desired image. I quickly understood that to make a thing visible is only a precondition for observation; a multitude of decisions go into the process of giving phenomena form and meaning. Today, the digital and mechanical technology involved in image creation is far more complex as is our reading of photographs and the archive of representations increase. On the technological side, photographic processes involve an historic mix of military technologies, software engineering, and patents that work in tandem to produce the commercial cameras we use on a daily basis. The mechanical and chemical processes that were once understood during the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth century have been usurped by the automatic and instant interpolation of the image through software algorithms. More specifically, in relation to this exhibition, the instant sharing and capturing of the subject in the digital world creates a different

state of being for the producer and consumer of photographic images. Once photography took hold as a means to capture an object, subject or event “objectively,” nations-in-the-making seized the opportunity to use the technology for surveillance.⁵ Satellite imagery is one example in which photography has applications in agriculture, cartography, geology, navigation, forestry, regional planning, meteorology as well as surveillance. The latter has taken over most state applications. As a society claiming to be democratic, we should not neglect the role that the instant capturing of an event plays to counter the panopticism and the abuse of power by governments willing to suppress their populations or exercise their will over other nations. Such images have restorative power by showing the world inadequacies in governance. Where wonder and insight about our universe were once part of the larger equation we are instead focused on the skeptical study of human behaviour within the vast technosphere of information networks and the apparatus of data collection. This shift, from scientific and critical inquiry to the analysis of visual imagery as suspicion, has happened at the juncture where the massive influx of photographic imagery has blurred the distinction between the amateur and the professional. As an indexical technology (where light enters a lens and registers on emulsion or digital image sensor) the camera becomes a tool with the power to document an event and widely distribute it through myriad channels. However, the subject position of the author, and how photographs are situated in a larger body of the artist’s work, continues to differentiate the professional from the amateur, the commercial artist from the professional fine artist, journalist or scientist.

What this exhibition proposes is that subjects of observation, from a political standpoint, form a front to assert the importance of photographic images as markers of struggle. To foreground this, many of the works in this exhibition incorporate aspects of journalistic or documentary photography while others combine mediums that help to give a context to what the viewer sees through text or drawn elements. The images in *Futurity and Photography* help to alleviate some of the ills that global societies now face: suicide, militarism, war, which arise from a failure of sociopolitical will to change the ideologies that seem to be perpetuated. For example in Jamelie Hassan’s work Palestinian children become central tragic figures who must endure seemingly unending conflict. The various venues where Hassan has exhibited this work is a testament to the relevancy of the artist’s subject and is emblematic of renewed calls for solutions to the problems plaguing the Middle Eastern region.

In a statement related to the preparatory drawings she stipulates how, “The images echo the earlier 1989 exhibition of Palestinian children’s art held in London Ontario, which grew out of art therapy to help the children deal with the trauma during the *intifada* against the Israeli occupation in Gaza.” The photographs identify the impact on future generations who are often bystanders caught in the crossfire of oppression. The broad power of the Israeli state, in its definition of militant actions, constructs a situation that effects the lives of innocent Palestinian families embroiled in the hostilities. The written journal entries and small drawings become a way for Hassan to extend the borders of the photographic edge and the limitation of the frame to comment on larger themes that certainly play-out in the complexity of this struggle. In this instance, the artist becomes a cultural intermediary, crossing the categories of ethicist and activist.

Similarly, Palestinian-born Rehab Nazzal’s photographs record the dire circumstances in the occupied West Bank. In her photographs the terrifying aspect of conflict is emphasized by representations of children looking into the space of the viewer, while armed soldiers search and conduct raids and reconnaissance in the background. Nazzal’s use of black and white is emblematic of the binary arguments we see in the media as a “two-state solution,” which lacks the complexity of the various histories, power brokers and individuals involved in any resolution of an agreement. More importantly the images raise ethical questions about the responsibility of military intervention—by extension the photographs become a snapshot of questions regarding state power and occupation at street level. Nazzal’s photographs, presented in this exhibition, are part of a series titled *Downtown the City of Al-Khalil*, 2010. In these images she captures a moment where destinies change, for victims of war and the occupiers, as each act of aggression results in an unseen trauma that extends well beyond the photograph itself. These processes of control and conflict are part of a much larger historical account that we see in the work of Ron Benner who chronicles the movement, and political economy, of native American plant species around the world. Benner elucidates relationships between historical circumstances and geographic readings that begin to untangle a vast web of hegemonic control. The works included in the exhibition are the preliminary studies for his *Transmission: Blé d’Inde* garden in Gatineau, Quebec, where drawing and photography are combined in compelling ways to construct an image of the Taj Mahal. In this particular garden installation Benner cites the vectors that link trade, the

naming of biological organisms, and the cultural practices of gardening and cultivation. According to Benner, maize “...entered India sometime after 1500 AD when the Portuguese merchant mariner Cabral sailed from Belem, Portugal to Cochin, India via Brazil and Africa. For the next 100 years the Portuguese were the vector for the movement of native-American plant species to Africa, Asia and Europe. This movement occurred during the time of the Mughal Empire in India, hence the use of the Taj Mahal silhouette backdrop in the cedar trellis. When Jacques Cartier sailed up the St. Lawrence he believed the area was Asia. The name for maize (an Arawak word) became blé d’Inde.”⁶ Benner’s work follows a trajectory critical of the Western gaze of the “exotic” East, but his critique incorporates the entanglement of power in a constantly shifting dynamic. In a broader sense Benner’s garden installations are international in scope and, I argue, that they are now starting to divide into a much larger discourse of globalized trade and subaltern vectors that no one has been able to properly circumnavigate. Biopiracy and bioprospecting corporatize the necessities of life in neo-imperial forms of control over food cultivation, production and distribution. By all accounts, much more work needs to be done to elucidate the connections these new forms have within a history of food trade and environmental degradation.

