

World in a Jar: War and Trauma



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**Society for Photographic Education
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© Robert Hirsch, *World in a Jar: War and Trauma*, 2008.

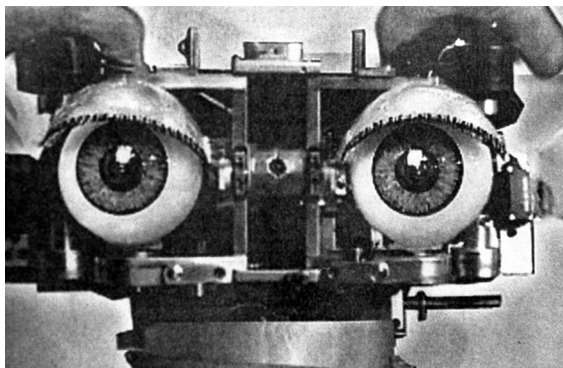
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Some images originally appeared in color.

To learn more about this project and other works visit:

www.lightresearch.net

Book design by Anna Kuehl.



Welcome to Society for Photographic Education's National 2008 Conference in Denver.

I want to thank everyone at Elsevier's Focal Press for this opportunity to discuss the key themes and philosophies that informed the making of my pictorial sculpture *World in Jar: War & Trauma*. I will also talk about how this thinking served as the aesthetic and conceptual foundation of my latest book *Light and Lens: Photography in the Digital Age* by creating a model that facilitates an open dialogue about our relationship to the world and the various means available for us to translate complex intellectual situations into a comprehensible visual language. Accompanying my talk are PowerPoint presentations of the *World in Jar* installation and select project images (images are available at: www.lightresearch.net) followed by pictures from *Light and Lens*. I will be happy to take questions at the conclusion of my talk.

Following an aesthetic strategy of search and discovery, *World in a Jar: War & Trauma* utilizes the camera as a cultural tool to curate and re-imagine key components from historical

and original images to explore the workings of our collective societal memory involving loss, popular culture, religion, tragedy, and the nature of evil over the past four centuries. *World in a Jar* evolved out of my immediate response to the events of 9/11 and has allowed me to use camera vision to personalize large themes by dislocating the specifics in favor of the general. It is shaped by my visual re-examination of history, which is fueled by my collecting of photography books and pictures. These sources allow me to rework and reinterpret images to explore life's Big issues and to ponder what history and images can and cannot teach us.

World in a Jar is a freeform sculptural montage that rethinks the customary linear narrative by offering a supermarket of moveable images. The original installation consisted of 850 individual image jars, stacked 4 high on a 50 x 4 x 2 foot serpentine display pedestal, which was surrounded by ten individually framed 40 x 60 inch prints. Each glass jar contains the same picture, a twin printed twice on a black field (akin to a 19th century stereo card), which lets the image to be seen from multiple points of view. Each jarred image serves as an interchangeable viewing block, allowing it to be a perpetual work in progress that recreates itself each time it is installed. This permits each photograph to not only present its own split-second historical reference, but also informs the context and interpretation of the surrounding images. There are no captions to anchor the images to particular events, which allows the images to transcend their specific

time-based circumstances. Rather, images freely float in an ambiguous and enigmatic space, encouraging viewers to interact and expand meanings based on their own experiences. This engagement is a reminder how photographs continue to seduce us into believing that they are objective records, when in fact all images are not what they initially appear to be and require thoughtful interpretation. This open-ended production, emulating how the puzzles and paradoxes of our own memories are constructed, can convey an endless tale about the human condition that exists outside of chronological time.



Where Does Art Come From?

Through the process of making representations of representations, I contemplate issues of reality, originality, and reproduction. Photography is an ideal medium for exploring such questions because it recycles the real. A camera makes no judgments about the subjects in front of it, capturing anything touched by light. It is the human-guided direction that can imaginatively put the pictorial results to new uses and assign fresh meanings. Thus, originality is the capacity to think and act in-

dependently and in turn to express ideas differently from previously recognized views of a similar subject. Inventive ideas come from re-contextualizing the past. We constantly draw in memories of things we never directly experienced through arts and the media. The more one knows about how art is made, the more derivative and evolutionary one knows art is. For artists, nothing dies; instead everything is grist to be transformed into something else.

