

Photography, a long awaited SNO exhibition project, explores the boundaries of what might be considered abstraction in photography.

The exhibition examines conceptual approaches to the medium that go beyond the traditional idea of taking photographs. It looks at the complex notion of why photography is or isn't abstraction. In this exhibition each artist brings a primary structural concern for what abstraction stands for, in direct opposition to the expanded system of captions, or symbolism or metaphor in representational image making.

Virtually everything today could be said to be a photograph, to be photographed, or to be a record in the archive of the new technological and digital way we think and behave. Traditional processes of taking photographs and creating moving images have undergone a revolutionary change in the digital age, so the framework for making the photographic image has shifted profoundly. SNO sees the inspired constructive works in this exhibition as conscious departures, standing in very deliberate opposition to most photographic and filmic practice, which finds a representative point in time to narrate or represent the world in which we live.

From the time the medium was invented photographers have been fascinated by the magic of light and darkness of the world that we all inhabit, and the artists of abstract photography retain this fascination. But in a variety of ways they also engage in the meta-language of poetic and philosophical investigations. Through this approach, abstract photography can transmit to the viewer remarkably tangible qualities and dramatic tensions. The desire to form these concrete outcomes has motivated each of the artists in this exhibition.

The aim of this exhibition is to expose contemporary artistic positions that take the processes of the photo and the filmic beyond what the camera itself may see or record. By setting reductive conditions, and then experimentally taking a combination of approaches to framing the subjects, these artists can render their world in this **other** way of seeing.

-- Ruark Lewis, curator



Reflections, Václav Krůček, 2004

On a sunny day on 6 January 2004, I placed a roll of reflective foil on the table. I watched the sunrays hitting the roll and started to record the process on my 6x6 camera. I repeated the process the next day, placing 2 colour foils under a skylight opening. These works were created in Surrey Street, Darlington during my stay in 2003-2004 and initiated a series of photographic cycles.

-- Václav Krůček



The Sum of Everything and More, Karin Lettau, 2014

Irish sound artist Thomas McConville's recent audio work draws largely from painting, literature and photography.

Through research into the literature of James Joyce, the paintings of Picasso and the photographic work of David Hockney, McConville became interested in how time and perspective can be sensed in his compositions.

He considers the recording of acoustic samples as analogous to the process of photography since it entails capturing a moment in time. He uses a collage-based approach where, in some cases, recordings that represent experiences from an entire year are condensed into a few seconds.

In the process of making a musical composition, the sonic 'snapshots' are decontextualized from their respective moments, forming a new narrative in which contrasting recordings are placed side by side. In this way the work acts as a distortion of time, constituting both an audio photo album and a fragmented incomplete narrative.

In *Shop* (2104) he creates forms and processes within the music that emulate the cyclical structure of James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*. It is a cyclical piece of music that begins halfway through a musical phrase and ends halfway through the same phrase, creating 'endless' music when looped. Each cycle of the piece lasts approximately 8 minutes before beginning again. The work contains elements of cubism in having sounds can be heard from several positions at once, giving the listener multiple perspectives of the same piece.

-- Ian Andrews

... The aesthetics of self-design, the decoration of our bodies with accoutrements, jewels, fashion items, spectacles, cosmetics, and all the other feathers we use to make ourselves look more beautiful, is perhaps also one of our most primal artistic endeavours. Today self-design displays itself mostly in the digitised images we take on our phones, carefully select, edit, and then choose to exhibit to our own special audience, be it Facebook friends, or Instagram followers ...

... 'The language that surrounds photography betrays this association with death and loss: shooting, framing, capturing...' The images on display here, however, are less about taking photographs, than they are about making images. Making an image entails a commitment to publicize, advertise and ultimately to expose ourselves. 'What is exposed can be put on trial — or — maybe it can be exposed because a trial has occurred.'

Beauty, however, always seemed to dream of a place beyond judgment. In his book *On Love* the 19th Century realist novelist, Stendhal, famously wrote that for the artist, as opposed to the spectator, beauty is nothing but a 'promesse du bonheur' — a promise of happiness.

... when my Mum wants to say 'I'm imagining something' she says, in her own mother tongue: 'Ich stelle mir etwas vor' — 'I'm placing something in front of me.' She makes herself into an image, and makes for herself an image. The images displayed here were made with a special camera, her iPhone ...

-- Karin and Paris Lettau



Untitled, Carl Plate, 1973

SNO 109 —

Photography

Nov 8 — Dec 10, 2014

Artists:

Václav Krůček,

Karin Lettau

Thomas McConville

Carl Plate

Jacky Redgate

Rik Rue

Vsevolod Vlaskine

Carl Plate's collages were a well-kept secret during his lifetime.