Similarly Amy Creighton’s work explores urban growth patterns where human populations invade ecosystems and watersheds in the London area. It becomes clear through the imagery that these processes continue to displace animals, insects and plants. Indeed the externalities (the real costs) on view in Creighton’s photographs seem to be missing from urban planning, and as such mark a particular moment in which our political system fails to address biodiversity. The life-forms represented in Creighton’s *Altered Landscapes* series are left bewildered, lost in unfamiliar territory. Describing the work she remarks, “As current human populations increase, and we cease our symbiosis with the environment, we endanger all of our natural bearings once felt to be secure. The world that I know and experience will be vastly different for my children when they reach my present age.” By strange coincidence her additions to the exhibition resonate with the work by Nazzari and Hassan insofar as we ourselves are occupiers rather than caretakers of the planet’s biodiversity. If we are not nomadic we are colonizers of the land and larger ecosystem—with every conflict the capacity to survive with other sentient creatures is put in jeopardy. The built environment that once stood as a modernist ideal of affordable housing has its darker side in Creighton’s work. Displacing something else at the margins

upsets the presupposition of sustainability. To complicate the reading of the work she incorporates the use of a special lens, giving the photograph a hazy, almost pastoral romantic appearance; however the destructive nature of the subject is not diminished by the aestheticization of the composition. In her other series entitled *Shifting Focus*, there is a two-fold relationship to the act of taking a photograph (having to adjust one’s shutter speed) and the movement of a vehicle speeding along a highway. Again, like the other work, the image seems stylized, not through special filters but by the movement itself as though to reference the same fleeting moment that the impressionist painters were looking at in late nineteenth-century Europe. The difference here is the subject, the act of capturing the image, and the tiny bits of contemporary life that are almost hidden amongst the vegetation. Bits of barbed wire and fences are contrasted with the natural berms and bogs. The things that we build create borders, exclusive rights to property, demarcating how human systems defined claimed landscapes that we pass by with quickening pace. In Creighton’s work the rural quickly becomes the suburban and urban.

After WWII cities expanded to unprecedented levels because of unfettered growth. These inherited auspicious post-war modernist projects and the faith perhaps misplaced in them is graphed in the work of Montreal native RS Pennee, where the structural ambiguity of digitally enhanced photo-based media is foregrounded. In selections from his featured *Structures of Faith* series his photographs represent peril and precariousness. The work exemplifies the fact that we sometimes don’t know how things connect even if the representations are tactile and have restraining or suspension capacities. The tethers are literally up in the air, subject to gravity and material—that is all. How we configure these objects of tackle, pulleys, clips, straps and cables is up to us insofar as we think we have some measure of control. As Pennee remarks, “More than anything else, these images may suggest to some viewers, as they do to their maker, a balancing act performed on the precipice. A precipice that exists above, below, as well as to the sides.” We can surmise that this “balancing act” is performed by all of us, and at all levels of organizational power. That is to say that this uncertainty is made visible in the things that humanity builds to suspend or dangle vicariously against gravity and forces beyond our control and senses. It becomes reminiscent of the question that theorist Elizabeth Grosz once posed: “How is it possible to revel and delight in the indeterminacy of the future without raising the kind of panic and defensive counter reactions that surround the attempts of

the old to contain the new, to predict, anticipate, and incorporate the new within its already existing frameworks?”⁸ The structures and systems that help to influence the trajectories of the future exist in the connections that Pennee has deliberately set outside the frame, forcing us to question the hidden dimensions that stabilize or influence the tensioning of the structures we see in the work. Pennee reminds us of the Russian constructivist photographs of Alexander Rodchenko, Boris Ignatovich, and Georgy Zelma, which incorporated oblique angles, and dramatic vantage points that signaled a changing way of life in a post-revolutionary industrial era. In Pennee’s work, however, there is no certainty that materials are in any way connected to progress. These types of modernist structural devices in the twentieth century imaginary are also evident in the work of Marnie Wedlake. As a specialist in mental health care Dr. Wedlake explores the use of photographic imagery to discuss trauma, mental health, and the history of institutional medicine. The works in this exhibition feature photographic images of *The Luminous Veil*, a suicide prevention barrier that was added to Toronto’s Bloor-Danforth (Prince Edward) Viaduct in 2003. The irony of concealment (the veil) and the revealing through illumination is not lost on Wedlake. In this instance one may surmise that suicide is something hidden from the purview of the public for different reasons, yet because of this there is also a failure to act on the reality that surrounds depression and mental health issues. How can we recognize something that is constantly veiled? Wedlake suggests that, “Mental health care in the Western world is situated firmly within a biomedical paradigm. Disorder is assumed, and symptoms are viewed as dis-abling deviations from normal. A disease-based model of care informs the treatment options that are most available and accessible.” Wedlake argues that it is through dialogic debate that topics can be broached ontologically, emphasizing point-of-view rather than truth. Her doctoral dissertation emphasises this by combining narratives that weave in and out of one another. In her work however, the focus is placed on the open analysis of the photographs rather than seeking consensus as a necessary outcome. The images are seen within a sociocultural order and not set apart from it.

