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## Photography

### PRC: Focus on the Future

by Shawn Hill

This dual-purposed show divides its agenda thus: Thirty figures from the thirty-year history of the institution represent the past, many of them from the Photographic Resource Center's board, but also comprised of former directors, curators, and consultants. In the exhibition *PRC: P.O.V. Photography Now and in the Next 30 Years*, they each were asked to choose one image, person, or concept that they thought represents the future. This conceit honors the pivotal role the PRC has played in the promotion of fine-art photography over the past three decades, and it continues a tradition of linking the American photography tradition to pop culture and new and emerging talent (both native and abroad) in ways that only seem obvious in retrospect.

The choices here are quirky and necessarily limited by the format of one image per ersatz "curator." But the diversity is symbolic of another facet of the PRC: a boundless optimism and openness to the vital role photography plays in modern life. If there's a commonality to the predictions here, it's that the future is digital, and that the focus of the past by artists on revitalizing commercial gimmicks (photo booths, Polaroids, antiquated technology) will likely continue.

The Internet and digital technology permeate the show. Adobe Photoshop (that premiere graphics tool that has done so much to enhance the visual appeal of the Web) is celebrated, as are photo-based interactive Web sites like flickr.com and photobooth.net. There's a monitor set to the flickr page for the gallery opening and other related events, and a digital camera available to record one's own participation as a visitor to be added to the page by gallery staff. The online auction site eBay is honored for its ability to connect buyers to a virtual archive of vernacular and anonymous antique photographs.



Linda Kroff, *War* from the installation *24 Words: 1 Year*, gelatin silver print, 12 x 36", 2003. Copyright and courtesy of the artist.

The communicative power of photography, its pretences towards fact-based realism and its potential for distortion and manipulation seem vital themes. Robert Seydel nominates Interrupt Art Productions, a collective that uses altered Polaroids to explore themes of American urban and suburban life. Scott Peterman's interest in bleak landscapes carries over to the city in his image of a bleak vista of crowded apartment buildings, trapped in a grid at a diagonal angle to the viewer. Their tiny black windows stare empty out of each warren in a crowded profusion that is somehow absent of life.

Miklos Gaál's *Sunday Afternoon* makes human life seem alien. He shows a beach dotted with figures. They all share the same corporate blue umbrellas, but only a thin strip in the center is visible amidst a blurry, wet vista. The tiny figures look like ants colonizing a barren patch, their sensual enjoyment of the sunny day rendered inscrutable by distance. Others use photography to alter and challenge perception. Julie Anand scans strips of 16mm film and reprints them as blowups, so that each cell becomes a distinct image in a narrative. Her *Sand Angel* records her actions making a figure on the beach with her body, which is then washed away by the tide. The ephemerality of her action, the erasure of her gesture, preserves the essence of moving film in still photographs, and it is digital technology that serves as her studio printing process.

John Chervinsky creates a hermetic world in his images by setting up two chalkboards joined at a horizon line. This blank, black backdrop allows him to draw and arrange still-life objects and other photos in configurations that play with perception and challenge the three-dimensional illusion one expects in photography. In *The Hand of Man*, a pendulous and liquid-filled white balloon hangs over a target. Does the dotted line moving like a rope over pulleys frame it or bisect it? Is it in front or behind?

Chehalis Hegner's image is more personal, focusing on the human figure, which will likely remain a permanent theme of photography. A gloved hand caresses the face of a bald man. His eyes closed, he submits to the touch, his face emerging out of dark shadows to provide a non-verbal sensory experience to himself and his explorer. Her glove is torn, but she touches his skin only with her covered fingertips.

Karina Aguilera Skvirsky, nominated by Sara Rosenfeld Dassel, uses a news image as the basis for her restaged photograph. The series *Backyards* takes a figure of a woman witnessing a bombed destruction in Iraq, and moves her to a parking lot in America. The model dresses in the same attire, and is seen only from the back, gesturing. But now she looks at a blank, intact wall, and in full color rather than in black-and-white newsprint. Is she just as lost and devastated, or does her new context make her gesture meaningless? Sure answers are likely not forthcoming in a show with as broad a scope as this, but a feeling of hope persists. By celebrating its own history, the PRC attests to the digital revolution as a constructive enhancement of a field that has grown unstoppably since its invention.

Photographic Resource Center of Boston – [www.prcboston.org](http://www.prcboston.org)

D'Lynne Plummer also contributed to this article. She is a frequent reviewer for *Art New England*. Shawn Hill has been writing about art in Boston since 1990. He is an instructor in art history at Montserrat College of Art, Beverly, MA.



