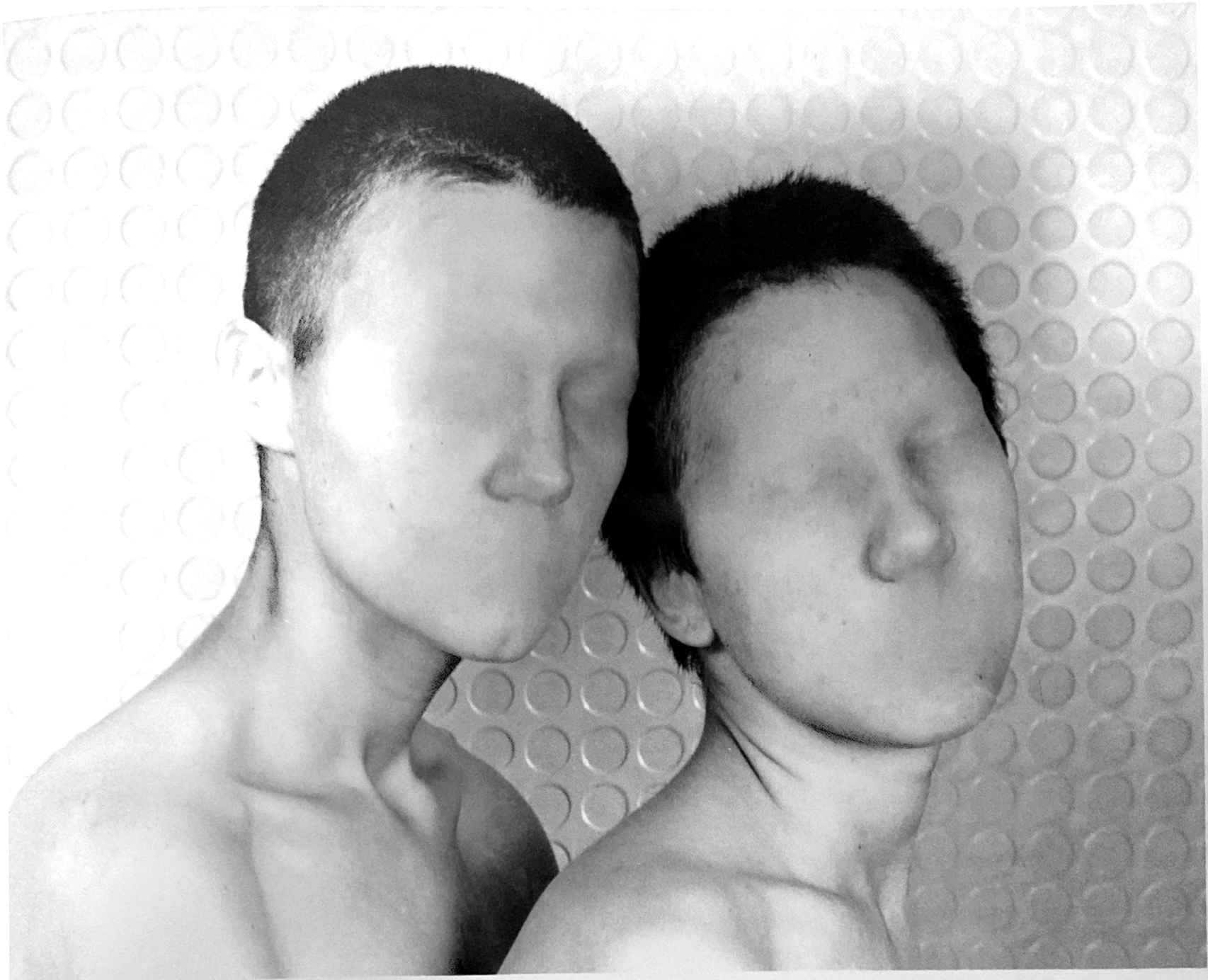


Fact, Fiction and Truth: Contemporary Portraits



Aziz + Cucher, Pam and Kim, 1995

Organized by Susan Hoeltzel

September 19 - December 16, 1995

Lehman College Art Gallery

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Fact, Fiction and Truth: Contemporary Portraits



