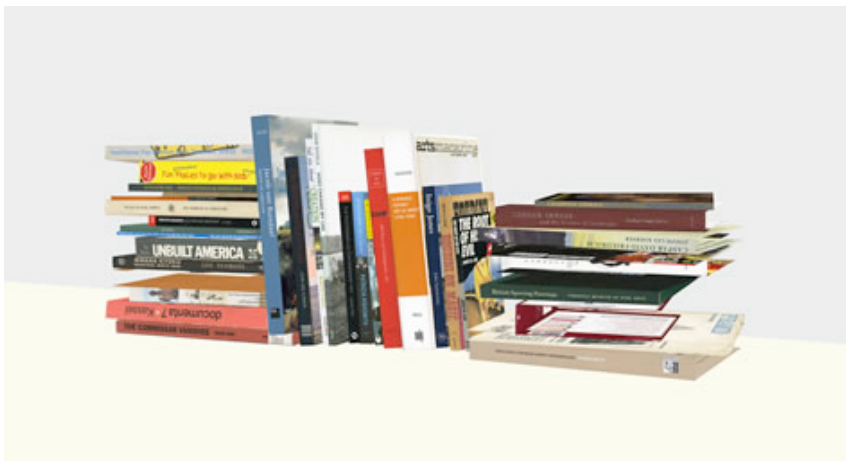


Truthiness: Photography as Sculpture explores how a new generation of artists in California are using photographic prints as the basic medium in the creation of sculptural works, in an effort to expand the use of the media and to examine the nature of the photographic image. Through these works, the artists shake the foundations of the photograph's traditional function as a reliable record of a visual perception. The exhibition follows in the footsteps of earlier generations of artists working in California who, in the 1960's through the late 1980s, began to use the photograph in radically new art contexts, such as John Baldessari, Wallace Berman, Robert Heinecken, Susan Rankaitis, Edward Ruscha, Ilene Segalove, and Alexis Smith. Artists in the exhibition include Elizabeth Bryant, Todd Gray, Katie Grinnan, Brandon Lattu, Srdjan Loncar, Dana Maiden, Tom McGovern, David Meanix, Gina Osterloh, Anthony Pearson, Carter Potter, Christopher Taggart, Mary Younakof, Amir Zaki and Bari Ziperstein. Curated by Tyler Stallings, director, UCR Sweeney Art Gallery. Catalog available with an essay by Stallings that provides historical context for this renewed approach towards photography.
<http://www.cmp.ucr.edu/>

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Truthiness: Photography as Sculpture By Tyler Stallings



Brandon Lattu, *Mantle Stack*, 2006, courtesy of the artist



Katie Grinnan, *Rubble Division*, 2005-2006, courtesy of the artist

Truthiness: Photography as Sculpture follows in the footsteps of earlier generations of artists working in California who, in the 1960's through the 80s, used the photograph in radically new ways.

They include artists such as Eleanor Antin, John Baldessari, Wallace Berman, Darryl Curran, John Divola, Robert Heinecken, Bruce Nauman, Susan Rankaitis, Edward Ruscha, Ilene Segalove, and Alexis Smith, among others. Beyond California during this time period, the list would include Dennis Adams, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Alfredo Jaar, Richard Long, Gordon Matta-Clark, Fischli and Weiss, Joseph Kosuth, the Starn Twins, and many others.

These artists and the ones in *Truthiness* explore the interwoven relationships between the recorded image in a photograph, the artifice of its manipulation, the performance of the photographer, and the sculptural nature of the final object. By emphasizing the materiality of the photograph, the artists show us in a nearly literal fashion how our perceptions are structured in large part by a world saturated with images.

