

CityBeat

cincinnati  art museum

PHOTO PAGES

Volume 1 Issue 3



THE ART OF DEMOCRACY?

Paintings are aristocratic, photographs are democratic. That has been one of the rallying cries photographers and their supporters have used to legitimize a medium that until recently struggled to rise above its reputation as producing snapshots and news images. Because it is perceived to be easier to take photographs than it is to paint, because they are by their very nature reproducible without limit, and exactly because they are so often reflections of daily life, rather than images of imaginary or posed situations, there is a truth in the statement.

It is, of course, an oversimplification. These days some photographs are as expensive as the finest painting. Photographers who aim to make art, rather than documentation, limit the prints they make to create scarcity. Using computer technology as well as their imagination, photographers often create wholly artificial worlds that are as strange and difficult to decipher as anything the old masters might have dreamt up.

Yet photography can't help itself. It keeps returning to social issues, focusing on environmental devastation, social discrepancies, and both the mundane nature and the suffering of daily life. It also questions the very nature of what an image, or an original, might be, thus undercutting the exclusivity of the work of art.

Above all else, photography (as well as video and computer-generated art) is the medium that, more than any other, pulls art into daily life, both in subject and as an object, and asks us to look at ourselves and our world in a critical manner. As it does so, it tends to destroy itself. It dissolves into reportage, into newspapers, websites, or debates, but it also loses its definition. What is a photograph that was not made by a camera, or that disappears as a recognizable image? What is an art project that is part of a political or narrative project? What about paintings based on photographs, or a combination of painting and photographs?

Distinctions are dissolving, the field is getting messy, the pictures are getting tougher to interpret and define. Sounds pretty democratic to me.

At the Art Palace of the West, we are happy to welcome these great, tough, democratic pictures.

Aaron Betsky
Director
Cincinnati Art Museum





ABOUT THE CINCINNATI ART MUSEUM COLLECTION OF PHOTOGRAPHS

The photography collection at the Art Museum consists of nearly 3,000 objects spanning the history of the medium from its inception in 1839 to the present day. Noteworthy examples from the nineteenth century include works by William Henry Fox Talbot, Gustave Le Gray, Julia Margaret Cameron, Matthew Brady and Carleton Watkins. The Art Museum began exhibiting photographs in 1896, in a period that saw a great debate concerning the medium's status as an art. The Art Museum's photographs from this particular period include works by such artists as Heinrich Kühn, Clarence

White, Emile Joachim Constant Puyo, Arnold Genthe and Herbert Greer French. Modernist works from the collection include photographs by Walker Evans, Man Ray, Paul Strand, Edward Steichen, Umbo, and Berenice Abbott, while the later twentieth century is represented by the work of masters such as Diane Arbus, Richard Avedon, Garry Winogrand, Harry Callahan, and Aaron Siskind, among numerous others. The Art Museum possesses an excellent array of pictures from the last two decades, including works by leading contemporary artists such as Matthew Barney, Nan Goldin, Adam Fuss, Gregory Crewdson, Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger, Tina Barney, and Carrie Mae Weems.

Florian Maier-Aichen (Germany, b. 1973), *Der Watzmann*, 2009, C-print, 71 3/4 x 47 5/8 inches (182.2 x 121 cm)
Copyright Florian Maier-Aichen, 2009. All rights reserved.
Courtesy Blum & Poe, Los Angeles and 303 Gallery, New York.s

The Meaning of Photography Today: New Acquisitions



**JAMES CRUMP, CHIEF CURATOR
AND CURATOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY**

"I sometimes don't think that I really take photographs so much as I frame things that I see. A lot of it has to do with the residue of something else. Something that's been burned or abraded, something that's been scratched up; there's a light reflecting off of something else, and there ends up being a pattern. It looks something like a painting a lot of the time." Sasha Frere-Jones describing the photographs he posts on his blog.