Our society's cultural heritage is founded on a practice of transformative art—one of borrowing, sharing, re-borrowing, and amending—the full range of ways new art learns from, builds on, and emerges out of the old. In music one can hear how Scott Joplin borrows from W.C. Handy, George Gershwin borrows from Joplin, Igor Stravinsky and Miles Davis from Gershwin, Aaron Copland from Stravinsky and Davis, and now movie composer John Williams, who has scored all of Steven Spielberg's blockbusters, from Copland. Consider one of our popular cultural icons: *Steamboat Willie*, the 1928 Walt Disney cartoon that introduced Mickey Mouse. *Steamboat Willie* is based on Buster Keaton's 1928 silent film *Steamboat Bill, Jr.*, which itself borrowed from a 1910 song, "Steamboat Bill." Disney snatched creativity from the life around him, mixed that with his own talent, and then imprinted that mixture into the character of our society. Select an art form and you will find this 1-2-3 combination of snatch, mix, and imprint. As Pablo Picasso quipped, "Bad artists copy; great artists steal."

Thing in Itself

My motivation is to *evoke* an interior state of consciousness and grapple with a subject beyond its external physical structure. This approach can be likened to the Japanese concept of *shashin*, which says something is only true when it integrates the outer appearance with the inner makeup of a subject. American writer Herman Melville referred to the purely surface view of reality as “a pasteboard mask.” Such a multi-sheeted mask conceals the intuitive world of the “thing in itself”—a deep structure of cultural, political, and psychological models that inform the realities “behind” or beyond what we can observe with our five physical senses—an idea dating back to Plato’s concept of delving into the multifaceted, interior panorama of the world.

What Do Pictures Mean?

Most of the images in this project were made from other photographs, as well as from drawings, paintings, and prints, for the purpose of questioning the nature of the photographic image. It is a Socratic process allowing me to engage in a philosophical and visual dialogue with other times, places, and makers, flowing from the principle there is no correct first version of how an image should look. I am not redefining an image as much as I am inquiring into the metaphysical contradictions and opposing social forces that swirl around each image. I am asking each picture a question while examining the origin of the image and how its significance has changed over time.

Plato understood the importance of this communication practice when he observed, “those who tell the stories also rule.” Plato also believed most people were not very bright. He thought the masses would follow a self-destructive path and therefore needed a Big Noble Lie to maintain social order and moral behavior. Under this paradigm, the falsehood is the means of achieving the principal objective of a well-ordered and moral society.



The power elite appreciates that images, as well as words, rule dreams, and dreams rule actions. Such images, dreams, and actions are not necessarily benevolent and can, in fact, be malicious. Evil can manifest itself as an obligatory fairytale in which one-group concocts a narrative of self-glorification that de-humanizes another group. Such myth formation converts *Those* people into powerful enemies whose existence is responsible for society’s ills and pose a terrible danger to the future of the group seeking power, thus justifying their elimination from the society to save it. The Nazis produced a culture of cruelty by fabricating giant lies, such as the 1940 film *The*

Eternal Jew, which portrayed Jews as wandering cultural parasites, who were referred to as cancer, excrement, and plague. In 1994 a similar dis-information campaign was carried out in Rwanda where the Hutus demonized the Tutsis as “cockroaches” who had to be evicted or destroyed and then proceeded to indiscriminately murder 800,000 of them in a genocidal campaign lasting just 100 days.

The more outrageous the lie, the more the perpetrators seem to be motivated by it. Eventually these lies become ubiquitous, contaminating and bogging down the entire society with falsehoods. As the poet Edna St. Vincent Millay pointed out, “It’s not true that life is one damn thing after another. It’s one damned thing over and over.”

