



## Third Annual Photography Competition at PPAC – surrealism is alive and well

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There are a lot of winners in The Philadelphia Photo Art Center's 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Photography Competition. With work from forty-four artists, the juried exhibition spans the PPAC gallery and the Crane building's first floor hallway. The show is a mixed bag of photographic styles, with documentary photography and work that has been manipulated either digitally or is physically dominating.



**Alan Charlesworth, “Rocks Bar (Albany NY)”, 2011, Archival Pigment Print, 20”x25”**  
With its rainbow stripes, the Stoli Vodka rug in Alan Charlesworth's “Rocks Bar” is a blatant marketing pitch at the gay community. The incorporation of the rainbow background can be

seen as a sign of growing cultural recognition. However, Stoli's declaration of pride in the isolated gay bar isn't a risky one, but a calculated sales pitch at a particular demographic.



**Marc Blumthal, I Like You, 2009, Archival Dye on Aluminum, 30" x 40"**



**Tatiana Grigorenko, "Confederate Flag", 2010, Archival Inkjet Print on cotton rag and collage, 32" x 44"**

Marc Blumthal (who had a solo show at [Napoleon](#) last month) and Tatiana Grigorenko consider photography's importance as memento and creator of history. Both artists erase members of family photos by covering their silhouettes with pieces of the background. Both Blumthal and Grigorenko have chosen to erase a baby from their photographs. The artists aren't just erasing photographic surface — they're erasing history. In an age when Photoshop can make this erasure seamlessly, the hairline silhouette in each image is a reminder of photography's ability to both record and manipulate.



**Lauren Marsolier, “Playground 3”, 2011, Archival Inkjet Print, 30” x 41”**

Also heavily manipulated, Lauren Marsolier’s digital landscape “Playground 3,” which pieces together elements from other photographs, resembles a de Chirico landscape with its long shadows and flat, stage-like construction. Resembling neither a straight photograph or a complete digital fabrication, the image remains ambiguous in terms of its medium. As with a lot of metaphysical work, this combination of disparate imagery and emptiness also creates a feeling of anxiety.



**Rosa Chang. “Concrete Bathers, Astoria, NY”, 2011, Digital Chromogenic Print, 24”x20”**

In Rosa Chang's photo, sunbathers lounge by the community pool on concrete that resembles sand. The visual pun reflects the desire for the more luxurious, beach get-away, and the emergence of the all-too-typical "staycation." Jay Muhlin's "Elif, waterfall" also reflects a desire for new experience. A woman appears in a state of euphoria inhaling deeply as wind blows in her face. The painted image of a waterfall behind reveals that the experience is only fantasy and the photograph is staged.



**Jay Muhlin, "Elif, waterfall", 2012, Archival Inkjet Print, 30"x40"**

Keith Sharp's "Suspended" [[Image on website](#)] is also a play between image and object. Suspended on a clothesline, a fabric image of the scene in the background blows in the breeze. The two images line up with one another, creating a surrealist window.



**Mark Brautigam, “Aurora”, 2009, Archival Pigment Print/Dibond, 20”x24”**

Several of the photographers in the show are thinking about ideas of home and shelter. Noah Addis’s “Lallubhai Compound Eviction #1” documents slums in Mumbai. Tim Gruber’s “Dreams Relocated” depicts a beachfront property that needs to be moved because of natural and man-made erosion. In “Aurora” by Mark Brautigam, a house provides solace from persistent darkness.

*The Philadelphia Photo Arts Center’s 3rd Annual Photography Competition and Exhibition features work by over 40 artists. Working in the areas of “social observation, staged portraiture, geometric abstraction, hand-altered constructions, and the metaphysical landscape,” the show provides a broad survey of contemporary photography. Juried by Natasha Egan, Director and Curator of the Museum of Contemporary Photography at Columbia College Chicago, and Kathy Ryan, Photo Editor at New York Times Magazine, the show is at the PPAC until September 8.*