Perhaps the discipline that most challenges our perception about art making today is photography, an irony given how much photographic images permeate every waking moment of our lives. Photography's acceptance into the fine arts is no longer contestable; it is the dominant medium of so much contemporary art. And yet, just when we have become comfortable with it, when photography has crawled out of

the narrow corner prescribed to it much earlier, technological change asks us to tame it anew, to place new definitions upon it; new limits to describing it and false rules about when and how to use it. What of the millions of perfectly rendered views made with the iPhone or the latest point-and-shoot? Which of these are "photography" in all its high mindedness and which are merely the work of dilettantes, or even accidents

(far left) Bill Davis
(United States, b. 1967)
Palimpsest 9, 2009. Digital
silver gelatin print, 41
1/2 x 54 inches. Museum
Purchase: Thomas R. Schiff
Photography Gift Fund. ©
Bill Davis. All rights reserved.

(left) Hiroshi Sugimoto
(Japan, b. 1948),
Mathematical Form 0004
(*Onduloid: A Surface of
Revolution with Constant
Non-Zero Mean Curvature*),
2004. Cincinnati Art
Museum Permanent
Collection. Acquired with
The Edwin and Virginia
Irwin Memorial Fund. ©
Hiroshi Sugimoto. All
rights reserved. Courtesy
Fraenkel Gallery, San
Francisco.







(top far left) Philip-Lorca diCorcia (United States, b. 1951), *Todd M. Brooks; 22 Years Old: Denver, Colorado*: \$40, 1990–92. Fujicolor crystal archive print, 30x40 inches. Museum Purchase: Thomas R. Schiff Photography Gift Fund and Trustee Art Purchase Fund. © Philip-Lorca di Corcia. All rights reserved. Courtesy David Zwirner Gallery, New York.

(bottom far left) Yamini Nayar (United States, b. 1975), *Cleo*, 2009. C-print. 30 x 40 inches. Cincinnati Art Museum Permanent Collection. Museum Purchase: Thomas R. Schiff Photography Fund. © Yamini Nayar. All rights reserved. Courtesy Thomas Erben Gallery, New York.

(top left) James Welling (United States, b. 1951), *5912*, 2008. From the *Glass House* series. Inkjet print. Framed: 40 3/4 x 57 3/8 x 1 3/4 inches. Museum Purchase: Trustee Art Purchase Fund, Carl Jacobs Gift Fund and the Susan and William Friedlander Endowment. © James Welling. All rights reserved. Courtesy David Zwirner Gallery, New York.



(bottom left) Edward Burtynsky (Canada, b. 1955), *Silver Lake Operations, #14 [Lake Lefroy, Western Australia]*, 2008. Chromagenic print, 48 x 60 inches. Museum Purchase: On to the Second Century Endowment, John J. Emery Memorial Fund and various funds. © Edward Burtynsky. All rights reserved. Courtesy Hasted Hunt Kraeutler, New York.

or random mistakes that increasingly seduce us with their glimmering surfaces and super saturated colors and painterly effects? Some would say that it is difficult to make a bad photograph today. Separating “fine art” from amateur’s play may become a fool’s errand and perhaps this explains why so many specialists in this field—purists, really—decry the death of photography, the medium that more than any other was continually evolving technologically as it does today, changing and facilitating the very means of producing images.

Whether there is room for an artful high-resolution photograph of a tree alongside photographs of beef-colored Gummi bears has less and less to do with the technological differences than with conceptual approach and the issue of subject matter for art photography. Today some claim that “digital media” is an oxymoron, but such arguments aren’t going to slow the production of these kinds of images nor the popular embrace of them. What determines the success of photo-based art are the choices that artists make about materials, formats and presentation; and none of these can claim greater legitimacy over another. The archaic process of black-and-white analog film may seem primitive to some, for example, but employed with intelligence this medium still has a power to help us better comprehend photography’s present condition and also its past. Viewing older forms of art makes us visually more acute and discerning in our study and appreciation of newer ones. The past can be a place for retreat or for refreshment. Some artists today, for instance, are questioning the mammoth, tableau-sized color print in favor of smaller, more intimate formats associated with an earlier era. In referencing the past, artists conversant with history are challenging popular notions about how camera images are constructed. Mixing media, techniques and conceptual approaches, their work underscores the relationships that photography always shared with sculpture, painting, drawing, and performance art. However, rather than shrink from the technological advances, these artists embrace them wholeheartedly, recognizing in them a panoply of new options and opportunities.