In parallel, Rob Nelson’s work centres around the construction of identity and the costs of living up to an ideal, which often results in melancholy. The construction of identity is always subject to various social and cultural pressures. Nelson’s portraits bear this out as the fatigued figures blend into their black and white surroundings and are accompanied by drawings that are applied to the image

after the fact. Again this points to the ease through which anyone can manipulate images. In this case Nelson is applying the drawn elements with care adding supplementary text to allude to extraneous relations. One might read “...EVERYTHING HAS BEAUTY...” or “...IMAGINATION IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN KNOWLEDGE...” which are inscribed on the surface in black marker. By combining portrait photography with drawing and writing Nelson emphasizes the structure of the image and references the cult of beauty while simultaneously contradicting the truth-value that has become the inherited default for photographic representation. In his work, he encompasses everything from the digital manipulation we see in fashion photography to body augmentation and plastic surgery. This is not only brought about by a symbolic order—that is to say the signs and symbols and behavioural “norms,” which constitute gender construction, but also by the structure of power that suggest roles for life-long fulfillment. Nelson brings to light a conceivable future where the availability to augment or otherwise shape-shift from one outward appearance to the next may well become a reality. It may be the case that in the future we will have a way to genetically augment our bodies, 3D print an identity or perform affordable surgery remotely. Physical changes may be as commonplace as the creation of a virtual avatar or choosing what to cut and what to paste. To some extent we can already do this by 3D printing prostheses to assist those with mobility issues.

Futurity is about duration, continuation, affects and effects. All have consequences that direct and shape what is to come. They are always already relational, potential and probable insofar as they, influence one another. Each of the artists in the exhibition understand that their work speaks to and is preconditioned by a past. Disputed territories, environmental conditions or the history of colonialism, structural engineering, mental health and the fashion industry are all featured here not as necessary future trajectories for ideas, but as dynamic relations that breathe life into the real and imaginary—none of which are mutually exclusive. The philosopher Jacques Derrida once remarked that he was always leery of the term “Necessity.”⁹ When we consider how necessity (as a drive in all of us) presides over the future we exclude the possibility of play, accident, randomness, chaos or new ways of being and acting in the world that may help us navigate the problems that are sure to find us in a finite world. As a species, we seem to want to be beholden to a system, which although directs a social order, can easily trap and consume us at

the same time. These systems, whether economic or legal, for instance, give a kind of carte blanche to proceed with actions that are often quite damaging to other biologically evolved systems or culturally diverse populations. It is important to identify some of the myriad problematic structures to get at the complexity of relationships between subjects, This is precisely what a group exhibition can offer. What all of the works have in common is their ability to make us cognizant of the failings or illusoriness of our political and social institutions. They can prompt a questioning of the unwillingness to see a future after conflict, after environmental degradation, or to see the historical and present complexity that affects and effects every future manifestation of reality—human-sensed or otherwise. These unfolding future anthropocentric iterations are part of dialogic sociocultural inputs, which reoccur not only as memes, but as moments of concern where the inability to act continues to haunt us with the power of photographer Sekula's chattering ghosts.

Troy David Ouellette, PhD

Curator

1. Walter Benjamin, *Little History of Photography, Selected Writings Vol. 2, 1927-1934*, Jennings, Howard, Smith eds., London: Harvard University Press, 1999. p. 527
2. Charlie Gere, *Art, Time and Technology*, New York: Berg, 2006. p. 56
3. Allan Sekula, "The Traffic in Photographs," *Art Journal*, spring 1981, pp. 15–16.
4. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Eric Prenowitz, trans., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996. p. 17
5. During the American Civil War aerial observations, and photography from balloons were used for military purposes for the first time.
6. Ron Benner, project description proposal for installation in Gatineau, Quebec. Unpublished Manuscript. 2007.
7. Elizabeth Grosz, *Becomings, Explorations in Time, Memories and Futures*. London: Cornell University Press, 1999. p. 16
8. Marnie Wedlake, "Releasing the Self from the Diagnostic Straightjacket: Making Meaning & Creating Understanding through Dialogic Autobiography," PhD Dissertation. Graduate Program in Health & Rehabilitation Sciences. London: Western University, 2014. Print. p. ii
9. Jacques Derrida, "'Presence Is Always Divided' - Derrida On Deconstruction." January 1, 2007. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JiIScOonGMQ>. Accessed September 4, 2014.

