

ANDREW WRIGHT

PENUMBRA

As the exhibition title *Penumbra* aptly suggests, Andrew Wright creates images that investigate half-lights, zones, and procedures where the ambiguity of what we are seeing extends to an uncertainty about how the work was created, or even if we are looking at photographs at all. Using a wide range of photographic means, he works with what light can reveal and hold open so that we may explore the edges of perception and understanding. This mid-career survey of works from 2001–13 includes selections from several of Wright's series, as well as a number of studies that reflect his experimental approach to image-making.

Wright explores the potential of photographic technologies both old and new: the perennial enchantment of the camera obscura is employed in *Penumbra* to expose the discrepancies between the time of taking an image and the time of taking it in as a viewer, while what Wright calls "photogenic drawings" present images of clouds made with an iPhone app. From John Constable to Alfred Stieglitz to Gerhard Richter, studies of clouds are the *locus classicus* for artists who hope to apprehend the ephemeral visually. Wright participates in this genealogy with his own depictions of clouds but he turns the tables on our visual expectations. The large-scale series *Coronae* (2011) presents images of what we might imagine to be interstellar phenomena captured by the Hubble Space Telescope; we cannot easily decide whether the bursts of light recorded here are large or tiny, very close or immeasurably distant. Their portentous implications contrast sharply with the techniques Wright employed to make them. Instead of looking to the skies, he simply pricked a tiny hole in the case of a role of photographic film. A retro photochemical technology and an apparently accidental action most photographers would avoid, turn a humble film cartridge into a cosmic camera.

Most of us happily take for granted a secure sense of scale and depth of field as we navigate our everyday visual worlds. Wright suspends these certainties, not to impress or trick us, but to have us think and see with greater attention. He regularly makes images in difficult circumstances, often in remote places, or at night with a flash or strobe light, to reveal the unfamiliar aspects of objects that we might never notice in the light of day. This technique allows Wright to investigate scale in *Standing Waves* (2007), where shots of rushing water and ice, forced into vertical columns in the Niagara Gorge, refract a subtle yet radiant range of colour. Taking the photos in the dark while held secure but dangerously near to the edge of the rushing water, Wright shows us the waves up close and impossibly still. Despite its apparent stasis in the image, the water moves with violent force and magnitude; some of the ice blocks are the size of cars. These photos suggest that we cannot adequately represent or understand nature, even though we are part of it.

Wright explores two very different aspects of photography: its ability to hold on to transient phenomena so that we may observe them freely, as in *Standing Waves*, and its attention to more permanent objects in the world. Working with static objects in *Tree Corrections* (2012), he reveals the cultural conventions that have made the weather twisted tree an icon in central Canada. By tilting his viewfinder to photograph such trees as if they were vertical, he skews the landscapes that frame them.

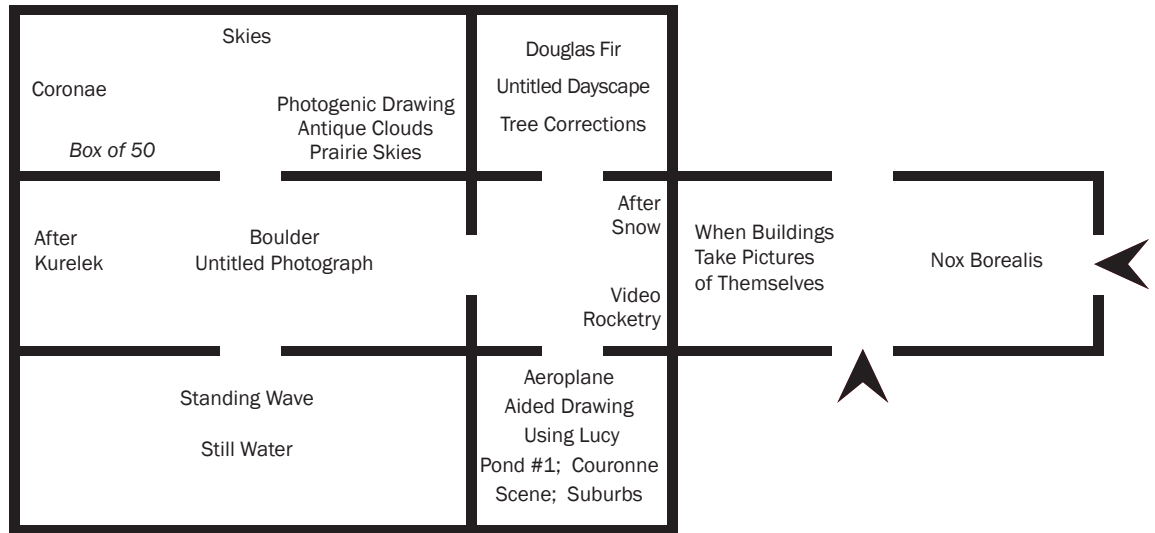
Wright departs from still photography's controlling parameter of arresting motion in his video work. *After Snow, parts I–III* (2011) riffs on the protocols of Michael Snow's famous film *La Région Centrale* (1971). While Snow mounted a 16mm film camera to a special machine that could then operate independently from any human presence, Wright employs a hand-held video camera that celebrates the accidents of an almost amateurish personal touch. Filmed in the Arctic but without looking for wilderness, Wright suggests that his short and abrupt homage "contains the visible traces of the performer, the artist as interlocutor, with lens cap and good winter boots in the periphery."