The latest acquisitions of photography at the Cincinnati Art Museum call attention to the myriad ways in which this medium is used to make art. Viewed alongside works already admitted to the permanent collection, the latest photographic acquisitions allow one to glean shared themes and genres, but also pictorial affinities and differences with earlier works, in all media. These recent additions demonstrate excellence in sometimes singular approaches to photography that witness the vibrancy of this art. In other examples, new acquisitions assist in creating continuity, serving otherwise to fill voids that exist in the collection or to round out a specific area or body of work by an artist.

Yamini Nayar, among the youngest living artists represented in the Art Museum, creates mosaic-like assemblages that fuse photography and sculpture together with results that are deceptively enchanting. *Cleo*, 2009, acquired this year, underscores Nayar’s material interests in her use of objects she gathers from various sources: archives,

the street, refuse and other found manufactured goods—a glass marble, for instance, or a scrap from an old photograph—repurposed for her elaborate constructions that she subsequently photographs. The constructed image has been a mainstay of contemporary photography in the last two decades and the Art Museum has periodically admitted works made in this fashion. What is most impressive about *Cleo* is the illusionistic space and sense of depth created by the wooden planks that recede in the composition and the fine, trinket-like details that seem to dot the surface. *Cleo* underscores the artist’s interest in personal narratives and place and issues such as alienation, migration and otherness, but it is also simply ravishingly beautiful as an image.

While Nayar’s *Cleo* is obviously a photograph, other recent acquisitions test our perceptions by stretching the definition of photography, thus blurring the lines between it and drawing, for example. Cincinnati native, Bill Davis’s *Palimpsest 9*, 2009, confounds us with its graphic effects and compositional play. The artist uses chalkboards filled with marks and annotations, which in this example seem to derive from optical and chemical equations thus alluding to photography’s analogue past. An exercise in visual fantasy, the numbers, words, patterns and designs and the mark-making associated with the ephemeral, erasable chalkboard have been photographed with film—thus made permanent—and digitally printed, adding an ironic layering of perplexity. The striking end result of this large format conceptual sleight of hand refers to memory—the essence of photography itself—while offering up somewhat an absurdist, dada-like puzzle that begs decoding and decipherment. The surface of *Palimpsest 9* is deceiving, rendering impossible the immediate discernment of the photographic medium. *Palimpsest 9* would seem as closely associated with numerous works on paper in the permanent collection, for example those of Cy Twombly, than any photograph.

In viewing these recent acquisitions, it is clear that contemporary artists today are breaking free from any one genre associated with the camera, challenging our assumptions about what a photograph is and how it sits beside other, more traditional, works of art. In this, the most exciting time ever in the medium’s history, the Art Museum remains committed to building its ever expanding holdings of photo-based art.

James Crump is the Chief Curator of the Cincinnati Art Museum, and since 2008 the first endowed Curator of Photography. In these roles, Crump has spearheaded numerous acquisitions on behalf of the Art Museum. His film on legendary collector Sam Wagstaff, Black White + Gray, has been screened extensively in Asia, Europe and North America and is available on Netflix and the iTunes Store.



Hiroshi Sugimoto (Japan, b. 1948), *North Pacific Ocean, Oregon*, 1985. Gelatin silver print, 21 1/4 x 16 1/4 inches. Museum Purchase: Thomas R. Schiff Photography Gift Fund. Copyright Hiroshi Sugimoto. All rights reserved. Courtesy Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco.



Yamini Nayar

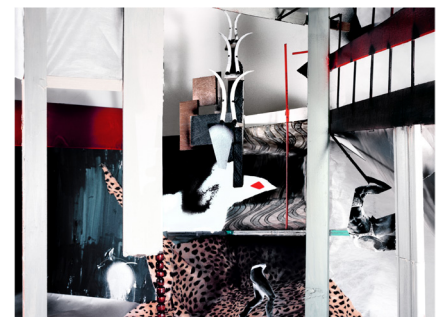
LIGHTBORNE VISITING ARTIST AND LECTURE SERIES

In association with the Art Academy of Cincinnati, twice each year, the Cincinnati Art Museum hosts two visiting lens-based contemporary artists as part of the Lightborne Visiting Artist and Lecture series. Most recently, we hosted artist Yamini Nayar, with her lecture on October 6th and an exhibition at the Convergys Gallery that was on view from September 10 to October 8, 2010.