(following page) partial installation view and audio interview kiosk



...MARRAZZO LE PORE APERTE



...MARRAZZO LE PORE APERTE

...MARRAZZO LE PORE APERTE



RON BENNER

Trans/mission: Blé d'Inde

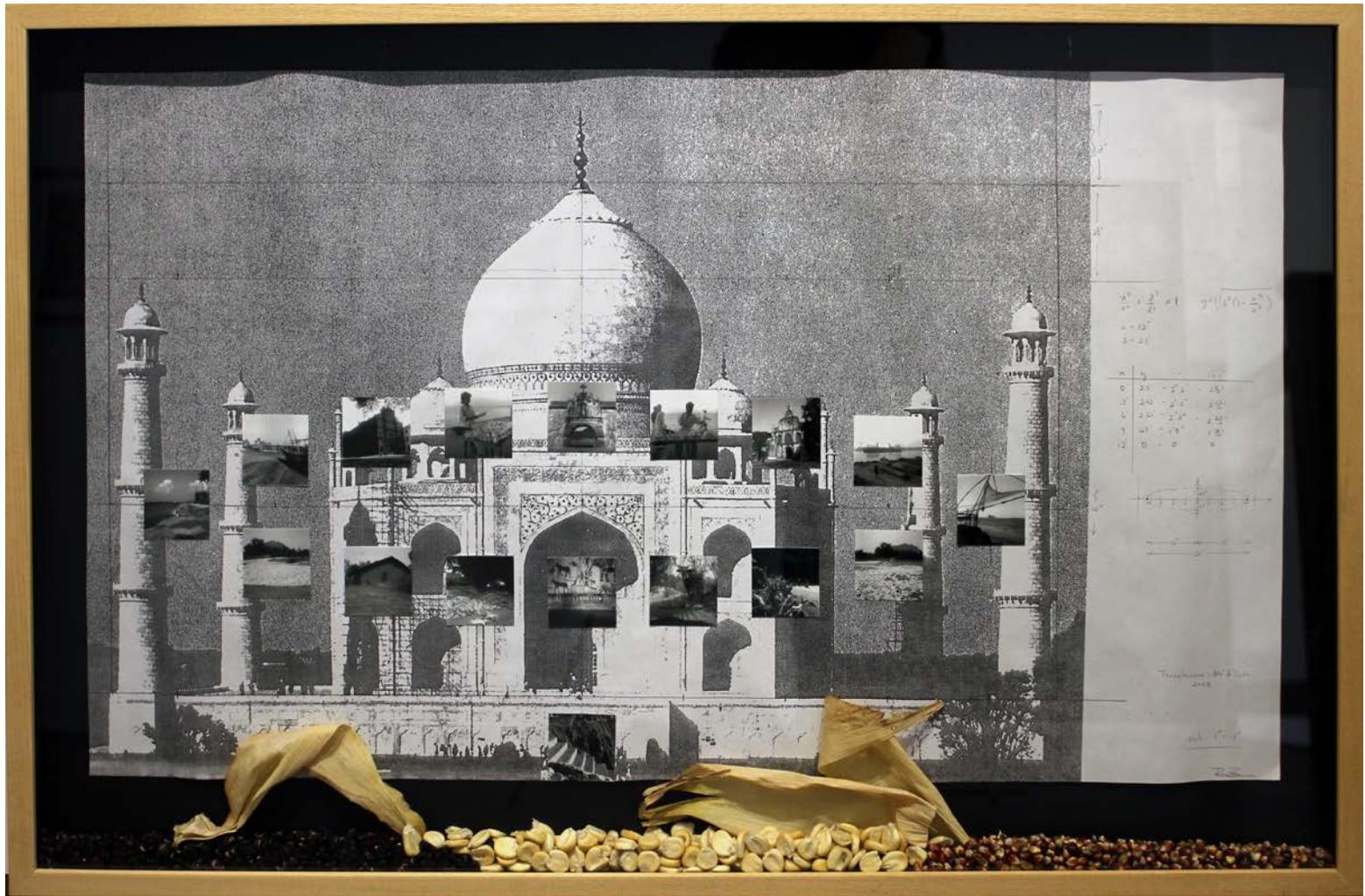
Ron Benner is an artist, gardener and activist from London, Ontario and a survivor of Agricultural Engineering at the University of Guelph 1969-70. He is adjunct professor in the Visual Arts Department at Western University and his mixed media photographic installations are in the collections of the National Gallery of Canada, the Art Gallery of Ontario, Museum London, McIntosh Gallery, Western University and the Casa de Las Americas, Havana Cuba. His photographic garden installations have been installed in locations in Canada, Spain and China.

In response to an invitation by Hannah Claus, Director of Axeneo7 in Gatineau, Quebec, Benner was asked to submit a proposal for a garden installation on a vacant lot adjacent to the building, which houses the artist-run centre. As a heritage building and former factory, the site is located in the historic industrial area of downtown Gatineau. For this location, Benner created *Trans/mission: Blé d'Inde*, which analyzed the Quebecois word for maize, or as it is commonly known in English, 'corn'. The history of maize in the Americas is at least 8000 years old having been grown by First Nation farmers from southern Chile/Argentina to southern Quebec and the Maritimes. The plant, which was adapted by Algonquian-speaking peoples of the region is called Gaspé Flint and has a growing season of three months. Maize entered India sometime after 1500 AD when the Portuguese merchant mariner Pedro Alvares Cabral sailed from Belem, Portugal to Cochin, India via Brazil and Africa. For the next 100 years the Portuguese were the vector for the movement of native-American plant species to Africa, Asia and Europe.