Even now that Photoshop has become a verb, people still want to trust their own eyes, even when they are aware they are only seeing pixels, thus validating Groucho Marx’s observational wisecrack, “Who you going believe—me—or your lyin’ eyes?” Yet people continue to expect photography to render reality transparent and understandable rather than acknowledging its inherently devious nature and ability to make lies visible.

During the mid-twentieth century, Henri Cartier-Bresson’s concept of “The Decisive Moment,” that fraction of a second when the essence of a subject is revealed, defined full-frame 35mm photographic truth. Its foundation was constructed around the hand-held camera’s ability to freeze and isolate action,

giving it the appearance of truth. Unfortunately this theory ignores that such Decisive Moments were disconnected from their original context and sequence of events. This omission overlooks the time before and after the shutter is clicked during which any subject before the lens is open to infinite manipulation of meaning. The mainstream embrace of this notion confused photography’s ability to capture detail with its capacity to deliver the truth.

Today we can have dynamic, digital moments constructed from many different pieces of time and space. These images challenge past assumptions by asking: Is a constructed image innately less truthful than a Decisive Moment, and can an assembled picture reveal previously unseen truths? Consider Jeff Wall’s highly structured image, *Dead Troops Talk (A Vision After an Ambush of a Red Army Patrol, near Moqor, Afghanistan, Winter 1986)*, 1992. Wall’s elaborate devastating war scene fabrication, camouflaged as truth, describes a real situation that defied the photographic approach of grabbing a scene out of the flow of real time. Wall’s methodology skates on the edge between life and theater to point out that The Truth is actually where our legends commingle with fact to form an accepted cultural reality, which is why allegory or symbolic expression remains a favorite method for representing moral, political, and spiritual messages.

The Double Image & The Uncanny

Photography is the act of seeing double. A photograph becomes a stand-in for the original. The photographic process is part of our cultural quest for no-hassle experiences and affordable status items, from the simulacra of Las Vegas to art and fashion forgeries. In the project's catalog essay (available at: www.lightresearch.net), Gary Nickard discusses Otto Rank's *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study* (1925), in which the uncanny—that is, the seemingly intense sensation of the supernatural, strange, unfamiliar, weird, and unsettling—arises from the doubling of reality in the form of ghosts, reflections, shadows, and twins, and how this eerie notion can include photography. In one sense, a photograph is a shadow or reflection that is formed by a lens and captured onto light-sensitive material. If a photograph can be identified as a category of Rank's "double," then it can also serve as an example of the "uncanny," an "energetic denial of the power of death."

In *Camera Lucida* (1981) Roland Barthes concluded that the relationship of the photograph to the double, its confusion with reality and time, constitute an uncanny concern with death. Thus it is precisely the direct and real connection between the subject and its image—the certainty of a physical existence within the past—that death and photography become inextricably bound, providing a human-made process for both circumventing the grim reaper and confronting the transience of life.



The Depiction of Suffering

Since the 1980s, the sharp reproach about photographic representation by critics, such as Martha Rosler, Abigail Solomon-Godeau, and Allan Sekula, left little opportunity in the academy for documentary style work. One of their principal criticisms swirled around the depiction of suffering, a critique rarely applied to the other arts. These academics contend photographs, such as those by Sebastião Salgado and James Nachtwey, should not make their subjects artistically pleasing for this practice contaminates the so-called "real" with visual pleasure, thus beautifying pain for viewers. These academic critics label such images as being detrimental to constructive social engagement rather than recognizing they might awaken one's compassion, and that such an acknowledgment could be a first step toward social justice. Pictures can be exploited, but de facto censorship is worst. Yes, the act of picture making involves applying aesthetic principles to a subject, but more importantly it transforms a subject. A good photographer can capture and transmit a subject's sensibility to viewers. Although there are limits on what photography can represent, and any emotional attachment to an image is unstable and sub-

ject to manipulation, it is necessary to feel and acknowledge the suffering of others before we can act to alleviate it. Often we humans seem to be hopelessly overwhelmed and powerless when confronted with the suffering of individuals other than ourselves. One way we can overcome this is by recognizing the anguish of others by seeing it in pictures. Such a multiplicity of images, as in *World in a Jar*, makes one conscious of the complexity of the process of representation in a more active and inquiring way. Thus suppressing such images curtails any form of intellectual, emotional or social engagement.