His earliest collages (1938-1946) used photo media cut-ups to create ways of seeing that inverted expectations. He adopted collage, combining 'found' photography with mixed media – crayon, paint, ink – as a means to liberate his creation of form and movement from reference to objective or 'seen' reality. Throughout the late 1950s until the early 1970s he created what he called his collage 'maquettes' (acknowledging their three-dimensionality) as his work embraced non-figuration, developing from his earlier abstraction in the previous decade.

By 1974, he was experimenting with what he called his 'multi-strip' work, each collage taking over a week to construct, using multiple copies of the same source. Plate developed a unique method of first constructing an abstract collage (see 998/75-6, 1065/71), in the process, removing the photographed subjects from their referents. He would then make three identical versions, using three copies of source materials – magazines, travel brochures etc. These he would then slice to create a doubly 'de-figured' image, twice removed from its reference to the objective world. These 'multi-strip' collages move across time and space, prefiguring work made possible by video technologies of later decades.

Plate remained committed throughout his life to the idea of making visible the non-visible. His work drew this response by A. D. S. Donaldson: '...we have a feeling of pleasure engendered by Plate's ability at once to disorient us, to take us away from the source of the image, and to return us happily to a new place, a new world even; Plate's world. Any original image has become unrecognizable, and in this work Plate recombined and reoriented his sources and evinced a fantastic post-pop new image order.'
(ADS Donaldson, 'The Visible Coming to the Aid of the Non-Visible: the Collage of Carl Plate', *Carl Plate Collage 1938-1976*, ed. Cassi Plate, Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Arts Centre, 2009, p. 67)

– Cassi Plate

The series called *Light Throw (Mirrors)* are staged studio photographs constructed by rebounding light from silver, grey and bronze mirrors onto the substrate of the wall.

Light Throw (Mirrors) is a reconstruction of visual effects that occurred unexpectedly in my earlier three-dimensional artwork *Edgeways* (2006), a still life installation of objects and mirrors where objects arranged on a table threw a grid formation of light onto the ceiling. Experimenting with this visual effect using small mirrors, I re-staged the arrangement, photographing it in my bedroom studio, recording 'visible' and 'invisible' elements with light sensitive photographic emulsion. The result is a dislocating effect of light, focus and perspective.

At the beginning of the production of *Light Throw (Mirrors)* I also made a mirror work that transcribes from Ralph Balson's 1941, *Constructive Painting*. Thinking about my shapes in *Edgeways*, I speculated whether Balson had drawn around paint pots or household objects to make templates for the shapes in his paintings. Then, observing another of Balson's works that uses metallic paint, I noticed how light rebounding from its surface creates fascinating visual effects. As part of these investigations I enlarged a photocopy reproduction of the 1941 painting to scale and cut it out. I made further shapes using my original paper patterns and computer aided design (CAD). Leftover mirror fragments of the transcription, cut-out cardboard shapes that I'd stored, and the other mirrors from *Edgeways* created the ultimate enigmatic image of *Light Throw (Mirrors)*.

– Jacky Redgate

Rik Rue's *Fire & Water* is video-for-sound -- what we might call a sound photograph, or a video-painting, combining rock, water, ambient sunlight and sound collage.

A concrete surface becomes a tissue on which reflected light is configured, with the camera

recording the varied movements of a second surface activated by the sun. What we see screened has been distorted over time by a natural systemthe record of a complex biological network. Rue's selection of found objects is vital in creating a transfigured experience for the viewer/listener.

Like other types of collage -- where elements are selected, juxtaposed and re-embedded to form a continuum -- in Rue's work elemental parts are traceable, for each constituent part represents a frame, with the overall image frame becoming a broader focus of meditation.

Known internationally for his sound collages, Rik Rue has also worked as a composer for theatre, dance and in film, and made phonic compositions for radio. In his meticulously conceived video-for-sound works, created and edited with cameraman Peter Oldham, the listener is able to trace visually parts of Rue's methodologies that in individual sound compositions are more often layered beyond recognition or set deep in aural and sound designs.

The visually aided sound work *Fire & Water* resists classification as film or moving image. It is more a 'transfiguration' of matter.

– Ruark Lewis

The photos of the *moonrivers* series came about through relinquishing control over the picture, subject, or movement. Both photographing and post-processing were based on a handful of minimal mechanical protocols, maintaining a state of no control over content.

The *moonrivers* series follows a work on the same visual material in collaboration with choreographer and dancer Tess de Quincey, based on introspective Bodyweather techniques. Those images acted as records of short orbits or syllables circumscribed by the human body in its interaction with the place and light. The *moonrivers* try to go beyond the content of those earlier records towards investigation of forms of flow to which we are exposed.