Yamini Nayar creates images that merge sculpture and photography and that explore issues of migration, fragmentation and place. Her work combines materials from various sources such as historical archives, architectural design, cultural artifacts and personal narrative. *Photo Pages* is pleased to present some of Nayar's most recent images. Please stay tuned for more information about the next Lightborne visiting artist, renowned photographer, Philip-Lorca diCorcia.

(left) Yamini Nayar, United States, *One of These Days*, 2008. C-print. 36 x 48 inches. Copyright Yamini Nayar, 2008. All rights reserved. Courtesy of Thomas Erben Gallery, New York and the artist.

(bottom right) Yamini Nayar, United States, *The Pursuit*, 2010. C-print. 30 x 40 inches. Copyright Yamini Nayar, 2010. All rights reserved. Courtesy of Thomas Erben Gallery, New York and the artist.



Studio Visit: **Anthony Luensman**

ANTHONY LUENSMAN

INTERVIEWED BY

JAMES CRUMP

Studio Visit is a recent feature of *Photo Pages* wherein a local or regional contemporary artist is profiled through a brief interview and portfolio of recent work. In this second

installment, *Photo Pages* catches up with Anthony Luensman, a Cincinnati native whose work has garnered the attention of several important local, regional and international collectors. Luensman is a graduate of Kenyon College where he earned his BA in 1988. In 2008, he was the recipient of the Efroymson Contemporary Arts Fellowship. Since 2000, he has been in numerous solo and group exhibitions including *Shapeshifter*, organized earlier this year by Linda Schwartz and Matt Distel for Country Club. Luensman's work is not strictly photography based and perhaps multimedia artist would be the most apt phrase to describe him. I visited the artist to discuss *Self-Reliance*, a recent exhibition at ArtWorks that featured twenty photographs as well as new sculptural works.

I was struck by the title of the exhibition, especially after realizing that you placed yourself in the frame of each image, which makes you part of a rich lineage of performative-based and conceptual photography. How did this series of pictures begin and what inspired them? Describe, for example, *Landscape* and the impulse behind it.

The series evolved out of my 2007 video series entitled *Man in Nature*. In that trio of LCD video loops, I used my own nipple, belly button and ear as either impositions upon or hosts for the natural processes of a sun rising, flowers blowing, the moon phasing.



The photograph series is called Self-Reliance with a nod to Emerson. Besides Man in Nature, there were several impulses behind the series. One was very literal: how have I lived solo for so long? What mental mechanisms have I developed to “entertain” or “sustain” myself, so to speak. Also, I was thinking of props, basically one per photo, that had some relevance to me, many reaching back to what I think of as a more “innocent” time – references to toy trains, Hot Wheels, grade-school Catholicism, etc. I then enjoyed complicating the innocence – or loss thereof – with hints of sexuality. There were also tongue-in-cheek images and mildly inside jokes. Finally, the series allowed me to return to a more cinematic approach to image-making. *Landscape* refers to toy trains whereas the miniature trees and such on my leg are all hobby-shop. I was also vaguely playing off the phrase “navel-gazing” along with my attraction to diorama-like presentations.

When did you begin working with photography and video and to what extent will they play a role in future projects?

Video actually began out of attempts to document work that was interactive or included sound, light, or movement. Invariably, I was less than satisfied with the results in terms of documentation, but the world of video and cameras had been made less obtuse. The advent of powerful digital cameras has really inspired me and works well with my trial and error process. I now have a camera as I might any other hand-tool. I’m much more free in terms of translating ideas and mental images into final manifestations – sculpture, 2-D, photo, video, combinations thereof. Initially, photography was of interest to me when traveling. These days, I think of it more conceptually, more serially.

Sculpture and photography have a long relationship which has been explored in exhibitions, most recently in *The Original Copy* at the Museum of Modern Art. How do these seemingly disparate fields coexist in harmony for you?

I’ve not necessarily thought of it in these terms. I think I adapt my work, or, when possible, design it according to the space in which I’ll be exhibiting. I enjoy the ambiguous space between discreet object and installation.

You began your career intensively engaged with sound design and theater projects. Given such varied interests, have you considered feature filmmaking or directing? To what extent have films inspired your output using photography?

