



Photography Now 2011

PHOTOGRAPHY NOW 2011

curated by Vince Aletti

April 9 – May 30, 2011

I hadn't really planned it that way, but I began judging the entries for Photography Now, the Center for Photography at Woodstock's 2011 exhibition, only 10 days after returning from two weeks in Amsterdam as a judge for this year's World Press Photo awards.

The two experiences could not have been more different, but the first definitely affected the second. In Amsterdam, I was one of nine judges sitting in a darkened room viewing and voting on more than 100,000 images as they flashed by on a big screen. Although there were categories in portraiture, nature, and sports, most of what we saw was hardcore photojournalism, recapping 2010 in disaster and death: Haiti, Mexico, Bangkok, Chile, Pakistan, the Gulf of Mexico. Wherever there were earthquakes, floods, riots, drug murders, assassinations, stampedes, oil spills—and intrepid photographers to cover them. The work was often hard to look at; the process relentless, intense, and exhausting. But if arriving at a consensus for the final awards was often frustrating, the exchange among the judges was always spirited and, in the end, exhilarating.

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After that, judging just over 300 submissions for the CPW exhibition was a breeze. Although much of the work dealt with serious topics, there were no severed heads, no mass graves. I was grateful to see happy children, hummingbirds in flight, a series of wooded landscapes; even if the work was disappointing or ludicrous, it wasn't painful. And the solitary nature of the process—clicking through images on my home computer screen, with no one else to explain, exclaim, or complain to—made it much faster. But after Amsterdam, I missed the

interplay of opinions, or a persuasive colleague's nudge to go back and look at something again. In a sense, I continued to channel that colleague and kept a running list of entries that deserved a second look, one or two of which made it through to the final ten.

Early on, I began to make a mental list of dos and don'ts for photographers who enter competitions. Do focus on one coherent body of work, but know when you've made your point. Don't include everything—edit and edit again; unless you're truly brilliant, less is usually more. Do stop to consider where your talents lie—what is it that you're actually good at? Throwing a bunch of disparate images into a portfolio and leaving it up to the judge to decide what's best only means that the good gets tossed out with the bad. Don't (over)explain; if the work doesn't speak for itself, your artist's statement won't make up for it. But do have something to say, and a distinctive, personal way of saying it.

In the end, the work that most interested me was experimental and process-oriented – in several cases (notably, **Bradly Dever Treadaway**, **Mariah Doren & Johanna Paas**, **Anne Arden McDonald**), photographs that involved drawing, collage, or chemical effects. At a time when digitally captured and enhanced photographs can achieve new levels of flawlessness, I find myself increasingly drawn to handmade, inherently flawed images. Certainly, that's what stood out from the submissions this year—work with some complexity and ambiguity, work that was constructed or crafted, work with a very individual voice. No question, some of the effects that I was most taken with—the lovely, ghostly layering in **Matthew Dols's** Sentimentalist series, **Chad Kleitsch's** celestial lights—were the result of sophisticated digital techniques. But I wasn't judging the means, I was concerned with the results.

I've always been interested in the photographic portrait and ended up choosing two very different approaches to that genre. Yo Imae makes classically straightforward but remarkably sensitive black-and-white pictures of solitary figures that remind me of Judith Joy Ross, and Rita Barros, working in color, arranges close-up details of a person and his environment into an intriguing, Hockney-esque puzzle. But other entries in portraiture didn't engage me as much as the ones that, even when they didn't foreground process, flirted with abstraction and mystery: **Christa Kreeger Bowden's** studies of intricate nests and roots; **Robin Dru Germany's** jewel-like, half-underwater views of a luminous seashore; and **Mikhail Gubin's** shots of the flickering spirits behind a grimy window.

No matter the style, the photographers that stopped my clicking finger and made me look closely more than once had one thing in common: a satisfying sense of resolution. They may already have moved onto other subjects and other styles, but with this group of images they found the ideal way to resolve form and content, intellect, and emotion.

- Vince Aletti, April 2011

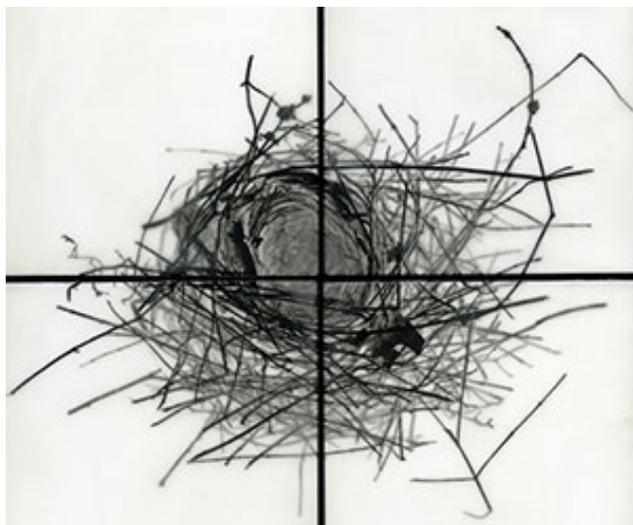
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Vince Aletti *reviews photography exhibitions for* The New Yorker's "Goings on About Town"

section and writes a regular column about photo books for Photograph. He is the winner of the 2005 Infinity Award in writing from the International Center of Photography, where he was an adjunct curator for the museum's 2009 "Year of Fashion," including Avedon Fashion 1944-2000 and Weird Beauty: Fashion Photography Now. Male, a book of photographs and other artwork from Aletti's collection, was published by Andrew Roth's PPP Editions at the end of 2008, following exhibitions of that work at New York's White Columns and Vancouver's Presentation House. The Disco Files 1973-1978, a collection of Aletti's weekly columns on disco, was published in spring 2009 by DJhistory in the UK.