Tatiana Parceró, *Interior Cartography*, 1994

Fact, Fiction and Truth: Contemporary Portraits examines the work of fourteen photographers, including two teams—whose art explores the nature of photographic truth. From family snapshots to driver's license photo I.D.'s, pictures of people are among photography's most common subjects. For most of us they are also a concrete representation of our memories and tangible records of our past. Sufficient to rival the painted portrait in the 19th century, photographic portraiture from the time of its invention has been closely allied to the documentary tradition—creating a sense that it is in some way replicating the experience of seeing and faithfully recording the sitter. By capturing the external visage and with it an implied glimpse at the inner self, it presumes an impossible objectivity. The photographic portrait, whether shot with a camera or created on the computer, is a chimera—an image captured in light and time, completed by inference, closure, and projection in the mind of the viewer.

In an age when direct experience can be convincingly simulated and info-tainment merges with the evening news, fact and fiction become more difficult to disentangle. In this

exhibition some photographers vigorously investigate the artifice of photography with a clear awareness that the image is an untrustworthy representation—some with a deadpan acknowledgement of the irony involved. In the work of others, deviation from reality provides a metaphor through which to better understand the world. The works employ a full range of technical possibilities—from computer imaging to toy cameras. In all the works there is an awareness of the medium's ability to show more than a surface.

At first glance Keith Cottingham's portraits of adolescent boys who bear a strong family resemblance, seem to be the most traditional work in the exhibition. Placed against a black background, the waist-length figures seem stark yet familiar. On closer inspection there is something odd about them. These are not real children but "fictitious portraits" fabricated on the computer. The portraits are an amalgam of drawing, sculpted clay modeling and a sampling of eyes, hair, and skin tones from a range of individuals of various ages, genders and ethnic backgrounds. Digitally produced these children exist only in the photograph. They are all the more disturbing

because they are not lifeless, but, in fact, appear to have a personality, an attitude—they could live next door.

More disturbing in appearance are Aziz + Cucher's unearthly portraits of individuals and couples. Their mixture of truth and fiction confound some of the basic underlying assumptions about the nature of photography as a record. Created by digitally removing some of the subjects' facial features—eyes, mouths, nostrils—then "grafting" skin in their place, these large, color-saturated Ektachrome portraits, photographed against stark backgrounds, simultaneously document each freckle and pore. They are a contradictory blend—real yet not human. Anthony Aziz and Sammy Cucher have created subjects who have limited means of interaction with the world. It is hard to know what these droid-like people are thinking—the viewer's traditional mechanisms for reading the sitter's mood or intent are also gone. They seem remote and alien.

Projection and closure play a role in finding a human face in the colorful, abstract blobs of plastic photographed in Laurie Simmons and Allan McCullum's series, *Actual Photographs*. These improbable portraits, based on the faces of train set figurines which stand a half inch tall, have been captured with the aid of a medical microscope. While they provide a lighter take on portraiture, they also probe the innate tendency to find the human face in the sketchiest of details.

The blurred, highly animated subjects of Barbara Pollack are in essence "found" photographs. Captured with aging or damaged Poloroids cameras, Barbara Pollack's Cibachrome *Head Shots* exploit the limitations of simple point and shoot cameras. The resulting images depict subjects outside the optimal circumstances—a four foot range, in a well-lighted setting, against a middle-gray ground—and document the effects of under-lighting and its resulting record of motion. Pollack focuses her attention on the "out-takes" or what might in the normal course of events be a discarded photo. In these portraits the distortions amplify and animate the sitters in unexpected ways.

Gary Schneider's oddly lighted subjects appear to exist on multiple planes within the print. They are "painted with light" in total darkness—the result of long exposure times, during which the camera records changes in the lighting as well as changes in the subjects' expressions during the pose. The erratic spotting with light creates a sense of drama and imparts a emotional intensity. Slight blurring suggests a living, breathing person, pushing the limits of the mechanical process and techniques of the camera.

John Brill's engrams, photographs based on hypothetical memory traces, suggest dream-like apparitions. The work is produced through an intentional and controlled process of image deterioration. His technique often involves multiple steps of processing and re-processing. The images in the Lehman exhibition include four shot from life and four appropriated from the television screen. Technically the work may involve - toy cameras, infra-red film, bleaching and toning in the darkroom, and reshooting with a pinhole camera. Brill's chiaroscuro studies of the face reveal the subject slowly. The scale is small setting up an intimate relationship and drawing the viewer closer. The result is an ethereal portrait like those one sees when they are on the edge of sleep.