Film, in terms of creating work, is, I’d say, an indirect inspiration. But as I begin to work more and more with video and photography, I’ve begun to notice the subsequent effects and possibilities in movies, advertising...actually everywhere. My favorite films are those drenched in atmosphere and narrative. Recent example? *Winter’s Bone*. But I’m not enough of a storyteller to ever consider feature filmmaking. Directing, on the other hand, is more to my capabilities as most sound and theater projects along with the physical installation of shows, is, to a large degree, a matter of “directing.” Lighting, for example, is important. I’m very attuned to this from theater and performance work.

Among the things that draw me personally to photography is the ephemeral nature of a moment passed that was recorded with the camera, the trace of an essence left behind so to speak. What draws you personally to the photographic process?

It’s actually more about mining the moment out of a barrage of picture-taking. In Self-Reliance, for example, I very much had the images and compositions in mind before shooting. It is then a matter of working with a studio assistant to find the exact position, lighting, angle, and exposure to render the image. After a shooting session, I’ll have hundreds of nearly identical images from which, amazingly, only one or two succeed to satisfaction.



Anthony Luensman,
Highway, 2009. C-print.

16 x 20 inches. Copyright
Anthony Luensman, 2009.

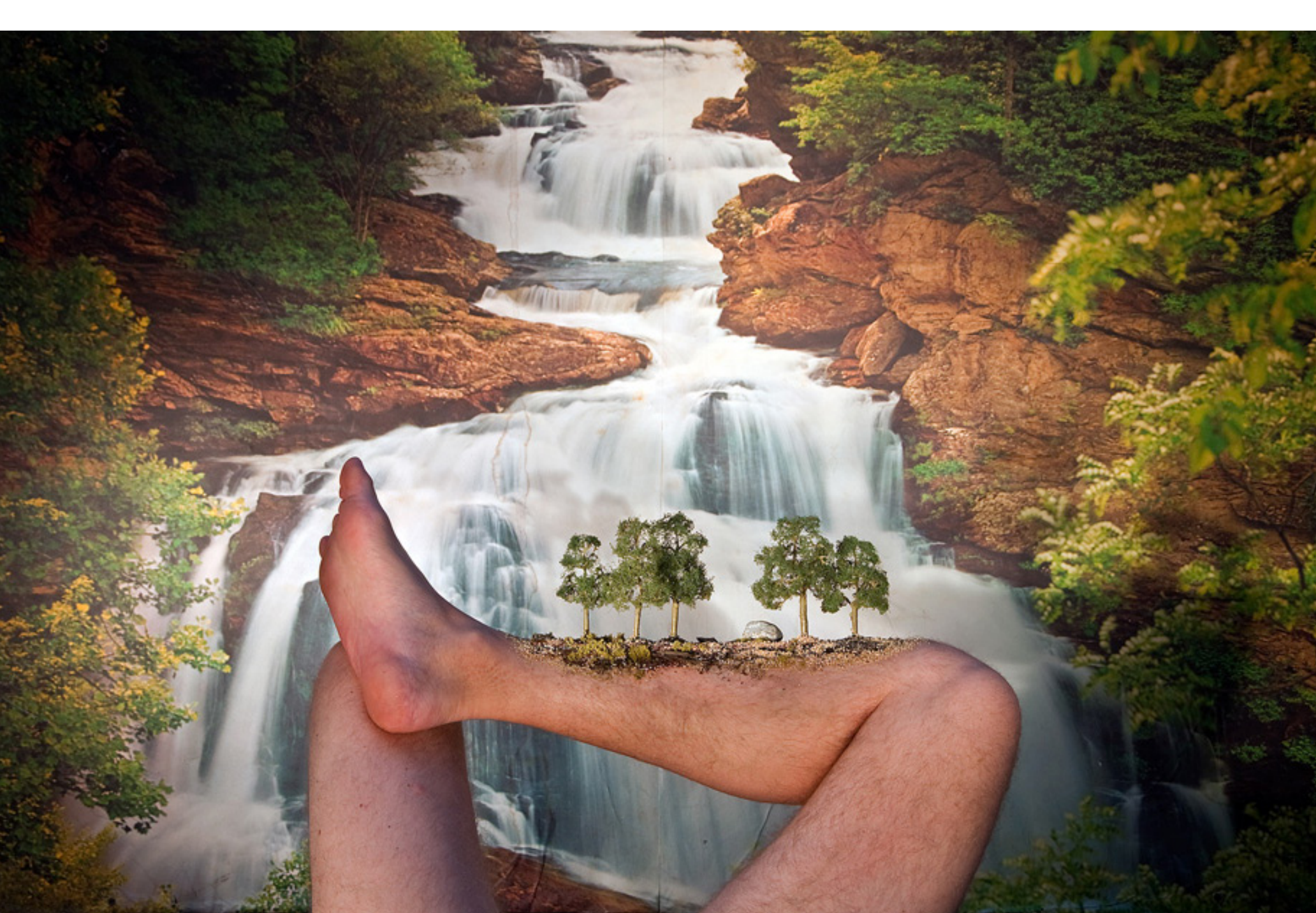
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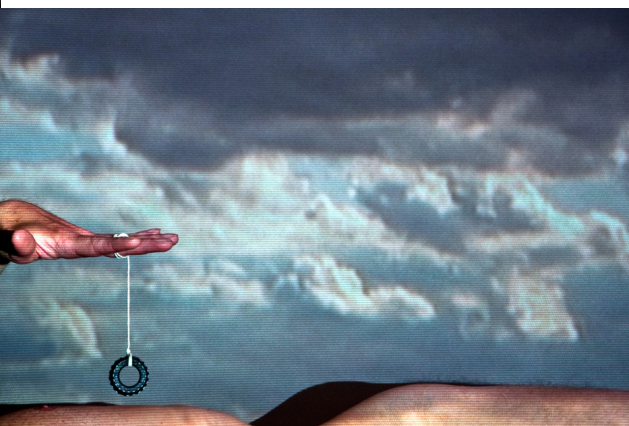
Anthony Luensman, *Drive*,
2009. C-print. 16 x 20