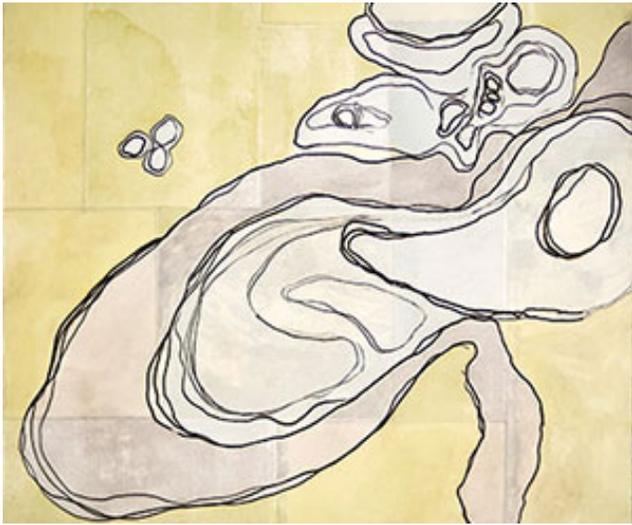
Rita Barros



Christa Kreeger Bowden



Matthew Dols



Mariah Doren and Johanna Paas



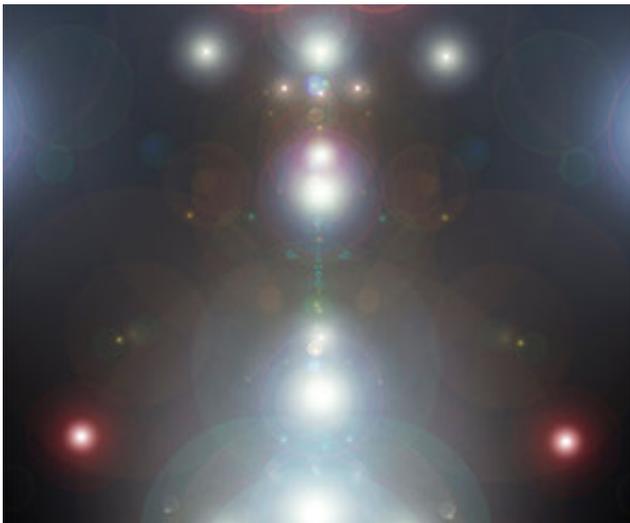
Robin Germany



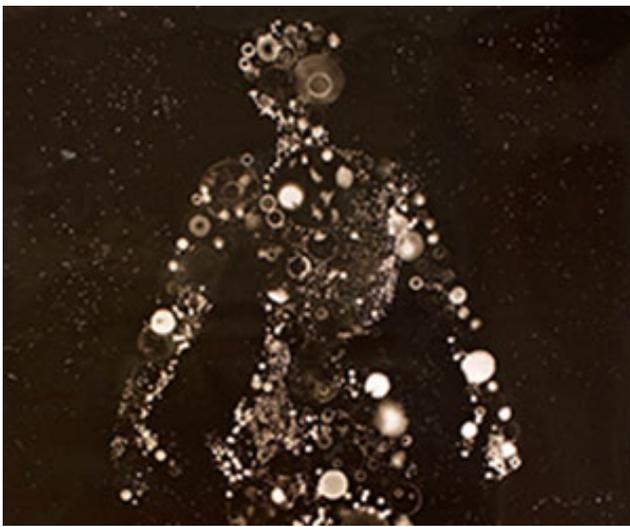
Mikhail Gubin



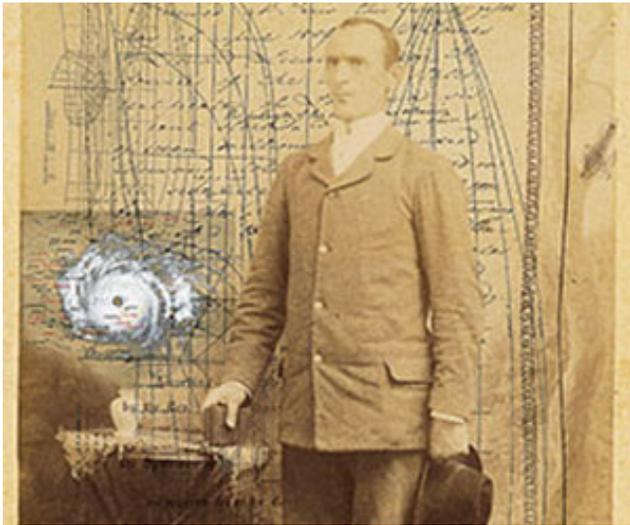
Yo Imae



Chad Kleitsch



Anne Arden McDonald



Bradly Dever Treadway



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