The garden Benner planted was comprised of this type of maize along with other types, such as Purple Peruvian, Iroquoian White and an Open-pollinated Indian Corn, which is multi-coloured. The installation at Westland Gallery contains these species juxtaposed with photographic backdrops of maize being grown, harvested and marketed in India. The images included in the exhibition were a part of the plan for the final installation taken on various trips between 1997 and 2000.



Ron Benner, *Trans/mission: Blé d'Inde*, 2008
photograph, Purple Peruvian, Iroquoian White and Open-pollinated Indian Corn
(installation view)



Ron Benner, *Transmission: Blé d'Inde*, 2008
photograph, Purple Peruvian, Iroquoian White and Open-pollinated Indian Corn
(detail)

AMY CREIGHTON

Shifting Focus and Altered Landscapes

Amy Creighton was born in Tatamagouche, Nova Scotia. She studied at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and completed an MFA in Photographic Studies in 2007 at the University of Westminster in London, England. After this, she completed internships with MoMA in the department of photography and with the CONTACT Toronto Photography Festival. Amy has exhibited in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. While in New York, Creighton took a supplementary job at the Jack Shainman Gallery in Chelsea. It was there that she had the opportunity to meet Robert and Shana Parke-Harrison. They were exhibiting a body of work entitled *Counterpoint*. This project and much of their work was created in “response to the ever-bleakening relationship linking humans, technology, and nature.” It was this experience that provoked Creighton to consider our impact on the environment.



Amy Creighton, *Trees and Field*, from the series *Shifting Focus*, 2014
digital photograph on archival paper



Amy Creighton, *Snowy Trees*, from the series *Shifting Focus*, 2014
digital photograph on archival paper

In her current work, Creighton explores the boundaries and borders of urban growth and land use. Paraphrasing theorist Carol Rose, she suggests that the common mental image of the environment being vast, untamed, and unowned, is a romanticized notion that is now elusive because no part of our planet escapes the reach of human interference and activity anymore. Throughout our day-to-day lives, there has always been a continual backdrop of landscapes and weather, of seasons, of wildlife and flora. However, as populations increase and we cease our symbiosis with the environment, we endanger all natural bearings once felt to be secure. Both of these projects attempt to explore this change. As Creighton explains, “For me, art doesn’t give answers as much as it raises questions and allows viewers to make their own connections and perceptions. The beauty of displaying art is that it gives the viewer the right to daydream and have free association with what is on display. As you view my images, I challenge you to think about your changing environment.” Amy is presently working on a project entitled, *Cancer: Then and Now* as well as co-teaching a series of seminars on Visual Art to Medical Students at Western University in southern Ontario.



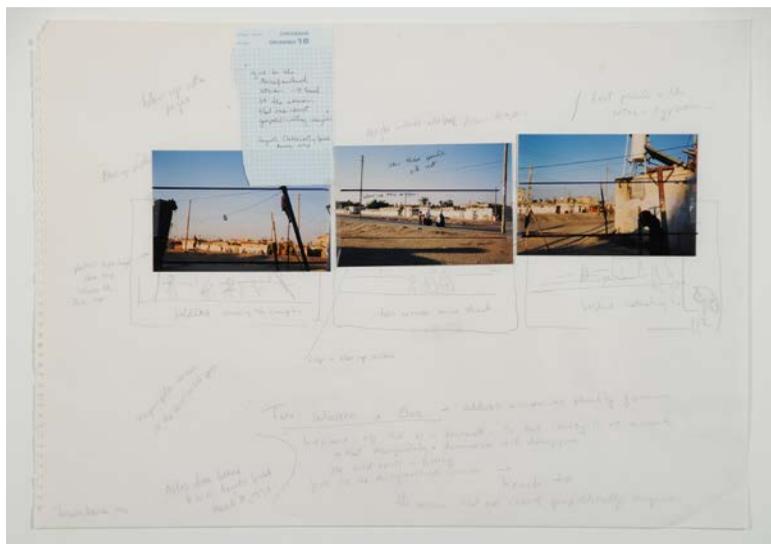
Amy Creighton, *Altered Landscapes*, Photography on Archival Paper, 2014
(installation view)

JAMELIE HASSAN

Jamelie. Jamila Project (Two Woman in One) Palestine's Children

Jamelie Hassan is a London, Ontario-based mixed-media artist and winner of the 2001 Governor General's Award in Media and Visual Arts. She has exhibited widely across Canada and internationally.

In this work Hassan explains, "During my childhood, my father would pile us into his Desoto and take us for Sunday drives on gravel roads to the Oneida settlement outside London, where farmers in this agricultural heartland of southern Ontario offered us baskets of apples and pears. In 1840 the Oneida Nation in New York facing certain annihilation, migrated to other parts of the USA and Canada. They bought land in southern Ontario and became part of the Six Nations. By the twentieth century, the Oneida Nation in New York, which had once held six million acres of land had only 32 acres left. My parents' friendships and solidarity with First



Jamelie Hassan, *jamelie. jamila project (Two Woman in One)* 1991, photograph, graphite on paper and ink on journal paper (working drawing for bookwork, published by Presentation House, Vancouver, B.C. 1992)



Nations communities was reflected in their other political support for anti-racist and anti-colonial causes, including the support of Palestinians after their dispossession of their land in 1948. It is from my parents' example that I trace the origins of their children's social justice activism."