The fragmented juxtapositions of Louis Lussier's large format prints also have a dream like logic to the imagery. Profiles



Keith Cottingham, *Untitled (Double)*, 1993, digital constructed photograph

placed against sea and sky become landscapes—mountains and deserts. Stairs lead out into darkness and shadow figures become surrogates for the self. Lussier's sources range from film stills to old photographs. The recombined images suggest a narrative.

Also slow to unfold are the reticent, barely perceptible portraits of Adam Fuss' *Untitled (Black Portrait)* series. Only after prolonged scrutiny do the face and torso of a young child—sculpted by a dim light and buried within the black chemical surface of the gelatin silver print—begin to emerge from a ground of darkness. Once brought into view, the figure remains largely a captive of the photographic medium. With a blink of the eye it disappears again.

Isolated objects alluding to the portrait tradition stand as surrogates in the silver gelatin prints of J. John Priola. In one work, what appears to be an old family portrait of a man and a woman—like those which might be found on a dresser top or in a locket—suggests a narrative at which we can only guess. The double portrait, a woman behind a man, possibly a mother and her son, is creased and torn in half, beheading the sitters. In another work, a broken porcelain bust of a young boy—an idealized representation—is cracked and hollow.

The issue of memory is also addressed in Bill Jacobson's ongoing series, *Interim Photographs*. Here it is defined in terms of a dialectic between presence and absence. Fading images immersed in light deal with reality metaphorically. Photographed against a clinical white paper background, these portraits provide, in the words of the photographer, "a statement about personal desire and collective loss, a drawing on feelings around the tentativeness and vulnerability of life in the age of AIDS . . ." Jacobson's black and white negatives, printed on color paper, lend a sepia tone to the photograph and a warm flesh tone to the portrait. In these diffuse images the form restates the content.

Tatiana Parceró's photographs explore identity in feminist terms, contrasting the exterior surface of her face with schematic representations of female internal organs. Using her body as a subject, she superimposes engravings from 19th century medical books. Parceró's self-portraits are veiled and coded by her anatomy.



Gary Schneider, *Telma*, 1990, gelatin silver print

Kathy Grove's series of deconstructed images is also connected to a feminist perspective. In *(The Other Series) After Smith*, *(The Other Series) After Kertesz* and *(The Other Series) After Muybridge*, Grove simply removes the female subject leaving behind a small boy alone on the forest trail in Eugene Smith's famous work, an empty sofa in Kertesz', and empty drapery in various shapes created by a motion study in the case of the Muybridge. In *After Lange*, Grove transforms Dorothea Lange's famous nineteen thirties icon of the Depression, *Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California*, into a glamorous model. With the composition essentially the same, Grove has executed a make-over by removing dirt, blemishes, and age, as well as, adding make-up. As with the other works, the additions and subtractions have provided a new sense of what is real, a different truth, and another fiction.

Susan Hoeltzel

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Aziz and Cucher

Pam and Kim, 1995
Digitized type c print
40 x 50"
Courtesy of Jack
Shainman Gallery

Ken, 1995
Digitized type c print
50 x 40"
Courtesy of Jack
Shainman Gallery

Rick, 1995
Digitized type c print
50 x 40"
Courtesy of Jack
Shainman Gallery

Bill and Patti, 1995
Digitized type c print
40 x 50"
Courtesy of Jack
Shainman Gallery

John Brill

Untitled, 1991
Sepia toned silver
print, 3 1/2 x 3 1/2"
Courtesy of Kent
Gallery, Inc.

Portrait #4, 1991
Sepia toned silver print
3 3/8 x 4 3/8"
Courtesy of Kent
Gallery, Inc.

Portrait #11, 1991
Sepia toned silver print
3 3/4 x 6 1/2"
Courtesy of Kent
Gallery, Inc.

Untitled, (B), 1992
Sepia toned silver print
8 3/4 x 6 1/2"
Courtesy of Kent
Gallery, Inc.

Untitled, (A), 1992
Sepia toned silver print
7 3/4 x 6 3/4"
Courtesy of Kent
Gallery, Inc.