In *Art and Photography* David Company writes, “In the mid 1960s many artists were looking to expand their horizons to engage with the rapidly changing world and its representations. It was in the photographic that they glimpsed the means to do it. Every significant moment in art since the 1960s has asked, implicitly or explicitly: ‘What is the relation of art to everyday life?’ And so often that question has taken photographic form. Why? Because it is an everyday medium. The photographic has achieved its greatest significance for art in its adaptability.”¹

The artists in *Truthiness* share the common idea that they are not photographers, but artists who use photography. This is a concept that has evolved from artists treating the camera as an extension of the eye in the 1920s and 30s; then away from an emphasis on formal and technical issues such as surface, volume, tonality, and the perfect shot as emphasized in the 1940s and 50s. Today, the photographic image is a vital feature in most contemporary art. This is the case whether it is an actual print, inspiration for or incorporation into a painting, or, as in the case of *Truthiness*, an approach to the third-dimension.

In essence, making the familiar two-dimensionality of a photograph three-dimensional brings attention even more so to the technology behind the making of such images. This is perhaps why the scale of several of the works in *Truthiness* is quite large. Or, the reason could be more mundane, such as the artists having easy access to high-resolution digital printers. They can afford to experiment, both literally and conceptually. It is the same story for artists when any new technology becomes available and affordable. Consider the innovations that occurred with the introduction of portable video equipment in the 1970s, desktop video editing in the 1990s, and web authoring applications in the 2000s.

There has been an ongoing dialog between photography and sculpture throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In a 2005 *Artforum* article, writer Mark Godfrey surveys a slate of younger international artists who are exploring the relationship to photography and sculpture. It functions as an update on the 1998 anthology *Sculpture and Photography: Envisioning the Third Dimension*, edited by Geraldine Johnson.²

Both Godfrey and Johnson describe how many twentieth-century sculptors have worked in dialog with photographs. Sometimes they aide in the formulation of the sculpture, other times photographs becomes both documents and work in of themselves. In Johnson’s 1998 book, she cites artists such as Auguste Rodin, Constantin Brancusi, David Smith, Joseph Beuys, Eva Hesse, Robert Mapplethorpe, Richard Serra, and Jeff Wall. Seven years later, Godfrey cites artists from the 1990s onward as wide-ranging as Simon Starling, Shirley Tse, Armando Andrade Tudela, and Damian Ortega. He writes that in contrast to the use of photography by artists from the 1960s and 70s, such as Douglas Huebler, his list of artists

...are not replacing the laborious activity of fabrication with a hastier form of marking and documenting, or moving from objects and matter to social space. Nor should a consideration of their practices imply a progressive development from sculpture to photography: They all continue to make and show actual objects. And unlike [Robert Smithson], they aren’t exactly interested in the way experience is mediated by photography and text per se—a condition that is now taken for granted from the start. Instead, photography and sculpture have entered a more complex phase of their relationship, folding over each other, reversing positions, flipping back and forth, the one becoming the other.³

Other reference points in the past 100 years include Eugène Atget (1857-1927), who photographed statues in Paris with an aestheticized point of view; German Karl Blossfeldt’s (1865-1932) photographs of plants that re-presented them as sculpture-like objects, functioning both as taxonomy and as decorative inspirations; the photomontages of László Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946) and El Lissitzky (1890-1941); and Surrealist artists’ fascination with extreme close-ups and other cropping techniques for transforming the everyday into the unreal, as in the collaboration between Brassai and Salvador Dalí with their *Sculptures Involontaires* (1933). After World War II, Walker Evans (1903-1975) created a

series based on tools, also re-imagining them as sculptural objects; Joseph Cornell (1903-1972) incorporated photographs and found objects into small boxes; in the 1960s and 70s artists incorporated performance, video, and Conceptual practices in which photographs of associated objects and events became both evidence and artwork.

Since the 1980s, many artists ranging from James Casebere, Sandy Skoglund, Gregory Crewdson, and Thomas Demand have used tabletop and room-size tableaus that they then photographed.⁴ Though some of the artists in *Truthiness* do touch upon this method, the majority of the work is relegated to actual three-dimensional sculptures that utilize photo-based media in their construction.