"In 1989, The Embassy Cultural House collaborated with the Near East Cultural and Educational Foundation of Canada to present a powerful exhibition entitled *Faithful Witness: Palestinian Children Recreate their World*. Accompanying the children's drawings were Assia Habash, Director for the Early Childhood Resource Centre in Jerusalem and Jacqueline Sfeir, a psychologist from Bethlehem, who presented a lecture, *Children and State Violence*, at Western University." Both works came out of a trip Hassan made to Gaza in 1990 to meet the children who had created the art from the previous exhibit that toured Canada in 1989). More recently these works toured in an exhibition entitled *A Child's View from Gaza*, in 2012. The quotations used here are from Hassan's statement, which accompanied that exhibition.

(above and following page detail) Jamelie Hassan, working drawing for *Palestine's Children*, photograph, graphite on paper and ink on journal paper, 1991



REHAB NAZZAL

Downtown the City of Al-Khalil

Rehab Nazzal is a Palestinian-born multidisciplinary artist based in Toronto, Ontario and is currently pursuing her PhD at Western University. She holds an MFA from Ryerson University, Toronto; a BFA from the University of Ottawa; and a BA in Economics from Damascus University, Syria. Nazzal's work deals with violations of human rights and violence of war and colonialism. Her work has been shown in Canada and internationally in both group and solo exhibitions and screenings. Nazzal has received awards from: Western University, Ryerson University, and the University of Ottawa.

This series of photographs were taken in 2010 while walking downtown in the city of Al-Khalil in the occupied West Bank. The heart of the city, a home for 170,000 Palestinians, is occupied by 500 Jewish settlers and guarded by hundreds of Israeli soldiers. The main commercial street in the city, Al-Shuhada, is controlled by the Israeli occupation forces, which deny the Palestinians access to their businesses and restrict their movement. Walking downtown the city reveals what the daily life of the Palestinians under these conditions looks like. *Downtown the City of Al-Khalil* captures the segregated system that privileges a group of people, by military force, and denies basic human rights of another group including walking to schools or places of worship.



Rehab Nazzal, *Three Soldiers Making Presence Known*, from the series
Downtown the City of Al-Khalil, 2010, photograph



Some of the photographs include children with toys and soldiers with guns. Children of Al-Khalil are born and grow up amidst manifestations of Israel's military occupation, which include: multiple checkpoints, watchtowers, gates, heavily armed soldiers, and settlers' violence.

Rehab Nazzal, *A Boy with a Toy and A Soldier*, from the series
Downtown the City of Al-Khalil, 2010, photograph (left)

ROB NELSON

Portrait Series

As a second-generation photographer, Nelson entered the darkroom at age eight and has never looked back. His work has appeared in *Saturday Night*, *The Look*, *Elm Street*, *Interview*, and the business magazines for the *National Post* and *The Globe & Mail*. Living wherever the work takes him, Rob has spent time in New York, Montreal, Toronto, and everywhere in between in order to shoot notable faces such as Prince Andrew, Kirsten Dunst, Karen Kain, and Margaret Atwood. Nelson has not only captured memorable names and faces, but he has also helped introduce notable newcomers such as musician Basia Bulat.

In this new series of work Nelson combines portrait photography with drawing to emphasize both the structure of the image and to allude to the cult of beauty. He references everything from the manipulation we see in fashion photography to body art and augmentation through plastic surgery. Here we see connections to Marina Abramović's performance work regarding beauty or the work of Orlan in terms of the reconfiguration of body physiology. Nelson employs the medium most associated with constructing representations that influence identity and body image (photography). He acknowledges the work of Cindy Sherman and Suzy Lake whose work references cinematic themes. The works featured in *Futurity and Photography* also allude to the work of Helmut Newton who used sexually charged images created through bold lighting, controversial scenarios and striking compositions.



Rob Nelson, *Davita*, from the *Portrait Series*, 2010, marker on photograph



Rob Nelson, *Imagination is More Important than Knowledge*, from the *Portrait Series*, 2010, marker on photograph



Rob Nelson *Everything has Beauty*, from the portrait series, 2010, marker on photograph