Since 9/11 some critics have revisited their previous positions. In her book, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), Susan Sontag changed her stance about the power of photographs to represent deprivation, humiliation, and suffering in a positive manner. Why? Perhaps Sontag realized that pictures are more accessible and visceral than words. Since people are not intimidated by photographs they see privately in books, magazines, TV, or on the Internet it encourages an immediate response in which individuals can question what these photographs show them. Pictures can make

us feel and even think, but only if we develop the creative power to imagine ourselves in situations besides our own. Using the mind's eye we can identify with the suffering of the person being pictured and substitute our image for their image. In spite of this, neither art nor artist is protection against cruelty and bestiality. Nonetheless I do think there is the prospect, if not for redemptive liberation, at least for some kind of solace in the process of making and viewing pictures.

In our own country the defining image of the Iraq invasion has shifted from the official media moment of the toppling of a statue of Saddam Hussein to the sadistic amateur snapshots made in Abu Ghraib Prison to videos of roadside bombings posted by insurgents on the Internet. The result of such hideous pictures has been a simultaneous protective indifference and an inculcation of compassion. How come? An image's authority is determined as much by imagination and memory as by its indexical relationship to the real. Engaging images acknowledge the complexity of life through their capacity to sensitize and stimulate our latent exploratory senses that generate *empathy*. Such photographs assert ideas and perceptions that we recognize as our own, but could not have given concrete form to without first having seen those images. Such visualizations can bear witness, which may raise our consciousness about our own passivity, indifference, and cruelty, allowing one to be the exception who follows the counsel of the Talmud: "He who saves a single life, saves the entire world."



Nature of Evil?

For ages philosophers have wrestled to define the nature of Evil with little success. This is because evil threatens human reason by challenging our expectation that the world makes sense. The West largely failed to understand Nazi Germany's extremism because rationalism is ingrained in our thinking. Rationalism does not permit us to recognize such evilness because we think all problems can be solved through talk and compromise. In actuality evil is often irrational, generating depraved behavior on an individual level; as a result from a failure of imagination, the inability to see beyond one's own circumstances, and the reluctance to think for oneself.

In 1651 Thomas Hobbes wrote (*Leviathan*) people were naturally wicked and basically selfish creatures who would do anything they find pleasurable or that would increase their economic and/or social position. Left to their own devices, people would act on their foul impulses. Individuals commit vile deeds that are within their reach, making the most of their opportunities, and doing what they think they can get away with. Evil can also

be contagious, with people taking their clues from their peers about what constitutes acceptable behavior. Thus Hobbes thought a strong government was essential to protect people from their own odious, self-centered deeds. Without a legitimate and rational Authority there would be no security. According to Hobbes people would constantly be in a "state of nature"—that is—a "war of every man against every man," making life "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short," and leaving no place for art or culture.

Human Evil

In the past people believed in Natural Evil, such as earthquakes, floods, tsunamis, and tornadoes, which were brought on by a vengeful God to punish the wicked. Although fundamentalists may still believe events such as 9/11 are the result of America's wicked ways, most people acknowledge evil in terms of human cruelty, with Auschwitz as an extreme manifestation. Whether expressed in secular or theological terms, history makes it clear that goodness and evil are human constructions and there is no intrinsic code of ethics.