Many of the works in *Truthiness* incorporate collage, bricolage and fragmentation. Artists have utilized these techniques since the early twentieth century, especially those associated with Cubism, Dada, Surrealism, and Pop Art. In most all of these cases, the artists linked with these historical avant-garde movements were coming to terms with the rise of a mass, consumer culture. Additionally, they worked with fragmented images in order to present multiple viewpoints of their subjects in order to suggest a larger context for interpretation. They emphasized that the surface world was not what it seemed at first glance. It was an attitude encouraged by their recognition that it was unquestioning attitudes associated with reason, science, and industrialization that led, in part, to the traumas of two world wars.

This sentiment is alive and well today. In his survey of installation art since the 1960s, *Installation Art in the New Millennium: The Empire of the Senses*, Nicolas De Oliveira writes about an interweaving of time and narrative as a response to society's swift alterations and the bombardment of information. Characteristics of such art include emphasizing a de-centered starting point for a viewer, encouragement of interactivity, and the creation of immersive, room-size environments. He writes that "In a rapidly changing world, time and memory are key concerns for contemporary artists. Though borrowing from existing methodologies, Installation [sic] artists prefer to construct their own spaces of memory."⁵

In addition to expanding the boundaries of what is considered art in regard to the idea of form, avant-garde artists since the late 1960s, have focused their subject matter on questions of sexuality, gender, identity, information, and authenticity, among other topics dealing with representation. The use of photography by artists has been at the heart of much of this exploration. As curator Klaus Kertess has noted:

The involvement of Rauschenberg, Claes Oldenburg, Alan Kaprow, and others in real-time, brilliantly nonsensical "happenings" in the mid-1960s, together with the often related, ordinary-movement-based choreographies of such artists as Yvonne Rainer and Trisha Brown, and the subsequent emphasis on process and dematerialization of the art object in the late 1960s, as well as the introduction of more portable video cameras, all introduced a new performative aspect into art, and gave the camera, as witness, an indispensable role.⁶

The early work of the California-based artists from the 1960s and 70s has been recognized in many exhibitions ranging from the Museum of Modern Art's *Photography into Sculpture* in 1970 to *Proof: Los Angeles Art and the Photograph, 1960-1980* in 1992, which was organized by a former UCR/California Museum of Photography director, Charles Desmarais, to *The Last Picture Show: Artists Using Photography, 1960-1982*, organized by the Walker Art Center in 2003. It would seem that there is an evaluation of California's role in experimental photography every five to ten years.

In his catalog essay Desmarais wrote on the artists from this formative time period as sharing an "attitude toward photography as plastic and anti-documentary was a new phenomenon." He also discusses MoMA's show and the California influence, writing, "As [Peter] Bunnell [the exhibition's curator] pointed out in the exhibition wall label, the majority of the twenty-three American and Canadian artists included were from the West Coast...nine from greater Los Angeles.... It traveled widely, too, showing at eight additional venues and ending up at the Otis Institute of Los Angeles County in 1972."⁷

Desmarais goes on to write that in a conversation with Bunnell, while researching *Proof*, the curator says in recognition of what was going on the West Coast that “It was clearly [Robert] Heinecken, or the spirit that he generated, and the curriculum of the school which apparently fostered” this approach toward photography.⁸

In 1992, a little over twenty years later after the MoMA exhibition, *Proof: Los Angeles Art and the Photography, 1960-1980* focused exclusively on the Los Angeles’ influence on the question of the authority of the photograph.

Aspects of the thesis included the fact that there was no strict photo historical hierarchy about what was proper photography, due in part to the general lack of support structure for artists.

But what changed the Los Angeles art scene’s position with the photograph was when Robert Heinecken, a graduate student in UCLA’s printmaking program, was invited to begin a program in photography there in 1961. In *Capturing Light: Masterpieces of California Photography, 1850 to the Present*, noted writer on photography, Andy Grundberg, has written that “Heinecken’s work of the 1960s is not so much photography, as traditionally understood, as it is a mediation on the pervasive presence of photography in mass media and the entertainment industry.”⁹ He also suggests that perhaps California held sway in experimental photography due to many European émigrés after World War II, many linked to the Surrealist movement, such as Man Ray’s time in Los Angeles from 1940 to 1951.