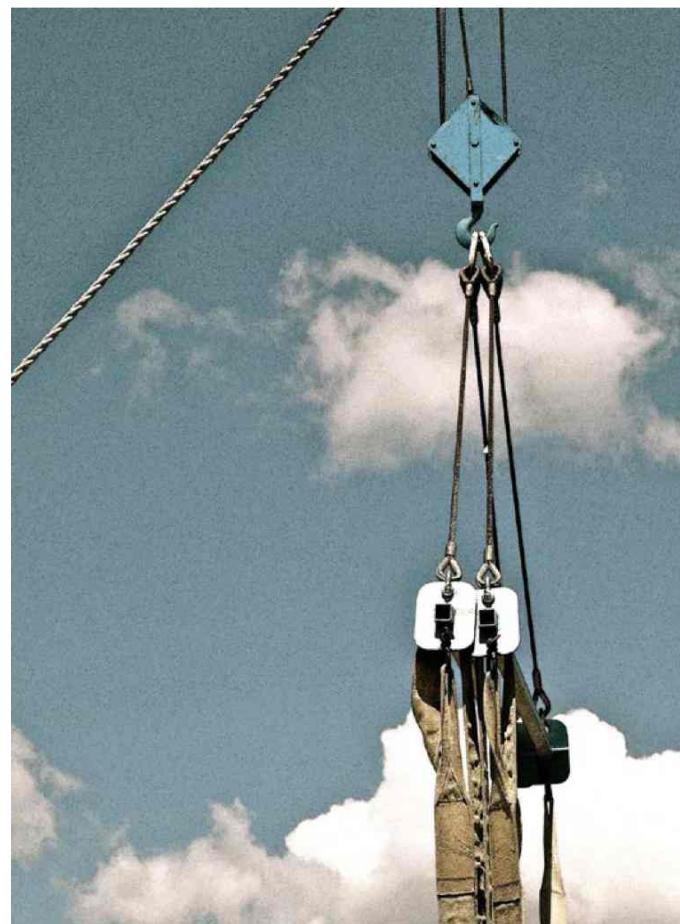
RS PENNEE

Structures of Faith

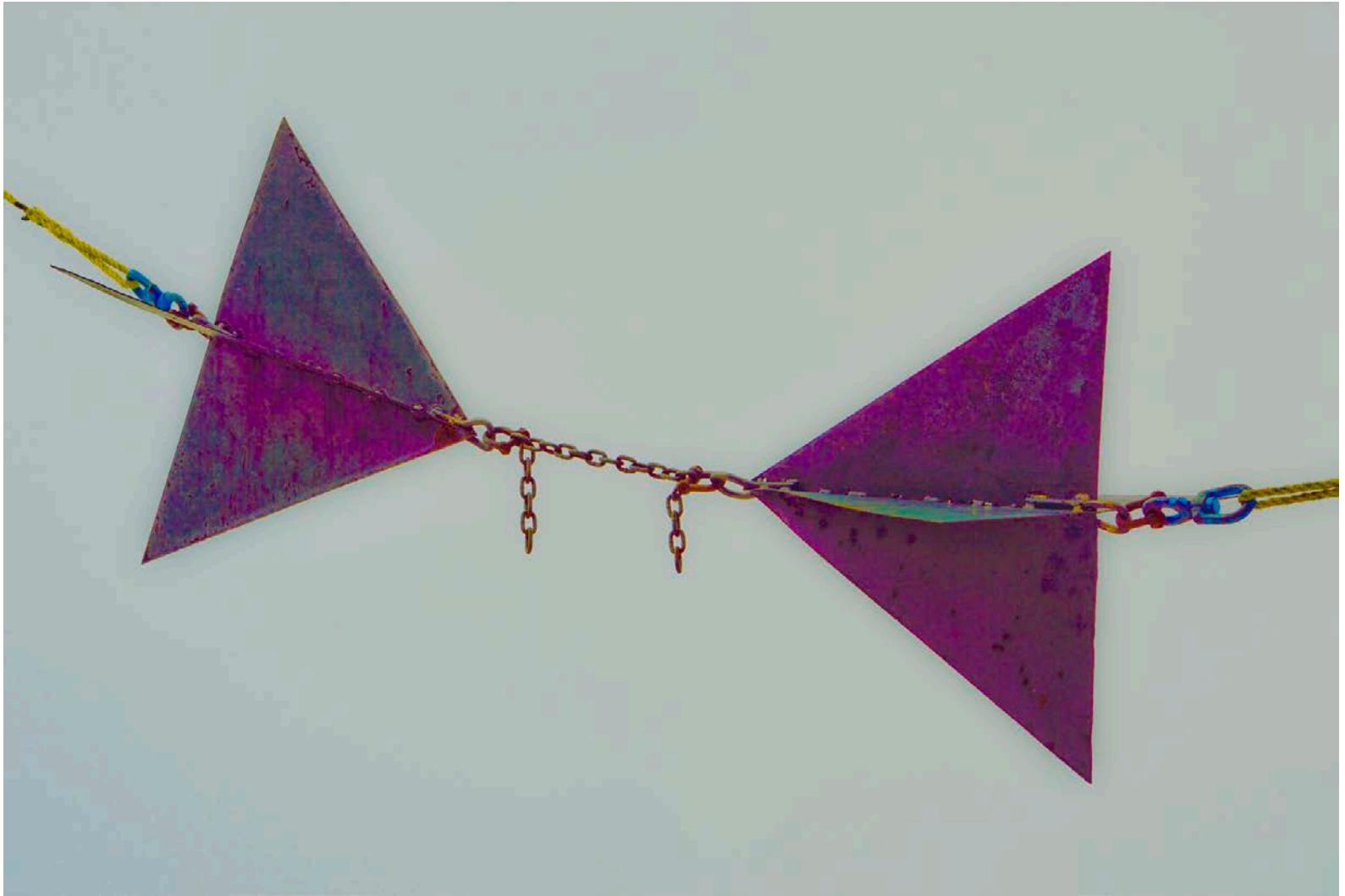
Ropes, pulleys, winches, ladders. Physical structures in which we place our faith. Their ability to sustain us has been tested and now is often taken for granted. These images began life as digital photographs, taken of documentable objects. Their exact role in life is not part of the picture, but they retain a recognizable measure of their objectivity. In some, the connection to the sky remains evident. Most of the images have dispensed with the connection these objects have to any space apart from that of the artwork in which they appear. They have in this way been rendered—or so one may be tempted to believe—symbolic or allegorical. But there are obvious formal aspects at work in these images as well. Line. Colour. Shape. Negative space. And it is apparent that these elements are not incidental. Nor accidental. And one can hardly evade the charge of composition.