Flow is something alien to the human movement. Due to its skeletal structure, the mechanics of the human body do not allow flow in its motion, its nature being compression, extension, and rotation. Flowing movement mostly is either a poetic metaphor or a highly controlled, culturally conditioned imitation, as in rituals, dance, or some sports like gymnastics and martial displays, which typically would be associated with arts.

The bloodstream, waves of neurotransmission, or breathed air constantly run through us, but we have very limited or no direct access to them, or control over them. Awareness of those aspects of our physicality comes from the practices distanced from human subjectivity: science on one hand, and on the other, oriental concentration systems like yoga, taijiquan, or meditation, as well as certain dance regimens like Bodyweather.

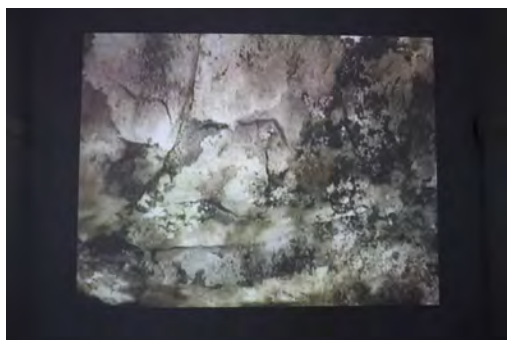
However, in an attempt to take control out of the equation, I was trying to move beyond the point of observation, introspection, or performance. One thing that perhaps is given to us seemingly with no mediation is the perceptual in-flow. Among the still imagery, the landscape form offers itself as a flow, since apart from its representational and structural aspects, it can be deliberately shaped to present an unobstructed flow of the eye glancing across it.

The *moonrivers* connect body (which is me and yet out of my control and does not correspond to anything in my mind, even subconsciously) to the flow of a landscape or a map through the mediation of light.

In the same way that the actual corporeal flows barely make any immediate sense to us, I tried to reduce the internal content of the images to zero. Instead of construction, the *moonrivers* series is based on selection external to it. Any other connotations coming with it are external: flow, rivers, rivers on the moon, the *moonrivers*, an accidental link to Mancini's song, the Moon as a dead celestial body, nostalgic absence, including nostalgic absence of oneself.

– Vsevolod Vlaskine

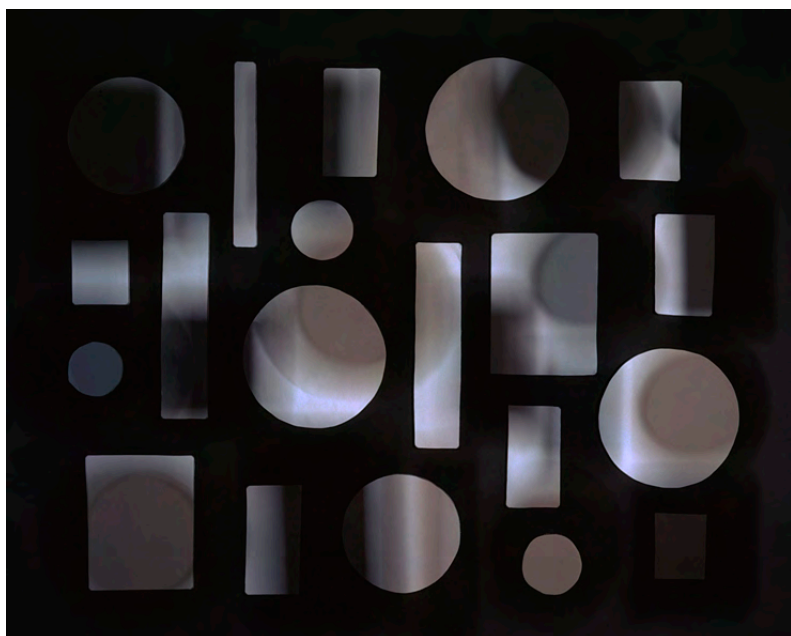
S I
N O
O 9



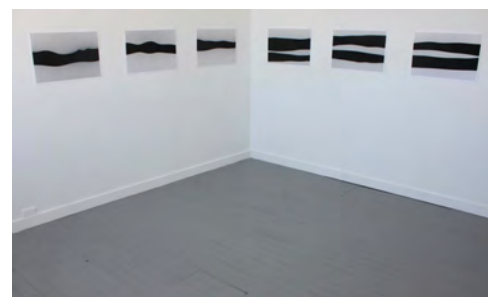
Fire and Water, Ric Rue, 2005



moonrivers, Vsevolod Vlaskine, 2014



Light Throw (Mirror) #8, Jacky Redgate, 2011



SNO
Contemporary Art Projects
sno.org.au