There was also the presence and influence of the Tamarind Lithography Workshop, Gemini G.E.L. and Cirrus Editions Limited, who were producing highly experimental prints and editions. Also, important museum shows were mounted on Pop art and Duchamp’s first retrospective at the Pasadena Art Museum. And then there was the establishment of the Woman’s Building in 1973, feminism being a key contributor to issues of representation explored by all of these photographers.

In essence, perhaps one can say that the three-dimensional, sculptural nature of the works in *Truthiness* elicits a temporal sensibility. It is a way to deal with not only the literal depthlessness of electronic computer screens but of the same surface qualities of traditional photographs. In an analysis of the effects of new imaging technologies on subjectivity, Sarah Kember writes in *Virtual anxiety: photography, new technologies and subjectivity* “that the current panic over the status of the images, or object of photography, is technologically deterministic and masks a more fundamental fear about the status of the self or the subject of photography, and about the way in which the subject uses photography to understand the world and intervene in it.”¹⁰

To go 3-D, then, is a desire for a return of the body center stage within the theatrical space of these photo-based works, whether as a maker of the work, or in terms of the viewer’s interaction with it. The artists in *Truthiness* and their viewers are closely linked together as they navigate an overload of images and data in today’s world.

Artists in the exhibition

Elizabeth Bryant

Bryant’s work often employs historic garden maps that are sliced into modern-day scenic posters and photomurals. Their incision offers both a literal-minded reminder of our devotion to a photograph’s indexical qualities, and also a complex statement about the impulse to order our environment. Consider *Tea Garden Path/Springtime Vista* (2000) in which the diagram of the stepping-stone pathway from a historic Japanese tea garden is cut into a generic landscape photo. Bryant conflates the acts of the anonymous photographer, the Japanese designer, and her own artful intervention. It is a clever comment about how different cultures and time periods approach the arrangement of nature. It is also takes into account the human impulse towards design, which is explored in *Ikebana* (2006). Comprised of color photographs that are laminated and cut to create card-like building components, it is a meditation on the Japanese tradition of codified arrangements flowers as a compact form of the aspiration to manage nature, but with grace.

Todd Gray

Gray's "California Missions" series incorporates taxidermied animals dissected by large photographic images, mirrored on one side, and on the other side depicting the terrain and architectural elements from the missions established by Junípero Serra (1713-1784), a Spanish Franciscan friar who founded the mission chain in the late 1700s in what is now southern California. The "horse," "pig" and "goat" are animals that would have been found at the missions, and are also allegorical symbols that explore issues of colonization and conquest. The sculptural nature of the work forces a viewer to walk around the work: they will see themselves in the mirror on one side, implicating them in the narrative, and then the life-size animal and the mission architectural fragment on the other side.

KATIE GRINNAN

Abandoned buildings, recycled architecture, and demolition are the subjects in much of Grinnan's work. "Rubble Division" is a many-sided structure of mounted photographs—a cross between the early twentieth-century assemblages and collages of the Cubists, such as Picasso, and the architectural explorations by Gordon Matta-Clark in the 1970s. The back of the work depicts images of a razed building, buttressed by actual supports of rebar and concrete blocks. Grinnan views her topographic use of photographs as "skins" for her sculptures. They combine photography and sculpture in a way that brings together social, psychological, and physical spaces to exist simultaneously, while bringing attention to the unease between the structure and facade of an object.

BRANDON LATTU

Often employing digital manipulation, Lattu composes images that are impossible to see in nature. In his work, perspective is inverted, hidden angles are revealed, opaque and impenetrable surfaces become transparent, as in the hanging sculpture, "Array." Transparency and blankness are recurrent themes throughout Lattu's work, which question assumptions about traditions of picture making. The photo-based works in Truthiness from his "Library" series depicts covers of books found in his home. Bookcases and stacks were initially photographed as they were found. In the finished works, full scale scans of the front, back and spine stand in for the books on a two-color or monochromatic ground representing the bookcase and the wall behind. However, the pages of the books are not shown, emphasizing the visual information on the covers of books. Various ideas intersect in this work such as reading versus seeing.