In her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963), Hannah Arendt postulated that evil, regardless of where it takes place, could simply be a function of banality—the tendency of ordinary clerks and teachers to conform and carry out despicable acts without critically thinking about the results of their action or inaction. History tells us that the suffering of the innocent is not the result of individual power-hungry, paranoid,

sociopathic, mass-murderers like King Leopold II, Hitler, Stalin, Mao, or Pol Pot. Rather, the mass catalog of evil is made-up by average, street-level bureaucrats who actually implement the horrendous policies and the general populace—all who benefit in some way from these death-worshipping ideologies. This sort of self-deception, where people compartmentalize and rationalize their actions, allows ordinary people to carry out acts of extraordinary evil. In Eichmann's case, he purposely ignored the "Golden Rule" and its principle of humane reciprocity. Rather, he claimed no responsibility because he was just "doing his job"—"He did his *duty*...; he not only obeyed *orders*, he also obeyed the *law*," demonstrating how deception is evil's servant.

Immanuel Kant advocated that people are their own moral legislators; in Eichmann's case, he knowingly forfeited being the "master of his own deeds" and made Adolf Hitler his personal legislator. Here evil is the result of an absence or failure to act. Arendt insisted that moral choice remains even under totalitarian conditions, and that this choice has political consequences even when the chooser is politically powerless stating: "[U]nder conditions of terror most people will comply but *some people will not*, just as the lesson of the countries to which the Final Solution was proposed is that 'it could happen' in most places, but *it did not happen everywhere*. Humanly speaking, no more is required, and no more can reasonably be asked, for this planet to remain a place fit for human habitation."



Conclusions

Just as most black-and-white photographs are shades of gray, people are rarely one thing or another. Rather we are a continuum of numerous biological and cultural elements, which makes it possible for humans to simultaneously pigeonhole dissimilar viewpoints. This gives us the capacity to continually ignore, change and/or diminish the real-world effects of our actions and inactions.

Evil is more encompassing than being a murderer. Evil also occurs in those of us who are members of the Save the Children Federation and who recycle our trash, but who on occasion realize that the idealism we have chosen to pursue is also selfish and such selfishness seems to be hardwired. In his book, *The Selfish Gene* (1976), evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins asserts a gene will operate in its own interest even if that means destroying the organism it inhabits, thereby making Selfishness the core of human existence. Dawkins' position supports Hobbes's case for a strong central authority to curb human self-interest and maintain societal order. As American

President James Madison wrote in the *Federalist Papers*, “But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary.”

The combination of biological pre-determinism and the random action of quantum physics makes Swiss cheese out of classical religious notions of predestination, heaven and hell, as well as such utopian political ideologies of communism and fascism. These belief systems have their roots in the authoritarian impulse of Faith, which criminalizes Thoughts as well as actions. Their common denominator of submission makes no distinction between public and private life and insists on arbitrating everything from diet to sex, always asking the same question: Are you one of *US* or are you one of *THEM*? Such imposed orthodoxy makes pluralism—the tolerance of difference—impossible to achieve.



© Mitch Epstein. *Biloxi, Mississippi*, 2005.

People ask me if working with such subjects and images is depressing, but just as darkness is another shade of light, this state of mind can be a compelling motivator when used to commune with one’s own soul. Darkness can bring a silent calm that restores our mental, physical, and spiritual well-being. Often, compelling art is the result of angst and tears. Regardless, it is better to candidly examine the human character so as to be more prepared for what life might deliver to our door. Much of my contentment grows from being fully engaged in thinking, making pictures, and writing about the world. I reflect on what the ancient Israelites called *hochma*—the science of the heart—the capacity to see, to feel and then to act as if the future depended on you.

This belief system ties into the notion I call the “*Possibility Scale*,” which proclaims: “If I can imagine it, there could be a way to make it happen.” It is transcendent artistic thinking—one that seeks to reach beyond the range of known experiences—encouraging one to adventurously visit regions once deemed out of bounds or inhabited by demons to push the limits of our understanding. Consider Leonardo da Vinci, Jules Vern, H. G. Wells, and now William Gibson, the father of cyberpunk science fiction, all of whose fantastic works, created outside the margins of their times, anticipated future inventions and societal transformations.