inches. Copyright Anthony
Luensman, 2009. All
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(opposite page bottom)

Anthony Luensman, *Saw*,
2009. C-print. 16 x 20

inches. Copyright Anthony
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Do you consider the pictures in *Self-Reliance* as documents of performance in the manner of, say, Chris Burden or Ana Mendieta? Or do you view these works on their own terms as “art” photography? Or both?

In 2009, I created a project on the streets of Taipei called *Betel Nut Boy*. This was much more the type “photo as document” of quickly staged performances. *Self-Reliance*, however, is more personal and narrative, the sets were made and the photographs taken in or around my

studio.

Even though no video was involved, I find this series to be more closely related to video stills than art photography. I see them this way as I was essentially creating small scenarios for a semi-fictional self. The titles, too, are to my mind, an important part of the work.

What contemporary artists most appeal to you at this particular moment? What historic figures inspire you most?

I’m more honestly attracted to reading and fiction...from Brautigan to Faulkner to the more contemporary Xiaolu Guo. Also I’ve been enjoying a correspondence with Royal Rhodes, a Kenyon professor of religion, and I’m fortunate to preview his achingly beautiful, yet-to-be published poems. This literary appeal, I think, is part of the reason I enjoy titling my works.

The construction of the images in *Self-Reliance* is remarkably clever. All share a type of visual play. Is there one theme that connects this series that you hope is intelligible to the viewer.

Desperately, with a sense of humor, hanging on to an innocent prop while trying to prop oneself up in a less than innocent, less than befriended world.

What are you working on now?

I’m 9/10ths of my way finished with a new photo series of ten. This series is a bit of a departure from my previous sets as I’m using others as models. I’m also in the early stages of designing a large gallery installation, and a video series (so far nine, playing concurrently) based on chapters from a recently reread novel.

(opposite page) Anthony Luensman, *Landscape*, 2009. C-print. 16 x 20 inches. Copyright Anthony Luensman, 2009. All rights reserved. Used with permission of the artist. (top) Anthony Luensman, *Moon*, 2009. C-print. 16 x 20 inches. Copyright Anthony Luensman, 2009. All rights reserved. Used with permission of the artist. (bottom) Anthony Luensman, *Swing*, 2009. C-print. 16 x 20 inches. Copyright Anthony Luensman, 2009. All rights reserved. Used with permission of the artist.