SRDJAN LONCAR

Loncar's process generally consists of carving forms of familiar objects, like a branch or cell phone, out of Styrofoam and covering them with close-up photo images of the object's surfaces. Substituting the photographic details of the object for the actual elements of the object, Loncar explores the complexity of observation, recording and representation. Relevant to his work is the legacy of the early twentieth-century art movement, Cubism, in which objects are depicted as broken up, analyzed, and re-assembled in an abstracted form. Instead of depicting objects from one viewpoint, the artist depicts the subject from a multitude of viewpoints to represent the subject in a greater context.

DANA MAIDEN

Maiden heightens our sense of the mundane world that surrounds us by creating objects that hover between two and three dimensions, such as the bathtub depicted in "Repose Construct," an ultrachrome print mounted on aluminum. Although the objects that she photographs are familiar, their transformation into sculptures creates a destabilizing effect. Ultimately, Maiden is interested in using photography as a tool for exploring the way spatial relationships can be perceived. She experiments with making space fold in upon itself or expand from a flat surface into three dimensions. By collapsing the space between disparate objects, she fuses together new correspondences.

THOMAS MCGOVERN

In "Pas de Deux: The Collector Plate Series" McGovern uses formal poses from Greco Roman wrestling, ju jitsu, classical ballet and mythology as metaphors for personal and social relationships. Introduced in 1895, souvenir collector plates became the standard in accessible art and bestowed upon the owner the faux aura of refinement and connoisseurship. The illustrated plate simultaneously

references Greek vases and plates whose utilitarian functions were enhanced by illustrations from mythology and daily life.

DAVID MEANIX

Meanix takes shots inch by inch, photographing an entire subject in detail, then prints these photographs at actual size, matching the pieces up to the original subject's features, and paper machés the pictures into "masks." They are then photographed while worn by people or placed in surroundings that compel the viewer to re-interpret concepts of identity, self reflection, destruction and growth through the context of the social and personal veils. Meanix's work was also used as the photography selected to represent the artwork of Claire Fisher on HBO's series, "Six Feet Under" (2001-2005); a show that reflects many of the psychological anxieties explored in Meanix's work.

GINA OSTERLOH

Osterloh treats the body and its surrounding environment as physical and psychological spaces in a symbiotic relationship. The works in Truthiness are based on sensations of catharsis and the desire to exist beyond physical limitations. In each photograph the body's gesture is inseparable from its constructed room-size paper environment. The seeming merging of setting and figure articulates a porous boundary between the internal and external, the visceral and the psychological. The figure occupies a space of the unfamiliar, or perhaps even a non-space or a pre-gendered / pre-verbal space; further emphasized in some works in which the body disappears altogether, leaving the room empty.

ANTHONY PEARSON

Pearson uses photography and bronze sculpture as his primary media. Arriving at bronze, by way of photography, he uses the material as a means to illuminate and complicate his picture-making concerns. With much of Pearson's work being decisively formal and abstract, his sculptures are often realized in the form of bas-relief and frontal "slabs." When these cast works are placed alongside the silver gelatin prints, in what the artist calls "Arrangements," the juxtaposition of materials react on a micro/macro level as the alchemical correlations of copper alloy and photographic silver become apparent. Relationships to outmoded analog and modernist practices are also explored in such pairings.

CARTER POTTER

Potter fabricates "paintings" by using 70mm film stock, which he wraps in bands on painting stretcher bars. Sometimes he will use only the leader part of the film, exploring abstraction. Other times, he allows the appearance of actual images from a film narrative, as in "We Cure Everything #3 (Lion King)." The sequence of images is continuous from within the film, but the imagery changes considerably from the beginning to the end- as do the colors and overall patterning. The work operates on both an abstract and narrative level: from a distance they appear to be jewel-like abstractions, and on close scrutiny the images in the frames can be discerned.