Time is the key. Time calls all of us and measures change. If there is no time, there is no change. If there is no change, there is no ac-

tion. If there is no action, life stagnates. And we need action to foster creation, for creation propels life and provides hope. Where there is no hope, evil takes hold. The real struggle is between hope and evil, for it is at this juncture that the mind's eye can offer up possibilities for new and innovative realities. Can photography play a role in this process? I think it is possible...

Light & Lens: Photography in the Digital Age

Both *World in a Jar* and *Light & Lens: Photography in the Digital Age* follow the premise of applying what we know to what we do and being accountable for our actions. Each project's flexible framework is engaging to diverse audiences, which promotes multiple interpretations. Both encourage us to think of the photographic process as a dynamic, changing entity, capable of functioning as a creative, cultural tool, and how the visual results can affect the way we know the world and define our place within it.



© Susan Evans. *Crime Scene #4*, 1991.

The widespread acceptance of digital photography necessitates a rethinking about how beginning college-level photography courses are structured and taught. With this in mind, *Light & Lens* has been designed from the ground-up with a fresh attitude about teaching introductory photographic imaging. *Light & Lens* meets challenges of this transitional time by clearly and concisely stressing the fundamental, “forever” aesthetic and technical building blocks necessary to create thought-provoking digitally-based photographs. The methodology is practical, explaining how theoretical principles directly relate to imagemaking by presenting the means to realize one's ideas with digital photography.

Light & Lens pursues the conceptual stance that camera vision is the primary skill of a photo-based imagemaker, by highlighting composition, design, and light as the strategic elements of photographic seeing. By concentrating on the camera as the initial and principal imagemaking tool, emphasis is placed on how to observe and use cameras to capture visual ideas. Once these skills are mastered, one is then prepared to tackle post-capture software techniques. *Light & Lens* does this by thoughtfully presenting how to use the four essentials that comprise every camera image: aperture, focal length, focus, and shutter speed. Digital single-lens reflex cameras (DSLRs) are emphasized because of their versatility and manual control, but attention is also given to how resourceful photographers can utilize point-and-shoot and cell phone cameras, as well as scanners, to effectively capture images.

Light & Lens is an adventurous idea book, featuring numerous classroom-tested assignments that have been gathered from a variety of photographic educators. These exercises encourage readers to critically explore and make images from the perspective of *the photographer's eye*, one whose foundation is centered on solid ideas and aesthetics rather than technological ability. Ideas are the dominant and driving guideposts; methods are learned and implemented to achieve one's vision. Technical information is presented to foster an understanding of the basic principles affecting how digital images can be formed and revised. By concentrating on the thought process behind the creation of successful photographic images, *Light & Lens* will not be rapidly outdated nor overwhelm readers with complex and ever-changing technical matters.

Since digital imaging software programs can be complex and changeable, *Light & Lens* takes the tactic of succinctly covering key imaging methods, but it is not a software handbook or a camera manual. Companion ancillary materials, available from Focal Press and other sources, serve students' detailed technical needs. Terms are discussed and defined upon their first appearance in the book so the surrounding framework supplies the needed background information. There are few references to the analog darkroom, as these initially have little relevance to most beginning students who have grown up in a digital environment. When appropriate, additional sources of information and supplies are provided at the end of a topic.



© Doug DuBois. *My Sister's Bedroom*, 2004.

That said, the spectacular and rapid technological transformations that continue apace mean that whatever digital imaging skills one learns as a college freshman will need updating before graduation. To successfully deal with this cycle of change, it is essential for imagemakers to develop and deploy a set of long-term learning skills, including how to utilize online information and tutorials, blogs, listservs, podcasts, and imaging software Help sections to stay abreast of the changing technology.

Discussions about contemporary issues affecting digital imagemaking, from appropriation and copyright to weblogs and “mashups,” are integrated throughout the book. Artistic and cultural references, from polymath Leonardo da Vinci to comedian Stephen Colbert, are intermingled as well, for meaning is derived from a cultural framework. Different goals and roles of photography are contrasted to reveal how a various approaches can shape

both the “what” and the “how” of an image and a multitude of interpretations.

