

Beauty, as they say, is in the eye of the beholder. If we turn to theories on the aesthetics of art, we find a plethora of standpoints. Our understanding of beauty, and the creative expression of it, is not only multifarious, but changeable. It's hard to believe that Impressionism, now held in high aesthetic esteem, was once scoffed at by critics when first exhibited. Whether we determine beauty in art on the basis of craftsmanship, emotive response, cultural dictum or social norm, it continues to be a highly contentious subject.

Throw into this mix the concept of 'strange'—something that is curious, unfamiliar, atypical, eccentric, uncomfortable and even perplexing, then 'strange beauty' confronts us with a most formidable scenario indeed! One might say that the exhibition concept—or theme—is actually one of contradiction.

This exhibition of photographs, curated on this basis, was therefore an arduous and yet wonderfully stimulating undertaking.

Liz Hicock's photographs, of the San Francisco urbanscape, are fabricated from molded Jello-O and photographed with refracted light that renders them into a luminous, kaleidoscopic wonderland. The photographs themselves are decisively assembled, presenting an unconventional vision that expands the lexicon of the constructed image in contemporary photography.

The link between the image as evidence and as an extension of imagination is explored and questioned. Unmistakable examples of this can be seen in the images of Jonas Kuilkauskas, Shelia Layton and Marita Gootee.

Andrea Land presents a somewhat more understated, quiet approach in her photographs of young girls. In her meticulous compositions of domestic spaces, she choreographs the subjects in order to project their world of 'make believe' and the temporality of childhood. The subdued color palette further extends the notion of an insular dream state.

Together, all of the selected images address the visceral features of beauty, subverted by a range of curiosities—orientation of subjects within the frame, representations of gender and the body, light, color and vantage point. In one way or another, the photographers' images counteract viewer expectation.

Darren Ching and Debra Klomp Ching

