Towards another (big bang) theory  
Photographs by Geoffrey H. Short

Great Balls of Fire

While once people gaped at first the awe and wonder from a majestic landscape painting, today they are more likely to get a rear end of a blockbuster movie - from a huge explosion as their hero narrowly escapes a predicament. These are, for viewers, carefully staged forms of release, offering us a respite from our day-to-day tribulations - sublime moments where things are far bigger than ourselves, and beyond our control. Geoffrey H. Short’s powerful, potent photographs of large, stage-managed explosions connect directly to our love of the release of a big bang offers. Frozen by the camera shutter and removed from any narrative, his burning blooms in the sky (quite literally great balls of fire) lead us to think about an explosion’s symbolism. Sex, death and cosmic creation, just for starters. They also make us think about photography in relation to painting.

Technically impressive in their detailed capture of these temporary events, the beautiful abstract marks made by explosives can seem as impressionistic as a Turner stormy sky, or as expressive as a white spray of Pollock strokes.

Short’s technical virtuosity and subject matter is likely inspired by years working as a commercial stills photographer in film and television. Film special effects technicians were hired to create these explosions on Auckland’s west coast black-sand beaches. Short initially studied at Elam School of Fine Arts (University of Auckland) in the 1980s, returning there a few years ago to graduate (Bachelor of Fine Arts) with first class honours and a senior prize in fine art, based on this body of work. The work has also been selected for an internationally touring survey exhibition of emerging photographers (reGeneration2 - Tomorrow’s Photography: New Zealand).

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Mark Amery

The Power of Metaphor

Geoffrey H. Short’s picture essay, Towards another (big bang) theory is all about power in a fascinating and extraordinary way. His photographs of identical explosions reference the beginning (and perhaps eventual end) of our earth in the cosmos. Like Alfred Steiglitz’s photographs of clouds, these are equivalents - poetic metaphors - expressing emotions from fear to laughter. They are frozen in time and range from images of the sublime to ridiculous (when a threatening explosion takes on the resemblance of a heart, or dog, or rabbit). Short, like a movie director, creates the equivalents with right gunpowder and paint. As he says, ‘Fossil fuel (with all its geo-political associations) mixed with gunpowder (with its own history of war, plots and danger) makes for an unpredictable, dramatic and multi-layered imaging material’.

This dramatic material demands a large format presentation, and thus we have introduced the first special formal poster edition of MoMento.

John B. Turner

Director and Co-Editor, PhotoForum.