

New Narrative

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Curatorial Statement

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Let's just look

All photographs are stand-ins for the real thing. In many instances, photographs are the only means in which we make determinations about the world around us. Through online intermediaries, like Google Earth, Snapchat, and Skype, we can immediately gain a general sense of things on the other side of the screen. While these tools function similarly to early photographic travel guides and newspapers – albeit sped up to a 21st century pace – one notable difference, is the overarching sense that the contemporary world is predominately satisfied *with images*. An image is good enough. The real thing is now secondary to the photograph. Even with the knowledge that most images are altered or modified to serve a specific purpose and that truth and photography do not correlate, we are still willing to experience the world through the passive lens of photography. Whether we are willing participants or not, this is an inescapable fate. There are mountains containing troves of images just waiting to show us a mediated history of everything.¹

While this concept points to a very dystopian translation of our photographic moment, it does beg the questions: Can we live vicariously through images? Do we already?

Close Enough

There are lots of things in the world – bugs, plants, artworks – that have learned the skill of mimicry in order to survive. To look like something, to imitate it, is the way in which some species thrive and evolve. It is also the basic make-up of the photographic image. French intellectual Roger Caillois spoke of this quality in insects as a parallel to a type of photographic mimicry:

Morphological mimicry could then be...an actual photography, but of the form and the relief, a photography on the level of the object and not on that of the image, a reproduction in three-dimensional space with solids and voids: sculpture-photography...²

¹ Reframe, "Step Inside The Historic Photo Archive Stored In An Underground Mine," Last modified April 29, 2014, <http://reframe.gizmodo.com/step-inside-the-historic-photo-archive-stored-in-an-und-1569291447>.

² Roger Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," *Minatoure* 7, (1935): n.p.

Thanks to the medium surviving, thriving, and evolving, we can utilize photographic images and give them dimensional form through 3-D printing, molds, and mapping. With these new processes, an image assumes the role of “original” in relation to the fabricated object. We move one more step away from the real and produce an object along the lines of a decoy – from a distance it is convincing enough for us to be taken in.

Making Meaning

The perplexing nature of images and the information they contain is magnified in the way they can move from one visual condition to another. For instance, “[an image of] the moon landing... can slip from an astronomy journal to a US consulate, from there to an advertising poster for cigarettes and from there finally to an art exhibition.”³ The meaning and translation of an image is purely dependent on its context. If we are using images to help us establish a better comprehension of the world (and universe) around us, then how do we know *when* to look at an image for that purpose? If an image of the moon landing ends up in an art exhibition you still recognize it as the moon landing and acknowledge the basic facts associated with that historical event. You then attempt to determine what else the image is doing when side by side with other images or objects or environments. It is within that second of determination that we begin to *make meaning* for the image. A highly subjective moment of creation occurs and subsequently every time we see that image, those new meanings will be present in our minds even though their relevance may have only been important in the one particular instance. These layers of meaning are present in every image we look at and that is why having an active relationship to images is critical. We can (and should) remove ourselves from a place of a passing glance or momentary scan of an image, to a place of closer inspection where we can utilize the image to do work for us.

Retrofitting Images

The artists in *New Narrative* employ an array of tactics to examine (and undermine) the slippery state of photography via photographic history, cultural references, and technological shifts. The product of these investigations is not, however, entirely photographic. While the image may be a starting point, the artists consider how critical context is to the inherent meaning and experience of an image. Through very deliberate image making and appropriation colliding with sculpture and installation, the final works are studies in the boundaries of the photographic. They point directly to the critical importance of images, but complicate it through highlighting the very muddy waters of creating meaning through presentation.

³ Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (London: Reaktion Books, 1983), 54.