

2008 Edgy Photography Exhibition

The Center for Fine Art Photography

Juror: Michael Itkoff

Juror's Statement

There is no doubt that the photographic landscape has been turned on its head by the proliferation of digital enhancement and alteration technologies. These days, even media industry professionals representing established news outlets are not immune to the temptation to airbrush a portrait, substitute bodies, and embellish disaster scenes.

The history of photography is marked by experimental visionaries who enjoyed physical manipulation of the tools of the trade to achieve fascinating visual results. Indeed, as soon as the photographic image was successfully 'fixed' in place, photographers began to experiment. The photogram, or the trace left by objects put directly on photographic paper under the light of the enlarger, was one of Man Ray's favorite techniques. Alexander Rodchenko and other Soviet agit-prop artists provided the model for collage by cutting photos and negatives and coupling them with line drawings and even painting. Another example of the genre is Charles Sheeler's masterful picture of the Ford Plant (1927) which consisted of an analog composite created by cutting negatives to achieve a final, integrated print. The pursuit of a visual experience at the cost of an individual photograph's content stands in stark contrast to the 'straight' photographic movement popularized by Steiglitz and his 291 Gallery in New York City. Nonetheless, photo collage and alternative techniques remain vital artistic methods utilized today as digital technology has reinvented the possibilities and further democratized the process of image making itself.

The Center for Fine Art Photography's 'Edgy' competition has asked adventurous members of the photo community to embrace the technology of the past, as well as the present, to create innovative imagery. The imaginations of hundreds of entrants were set loose in this competition unfettered by journalism's ethical concerns or even the common language of representational form.

As a photographer and photography editor, I am accustomed to viewing portfolios conceived around a coherent body of work or an idea. Often, when provided the opportunity to discuss projects directly with photographers, I tend to question motivation in an attempt to go beyond the surface of the image and dive into conversation about the intentions of the artist. In jurying this exhibition I was unable to receive more information from photographers than the images and statements provided through the submission process. More than eight hundred images were judged from which I selected sixty. The constraints of the jurying process forced me to 'reject' over 99% of the images being considered and winnow the selections until a cohesive and resolved group was achieved; not an easy task even for someone who "edits" an abundance of images on a daily basis.

I believe that what a photographer chooses to focus on serves as a mirror of their internal psyche. My first impression, having sifted through hundreds of images for this exhibition, was that many of the submitting artists were quite disturbed. Floating clown heads, alien embryos, dismembered babies and worse appeared before my eyes creating haunting retinal impressions before I could manage to move on to the next image. After growing accustomed to the unusual imagery I began to see this exhibition for what it really was, namely, creative photographers pushing the limits of their imaginations and photo-manipulation skills. The choice of visual techniques and subject matter was not limited to Photoshop's selection of pre-made filters although there were plenty of images that were. I enjoyed seeing many examples of analogue manipulations of form and content including staged scenarios, photograms, stroboscopic experiments, emulsion transfers, pinhole exposures and more.

After taking a bit of time to clear my head from days of sifting through the diverse imagery, I sat back down to continue editing submissions and resigned myself to a journey that was at times unsettling and at times exhilarating and transportive. As I worked through the mini-portfolios I soon lost all sense of historic context and saw simply what was in the frame. I began to see the exhibition take form and was filled with excitement for the visual diversity being represented by the selected artists.

The final images chosen for the Center for Fine Art Photography's 'Edgy' competition were selected based upon technical proficiency and original vision; together, they create a compelling statement that seeks to raise questions about the ever-changing medium of photography.

I hope you will enjoy them as much as I did.

Michael Itkoff
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