Nox Borealis (2012) is perhaps the most surprising and difficult-to-fathom work in *Penumbra*. Despite the generous size of these large-format, nearly 1:1 ratio images taken in Iqaluit, we can see very little. They are almost completely black, challenging our stereotype of the "Great White North." Equally disorienting is Wright's decision to present these monoliths as self-supporting sculptures standing in the middle of the gallery, rather than hanging on the wall. What these works are supposed to be, show, or obscure, and how they were made, remain open questions. However we respond to such specific puzzles, all of Wright's images extend our field of vision simply, magically, and profoundly.

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Nox Borealis, 2011

Digital chromogenic prints on dimensional plywood substrates

Wright traveled to Iqaluit, Nunavut, to experience an unfamiliar sense of scale and deceptive notion of time in the Arctic, where light and dark are not necessarily an indicator of day and night. As sculptural gestures these images, depicting inverted vistas of snow above a black sky, allude to the disorienting and seemingly empty landscape.



When Buildings Take Pictures of Themselves #2; #3, 2013

Silver gelatin prints

Capturing the field of view through windows at UTAC, Wright's photographs were created by means of the camera obscura, the first photographic technology. From within a darkened space penetrated by a single small hole at one end, the daylight scene outside is projected, inverted and reversed, onto the opposite wall as a result of the physical properties of light.



Douglas Fir #3, 2001 (from the series *Illuminated Landscapes*)

C-print

Wright uses artificial light to create a sense of the staged, the protected, the artificial, and the segregated in natural environments and remote locations.



Untitled Dayscape #1; #2, 2013

Digital chromogenic prints

Captured in the clear light of day, Wright's upended *Dayscapes* depict an uncertain topography. Distorting the angle of view and central focus of the scene, solid ground is presented as weightless pattern alongside picturesque sky.



Tree Corrections, 2013

Digital chromogenic prints

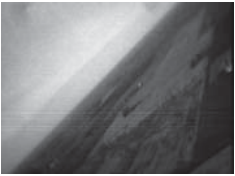
Working along the shores of Georgian Bay, at sites frequented by the Group of Seven painters, Wright's *Tree Corrections* foreground the windswept distortion of the landscape. Despite allusions to traditional depictions of nature, this grid of images subverts the conventions of representation through the re-orientation of the horizon.



After Snow, 2011

Video, 1:34 mins

Part tribute and part reworking of Michael Snow's highly controlled and probing film *La Région Centrale* (1970), *After Snow* is deliberately fast and chaotic. Positioning himself within the landscape and the camera's frame, Wright stands in for Snow's hidden automated camera.



Selections from **Video Rocketry, 2001-2007**

Three videos, 9:40 mins

Miniature remote video cameras mounted on model rockets recorded their trajectories and the destabilized landscape below as they soared up to 5000 feet in the air then returned to earth.



Untitled Aeroplanes I; II, 2001

C-prints

Jets flying overhead were photographed at the limit of the zoom lens owned by the artist at the time.