Equally, however, doubt and irony play a significant role.

More than anything else, these images may suggest to some viewers, as they do to their maker, a balancing act performed on the precipice. A precipice that exists above, below, as well as to the sides. These are examples of art in a precarious place—between the four corners of the abyss. But then, isn't it the case that we maintain our graceful and delicate or at times awkward balance, suspended like marionettes, but also like gymnasts on their trapezes and highwires? These then are our perches. Our purchase between the infinities that frame our finite selves. Bridges rooted, like music on a staff. Is that even possible? Pennee believes that art realizes one of its many potentials—and fulfills one of its possible obligations—when it renews our attention to the fragility and contingency of our preconceptions and foundations, and does so without entirely depriving us of a medium in which we can endure, offering in its practice other structures to hold on to.



RS Pennee, *Trapeze #1*, from the series *Structures of Faith*, 2012
photographic-based print on archival paper



RS Pennee, *Trapeze #18*, from the series *Structures of Faith*, 2014
photographic-based print on archival paper

MARNIE WEDLAKE

Juxtaposition

Suicide exists just beyond that most precarious edge where the pain of living overwhelms and overtakes.

As a specialist in mental health care Dr. Wedlake explores the use of photographic imagery to discuss trauma, mental health, and the history of institutional medicine. The works in this exhibition feature photographic images of a suicide prevention barrier from Toronto's Bloor-Danforth Viaduct known as the Luminous Veil. The irony of concealment (the veil) and the revealing through illumination is not lost on Wedlake. In this instance one may surmise that suicide is something hidden from the purview of the public for different reasons, yet because of this there is also a failure to act on the reality that surrounds depression and mental health issues. How can we recognize something that is constantly veiled? She suggests that, "Mental health care in the Western world is situated firmly within a biomedical paradigm. Disorder is assumed, and symptoms are viewed as dis-abling deviations from normal. A disease-based model of care informs the treatment options that are most available and accessible." This exhibition encompasses the date of September 10, which coincides with World Suicide Prevention Day and brings further attention to the plight of those struggling with depression.

People do not commit suicide; they die by suicide. Crimes are committed. Historically, suicide was considered to be a criminal act in many countries, including Canada. It was not until 1972 that suicide and attempted suicide were removed from the Criminal Code of Canada. Those who make the choice to take their own lives 'die by suicide'. In this same regard, suicides are not successfully completed. There is no measure of success in a death that is the desperate result of being so deeply and overwhelmingly pained by the circumstances of one's life. In *Juxtaposition*, a series of 10 photographs, Wedlake has woven together something of a visual dialogue. Each of these 10 images provides a different perspective on the suicide prevention barrier.



Marnie Wedlake, *Juxtaposition*, 2014, photograph on archival paper



Marnie Wedlake, *Stronghold*, 2014, photograph on archival paper

To be in juxtaposition is to be situated side-by-side along with the presence of an apparent contrast. From many different perspectives, both literal and metaphorical, the Luminous Veil locates that which is illuminated and radiant in juxtaposition of that which is covered and shadowed. Western-centric mental health care is replete with juxtapositions. Energies of hope that are illuminated and evolved do regular battle with counterforces of pessimism that are despairing and oppressive. For those hapless individuals who become embedded within this system, that Wedlake believes has lost its way, an engrained apathy can be one of the most tragic side effects. Prolonged immersion in spaces of desolate misery can be heavily compounded by the multiple marginalizations (e.g. poverty, homelessness, lack of meaningful occupation, addictions and abuse) that too often plague those who experience seriously compromised emotional wellbeing (what biomedicine refers to as 'mental illness').

Lives that have become dis-abled through exposure to accumulated dis-order, are too often viewed as disabled because of disorder, by a system that insists on pathologizing responses to adversity. This series of photographic images is, indeed, a visual dialogue. Through passionate conviction, it is Wedlake's intention to use this aesthetic form to inspire conversations aimed at poking holes in the dominant discourses. This series of images calls for engaged and unbridled questioning of the reigning privileged assumptions that are the girders and beams of Western-based mental health care.



Marnie Wedlake, *Chaos out of Order*, 2014, photograph on archival paper

Futurity & Photography

August 26 - September 13, 2014

Ron Benner
Amy Creighton
Jamelie Hassan
Rehab Nazzal
Rob Nelson
RS Pennee
Marnie Wedlake

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ISBN 978-0-9939209-1-2

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(following page) partial installation view, Marnie Wedlake, *Juxtaposition*





Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Al and Karen Stewart of Westland Gallery for their support for this project. The gallery has been up and running for just over a year and the newly renovated space has featured over twenty exhibitions.

An exhibition of contemporary photography has been a long time coming in London. This exhibition, at least in part, is a renewed assertion that artists can effect change by turning a critical eye to the subjects they care about. It was a pleasure to have worked with the artists, who helped to shaped the content of the exhibition. For a more in-depth look at each artist visit:
www.westlandgallery.ca/futurityandphotography



(previous page) Amy Creighton, *Shifting Focus*, 2014, (installation view)

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