

Current artist on view at NAPOLEON, Marc Blumthal, shows cut and pieced photography in noteworthy exhibit by PPAC

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I Like You by Marc Blumthal

The 3rd Annual Photography Competition at the Philadelphia Photo Arts Center, opened on July 12th, 2012 at the Crane Arts Building. Curated by Natasha Egan, Associate Director and Curator of the Museum of Contemporary Photography and Kathy Ryan, photo editor of the New York Times Magazine, the exhibit houses 45 photographs made by 44 artists. The call for work, which was a national one, gathered over 450 diverse submissions. The resulting show ranges from traditional landscape and portraiture to collaged, manipulated and constructed photography. Thanks to Executive Director Sarah Stolfa's vision of creating a facility for printing and showing work, this amazing show- which has some seriously good national work in it- is something Philadelphia gets to call credit for. Congratulations to the PPAC for putting such a great exhibit out there!

Marc Blumthal, of the *Finding Nemo* exhibition currently on view at NAPOLEON, has a piece in this exhibition. In Blumthal's cut and replaced photographic series, a curious form of subtraction and addition is used to emphasize registered but absent forms. *I Like You* (2010), on exhibit at the PPAC and shown above, shows a dated bed sheet, ruffled with use with an overhead view of what appears to be the silhouette of an infant. The infant is subtracted as a shape from the photograph, but is filled with other views of the bed sheet making for a complex overlapping of pattern and invisibility. A decisive choice to fill what is absent so completely with what was, adds a strange sense of fullness to an otherwise complete subtraction, calling into question what in fact this is a photograph of. Was the child ever there to begin with? What happened? The cool flatness of photography emphasizes the layers and mis-registered saturation levels of what is used to fill the void, leaving the viewer to approach what feels like a closed story. The source material here adds an air of uncertainty to the story at hand. The result is a mixed bag of looking back on something, personal perspective, loss and intimacy. As is the case with some of Blumthal's similar work in the *Finding Nemo* exhibit, there is a suggestion of several layers of past tense. Multiple threads of memory are present and one person's perspective is never really truly another's. In this case, photography serves as a form of evidence but is entirely subjective: I was *there*, you were *here*.

The blending of tenses in Blumthal's work manifests in several ways between the work in the PPAC show and the pieces in NAPOLEON, using different visual tangents to block, over emphasize and obliterate imagery. The NAPOLEON show houses imagery that has been over-screened in layers of screen prints with multiple layers of different sized pixels, leaving the viewer super close to the content in an intense zoom. There is noise in this work that is rhythmic and bright. Here the ultimate past tense of the medium of photography calls into question what is most recent. In Blumthal's bodies of work, his approaches seem to seek different kinds of distance, noise and tense, both visually and physically.

Sensitive arrangements and correlations of image to place, memory, surface, material and perspective run throughout the show at the PPAC and are enhanced by a smart installation of work, allowing viewers to make relationships as they work their way through the show. Overall highlights included photographs by Vivian Keulards, Jay Muhlin, Mark Brautigam, Rachel Cox, Tatiana Grigorenko, Motohiro Takeda, Bobby Davidson, Keith Sharp and Tim Gruber. The exhibit is up from June 12th- Sept. 8th. Marc Blumthal: *Finding Nemo* at NAPOLEON remains up until July 27th, 2012.