Untitled, (E), 1992
Sepia toned silver print
7 1/8 x 6 3/4"
Courtesy of Kent
Gallery, Inc.

Untitled, (D), 1992
Sepia toned silver print
7 x 7 1/2"
Courtesy of Kent
Gallery, Inc.

Portrait #5, 1991
Sepia toned silver print
4 1/4 x 4"
Courtesy of Kent
Gallery, Inc.

Keith Cottingham

Untitled (Single), 1993
Digital constructed
photograph
61 1/2 x 53 1/4"
Ronald Feldman Fine
Art Inc.

Untitled (Double)
1993
Digital constructed
photograph
61 1/2 x 53 1/4"
Ronald Feldman Fine
Art Inc.

Adam Fuss

Untitled (Black
Portrait), 1990
Gelatin silver print
24 x 20"
Courtesy of Robert
Miller Gallery

Kathy Grove

The Other Series:
After Lange, 1989-90
Gelatin silver print
18 3/4 x 15"
Courtesy of P.P.O.W.

The Other Series:
After Smith, 1992
Gelatin silver print
22 x 18 1/2"
Courtesy of P.P.O.W.

The Other Series:
After Kertesz, 1989-90
Gelatin silver print
9 1/4 x 7 1/2"
Courtesy of P.P.O.W.

The Other Series:
After Muybridge, 1992
Gelatin silver print
12 1/2 x 22 1/2"
Courtesy of P.P.O.W.

Bill Jacobson

Interim Portrait -
#507, 1993
Chromogenic print
24 x 20"
Courtesy Julie Saul
Gallery

Interim Portrait -
#271, 1992
Chromogenic print
24 x 20"
Courtesy Julie Saul
Gallery

Interim Portrait -
#255, 1992
Chromogenic print
24 x 20"
Courtesy Julie Saul
Gallery

Interim Portrait -
#384, 1992
Chromogenic print
24 x 20"
Courtesy Julie Saul
Gallery

Interim Portrait -
#378, 1993
Chromogenic print
24 x 20"
Courtesy Julie Saul
Gallery

Louis Lussier

Testimonial / Fableux,
1991
Gelatin silver print
14 x 11"
Courtesy of Jack
Shainman Gallery

Testimonial / Fableux,
1995
Gelatin silver print
43 x 80"
Courtesy of Jack
Shainman Gallery

Tatiana Parcerro

Interior Cartography
Series III, 1994
Gelatin silver print
16 x 20"
Courtesy of Carla
Stellweg Latin
American &
Contemporary Art

Interior Cartography
Series I, 1994
Gelatin silver print
16 x 20"
Courtesy of Carla
Stellweg Latin
American &
Contemporary Art

J. John Priola

Portrait, 1995
Gelatin silver print
20 x 16"
Courtesy Julie Saul
Gallery

Boy, 1995
Gelatin silver print
20 x 16"
Courtesy Julie Saul
Gallery

Barbara Pollack

Headshot: Sue,
1995
Cibachrome
15 1/2 x 15 1/2"
Collection of the artist

Headshot: Kristen,
1995
Cibachrome
15 1/2 x 15 1/2"
Collection of the artist

Headshot: Mark,
1995
Cibachrome
15 1/2 x 15 1/2"
Collection of the artist

Headshot: Baby Max,
1995
Cibachrome
15 1/2 x 15 1/2"
Collection of the artist

Gary Schneider

John, 1990
Gelatin silver print
40 x 30"
Courtesy of P.P.O.W.
Lynne, 1990
Gelatin silver print
36 x 29"
Courtesy of P.P.O.W.

Telma, 1990
Gelatin silver print
36 x 29"
Courtesy of P.P.O.W.

Laurie Simmons / Allan McCollum

Actual Photo, 1985
Cibachrome, 10 x 8"
Courtesy of Metro Pictures

Actual Photo, 1985
Cibachrome, 10 x 8"
Courtesy of Metro Pictures

Actual Photo, 1985
Cibachrome, 10 x 8"
Courtesy of Metro Pictures

Actual Photo, 1985
Cibachrome, 10 x 8"
Courtesy of Metro Pictures

Actual Photo, 1985
Cibachrome, 10 x 8"
Courtesy of Metro Pictures