CHRISTOPHER TAGGART

Taggart's work explores optical illusion, geometry, proportion and perspective. In the past he has created works such as a 17 1/2-foot-long, collage-like sculpture of a squirrel assembled from nearly 6,000 photographs of tiny details of a small stuffed squirrel toy. Each of the images corresponded to the geometric division of the squirrel into small triangular units. He has applied the same process to "(Virtual) Hand." Taggart's decidedly hand-made approach is also his way of exploring different forms of imaging technology and what happens when you translate images and objects from one medium to another. Here, he is exploring the translation of three-dimensional objects into other three-dimensional objects using a two-dimensional medium.

MARY YOUNAKOF

"Red Alert," an installation created for Truthiness, is a continuation of a series by Younakof that focuses on war related themes. It depicts a catastrophic impact where a burning world at war has crash-landed and burst open to spew out the forces driving its demise. Younakof uses photographic representations

of iconic toy figures and accessories depicting soldiers and accoutrements of war, which are rescaled to life size, and then set up in narrative scene. These photographic representations are not just documentations of children's playthings but with their accuracy in detail and shift in scale they take on an odd life-like quality, removing any innocence usually associated with toys.

AMIR ZAKI

Zaki pushes the boundaries of the real and the imagined with his depictions of urban California landscapes and architecture. In his photographs, he often explores themes of ambiguity and anonymity by displacing but personifying unique architectural structures as subjects. Seen in and around Southern California, Zaki's buildings are mundane constructions transformed from their natural settings through the photographic lens to emphasize their dynamic volumes and sculptural masses in space. He brings this same sensibility to his video installation for Truthiness, "Meditations on the Hollywood Juniper." In this work, the simultaneous depiction of two views of the ubiquitous plant decorating sidewalks has been transformed into an otherworldly, undulating, amoeba-like form.

BARI ZIPERSTEIN

Ziperstein's photographs, collages, and sculptures examine the psychology of space and architecture. In her work, which suggests a dialogue with Kurt Schwitters' early twentieth-century masterwork, "Merzbau," (1923-1947 in various locations), Ziperstein has transformed living spaces into sculptural environments. She does so by adding stark white site-specific sculptures that protrude from furniture and rooms and documenting the process through photography. The sculptural forms, made from foam core structures covered with plaster, suggest an overzealous modernist designer, an unending desire to consume by the homeowner, and perhaps a commentary on Los Angeles' knack for constructing houses with lightweight materials. In her stand-alone sculptures, sometimes exhibited alongside the photographs, she incorporates a cast-off object from a thrift shop. In a sense, she returns the object back to the marketplace, but rejuvenates it, making what was once mass-produced into a unique object.

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¹ David Company, ed., "Preface" in *Art and Photography* (London: Phaidon Press, 2003), 11.

² Geraldine A. Johnson, ed., *Sculpture and Photography: Envisioning the Third Dimension* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
³ Geraldine A. Johnson, ed., *Sculpture and Photography: Envisioning the Third Dimension* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

³ Mark Godfrey, "Image structures: Mark Godfrey on photography and sculpture," *Artforum*, February 2005.

⁴ An exhibition and catalog that recognized this tendency early on was *Cross-References: Sculpture into Photography*, exhibition catalog, (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1987).

⁵ Nicolas De Oliveira, Nicola Oxley, and Michael Petry, eds., *Installation Art in the New Millennium: The Empire of the Senses* (London: Thames & Hudson, Ltd., 2003), 132.

⁶ Klaus Kertess, "Multiple Exposure," in *Photography Transformed: The Metropolitan Bank & Trust Collection* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2002), 13.

⁷ Charles Desmarais, *Proof: Los Angeles Art and the Photograph 1960-1980* (Los Angeles and Laguna Beach: Fellows of Contemporary Art and Laguna Art Museum, 1992), 24-25.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁹ Andy Grundberg, "Portfolio IV: California Dreaming 1945-1980, 'A New and Different Kind of Art,'" in *Capturing Light: Masterpieces of California Photography, 1850 to the Present*, Drew Heath Johnson, ed. (Oakland: Oakland Museum of California, 2001), 202.

¹⁰ Sarah Kember, "'The Shadow of the object': photography and realism," in *Virtual anxiety: photography, new technologies and subjectivity* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1998), 18.