Light & Lens brings together a compilation of my combined experiences as an imagemaker, curator, educator, and writer, with additions from numerous other photographic educators who are credited throughout the text. Chapter 1 begins with a historic analysis of why and how pictures have been made and concludes with an extended series of questions and answers that are routinely asked at this stage of photographic education. Then the text moves into a discussion about design as the visual foundation of imaging (Chapter 2). A chapter dealing with fundamental image capture strategies utilizing cameras and scanners follows (Chapter 3). Next, technical matters of exposure and filters are covered (Chapter 4). This is followed with Chapters 5-7, which explain the qualities of light, observation, and methods of expressing time and space. Chapter 8 takes on the fundamentals of the digital file as captured by the camera, displayed on a monitor, and outputted as a print. Chapter 9 provides coverage of how to present and preserve your work. A chapter covering how to see and dynamically use your camera is offered in Chapter 10. A subsequent chapter (Chapter 11) conveys lively methods and exercises to help one become a critical visual problem-solver and evaluator, and how to succinctly talk and write about the ideas that form your work. Finally, a series of assignments are given in Chapter 12 to help expand your ideas and vision. The book concludes with addendums on health and safety

issues plus career options. Each chapter is divided into discrete units that facilitate easily finding topics of interest. This arrangement also encourages readers to browse around and discover their own ordering structure of the material.

Light & Lens's curated contemporary art program consists of inspiring examples by 190 international artists plus well-structured illustrative visual aids, whose common dominator is that each became digital at some point during the creation and distribution process. These images were collected through an open international call for work, which was followed up by inviting selected artists to participate.



© Loretta Lux. *Sasha and Ruby*, 2005.

After reviewing thousands of images, certain trends emerged. Many imagemakers are moving away from single, still images and embracing the fluidity and cinematic character of interconnected moments, which blur the boundaries between moving and still images

and expand traditional concepts of photographic time and space, even when the final result is one image. In a post-9/11 world, more imagemakers are looking outward, to broader, less personal issues dealing with security, the war in Iraq, climate change, and natural disasters. There is also a much wider interest in science, as evidenced in images derived from microscopes, telescopes, and satellites or the referencing of scientific processes. From a technical viewpoint, there is a dramatic rise in makers using a scanner as a camera. New digital printers are allowing photographers to straightforwardly increase the physical size of their prints, giving them a sense of scale and wall presence that easily competes with painting. The result of this research is an image program that reflects the ingenious thinking of today's digital imagemakers.

In addition to the work of widely recognized international artists, I have included exceptional images by emerging and under-recognized artists, whose coherent bodies of work are often too nonconformist for mainline venues. All the outstanding visual examples provide models for points of departure. These photographic works remind us that all images are not equal and some pictures do communicate more broadly and significantly than others. As visual paradigms, they provide important guidelines to appreciate and understand visual culture, but are in no way intended to be prescriptive. Readers are encouraged to learn the rules and standards, but not to hesitate to set them to the side or do the opposite anytime they interfere with an inventive vision.

Additionally, to inject the voices of the photographers into the project, I distilled their statements about their vital aesthetic and technical choices into the image captions to provide readers with insight and motivation about the creation process. In the spirit of transmitting knowledge, ninety-nine percent of the *Light and Lens* artists have generously agreed to make their images available as a free, low-resolution download to qualified instructors for classroom use.

This exciting time of photographic evolution from analog to digital can be unsettling for some. Ultimately, it is important to utilize the advantages that digital imagemaking provides. With its capability for limitless shooting, immediate feedback, in-camera programming, and post-capture image modifications, along with archival desktop printing and online publishing, digital imaging allows us to realize Henry Fox Talbot's dream of every person being their own imagemaker and publisher.

Robert Hirsch



© Jeff Wall. After *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison, the Prologue, 1999-2000.