You’ve been reading about the Cincinnati Art Museum’s world-class collection of photographs and the groundbreaking exhibitions and programs coming this year. We also invite you to experience the rest of what the Art Museum has to offer – we’ve only touched the surface.

Founded in 1881, the Art Museum features an art collection of more than 60,000 works spanning 6,000 years of history. Interested in ancient civilizations? We have some of the earliest examples of human writing on display just inside the front lobby. Love the serene landscapes and studies of the Impressionists? Don’t miss our galleries on the second floor. Do motors and horsepower move you? We offer a rotating gallery space devoted to the creations of companies such as Lamborghini, Ferrari and Bugatti; this summer, the space houses that all-American classic, the 1956 Ford Thunderbird. Regardless of your passions, the Art Museum has something to captivate your imagination ignite your soul.

In addition to the several national and international exhibitions the Art Museum presents each year, we also offer a variety of cultural events and public programs for children, adults and teachers – there is always something going on. Admission to the Art Museum and its special exhibitions is free for all. The Art Museum is open six days a week, making greater Cincinnati’s most treasured cultural asset accessible to everyone. We bring people and art together in ways that transform our everyday lives and our community.



The Art Museum Gift Shop offers a range of books on photography, including works associated with current and recent exhibitions. Open Tuesday – Sunday; or call (513) 639 2958, or shop our new online store.

Questions, give us a call at 513.721.ARTS any day from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (Except major holidays.)

CINCINNATI ART MUSEUM

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For directons to the Art Museum visit

www.cincinnatiartmuseum.org/directions

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(cover) Yamini Nayar, *By a Thread*, 2009. C-print. 30 x 40 inches. Copyright Yamini Nayar, 2009. All rights reserved. Courtesy of Thomas Erben Gallery, New York and the artist.

VOW WOW POW

VOW WOW POW

VOW TO COME HERE &

YOU'LL BE WOWED BY 200 YEARS

OF GORGEOUS GOWNS,

FAME-SEEKING PORTRAIT STARS

WEAPONRY FROM DAYS OF

YORE; OUR 2010–11 SEASON

DELIVERS A POW.

Now: secrets revealed. That's the 2010–11 season at the Cincinnati Art Museum. *Thomas Gainsborough and the Modern Woman* is the first exhibition to focus on the idea of modernity and femininity in Georgian England from the perspective of Gainsborough's groundbreaking portraits of women, some of them scandalous demi-reps

(women with half a reputation) who were provocative women ahead of their time. *Wedded Perfection: Two Centuries of Wedding Gowns* removes the veil from the 21st-century bride as the centerpiece of an elaborate theatrical spectacle, and includes gowns by top modern designers, including Vera Wang and Zac Posen. *Heavy Metal: Arms & Armor* reveals our

weapons: the first Art Museum purchase of original objects from 1882, a deadly and design-rich collection of arms and armor evoking life in the Middle Ages. Special weekend events for visitors of all ages. There's something new every day.

Reel Art

Now in its second year, Reel Art joins forces with the Southern Ohio Film Association to connect the silver screen with the Art Museum's permanent collection and special exhibitions. During the upcoming weeks, you'll experience art through films that offer a glimpse of the lives of artists and the times relevant to our exhibitions, as well as films that explore a diverse cross-section of artists and genres.

TICKET PRICE

Individual show price: \$10 for non-members; \$5 for Art Museum members, students and seniors. Free parking is included with ticket purchase; Art Museum members always park free. Admission to the Art Museum is always FREE. October 31 film is FREE. To purchase tickets, please call (513) 721 ARTS. Reservations recommended.



SHOWTIMES

Films are presented in the Art Museum's Fath Auditorium on Sundays at 1 p.m. and are followed by a guest speaker, or staff- or docent-led gallery talk.

FILMS

October 24

October 31 (FREE)

November 7

November 21 & 28

December 5 & 12

December 19 & 26

September Issue (Cutler)

The Picture of Dorian Gray (Lewin)

Camelot (Logan)

Always a Bridesmaid (Davenport)

Modigliani (Davis)

The Nightmare Before Christmas (Selick)

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For more information,
or to become a member:
cincinnatiartmuseum.org
(513) 721 ARTS

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