Aided Drawing 1; 2, 2001-2002; Using Lucy, 2002

Graphite on paper; Drawing table, antique camera lucida

With the optical aid of the camera lucida, a 19th century device used by artists to accurately render a scene, Wright created a series of drawings while dressed in period attire for a performative project at Gairloch Gardens, Oakville. The doubling of the image reflects the superimposition of the view from each eye.



Suburbs, 2002

C-prints

On the edge of blackness at Banff National Park, Alberta, two views of the same setting contrast the constructed landscape with the natural environment.



Scene, 2001

C-print

Suffused by a dense snowfall, two tungsten lights on facing poles illuminate an empty space, and each other.



Pond #1, 2002; Couronne, 2002 (from the series Illuminated Landscapes)

C-prints

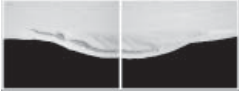
Wright's photographs of objects and settings, both living and inanimate, posit nature itself as a series of constructed vistas that are knowable only when exposed by the glow of highly controlled illumination.



Boulder #3 (Baffin Island), 2012; Untitled Photograph #1; #2; # 3; #4; #6; #8, 2013

Digital chromogenic prints

Wright's recent work reveals his ongoing interest in seeing the exterior world as a series of props and indeterminate spaces with ambiguous scale. Precisely composed using artificial light and limited depth of field, these images of granite rock formations, in tension with black skies, oscillate between realism and fiction.



After Kurelek, 2013

Digital chromogenic prints

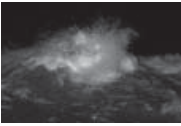
Wright's abstracted, upside down winter scene captured in the vast Arctic tundra recalls the paintings of snow banks and drifts by William Kurelek. Part of the landscape drifting above an uncertain and blackened sky is deliberately doubled in a gesture that calls into question photography's fidelity to truthful or accurate representation.



Still Water, 2009

Lambda prints, laminated plywood

Photographs of an endless waterfall captured at night along the Grand River, Ontario, are simultaneously recognizable as representations of perspectival space and two-dimensional images of pattern and hue. Transforming rushing current into solid form, *Still Water* sits mid-way between image and object.



Standing Wave #4; #11, 2007

Digital chromogenic prints

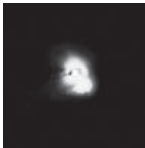
Shot precipitously close to the rapids of the Niagara gorge (a specially trained police escort accompanied Wright) these images of North America's largest standing waves are perceptually drifting away from their real world context. *Standing Wave* is both static and dynamic; scale is confused, as what seems to be small and magnified is in fact many metres tall.



Skies X; XI; XIV; XV; XVII; XIX, 2003-2004

Unique camera obscura silver gelatin prints

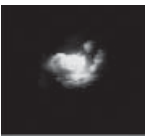
Using a make-shift lens and shutter fitted into a hole in the roof of his studio, Wright printed unique images of the sky, in reverse. Capturing arbitrary encounters with light and space that do away with the "decisive moment", *Skies* document the ephemerality of nature, and the fluidity of water, vapour and light.



Coronae 1; 2, 2011

Digital chromogenic prints

While honoring the tradition of camera-less image production, Wright challenges conventional understandings of photography. Created using punctured film, *Coronae* destabilize the viewer's perception of scale. These indeterminate images simultaneously refer to the macroscopic and microscopic, to both interstellar space and cellular forms.



Prairie Skies II; X, 2004

Silver gelatin prints

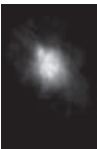
Lustrous cloud formations depicted against a dark ground were photographed using a cookie tin as a pinhole camera.



Antique Cloud I; II; III; IV, 2011

Alimotypes; Ambrotype

Wright used the wet plate collodion process, a printing method developed in the 1860s that captures microscopically fine detail, to reproduce crudely constructed cloud-like formations.



Photogenic Drawing XXI, XXII, 2011

Digital inkjet prints

Contrasting historic processes with digital technologies, the clouds in Wright's *Photogenic Drawings* were created using an iPhone app.



Selections from **Box of 50, 2013**

Silver gelatin prints

Experimenting with photographic film and paper, Wright's subject is the inherent nature of the medium itself and the unpredictable conditions of light at the site of exposure. For this work large format expired graphic film sheets were left on a windowsill at UTAC for several weeks then printed on stale-dated and out-of-production photo paper.