

[< Back](#) | [Home](#)



ON DISPLAY - Michael Grillo before the opening of "Photography as Witness" at Lord Hall.



PHOTOGRAPHY SQUARED - Artist Barbara Kossy's "A1 Traffic Jam" is one work on display at Lord Hall gallery.

Inside the photographer's shoes

Exhibit examines how the world changes through a lens

By: Eryk Salvaggio

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"Documentation: Photography as Witness," the newest exhibit at the Lord Hall gallery, combines the work of international photographers to explore what it means to take a photograph.

"We think Photoshop created the divide between truth and untruth in photography," said Michael Grillo, curator of the exhibit, at its opening. He went on to explain that the truth debate has been going since the first photographic patent was filed in 1839.

Grillo selected the works for the show based on what they said about documentation itself. The result is a fascinating mix that is visually and intellectually compelling.

Consider the work of Klaus and Celia Knoll, whose photographs actually appear as inverted mirror images placed side by side. However, a closer look reveals that what appear to be the shadows of trees on a bedroom wall are, in fact, upside down.

The work makes use of a primitive - but incredibly cool - process known as a "camera obscura." In this process, a small room is insulated from all outside light. Then, a pinhole of light is opened, allowing a small shaft of light to come through to the other side of the room. The shadows cast through this light are a photorealistic reproduction of what occurs outside the room - except that it is upside down.

The Knolls use this in a new way. By dampening their room while allowing some ambient light to come in, they were able to photograph - through use of a four-hour exposure - domestic, interior spaces with the exterior projected onto them, upside-down.

"Creating a camera obscura is a way of bringing the outside inside," Celia Knoll explained in her artist's

statement, comparing the process to a plant laying its roots.

Another twist on the photograph comes from Barbara Kossy, who constructs patched-together photos printed off on massive strips of inkjet paper. Starting from her left, she takes a variety of very casually shot images, and then recombines them in Photoshop to create a panoramic view of what Grillo calls "fleeting moments of the banal."

He explained that the scenes are about "day-to-day, subjective imagery," as well as the way we remember events - particularly the events documented here, such as being stuck in a traffic jam, or taking a ferry ride across a canal.

The images can be seen as a whole, resulting in her 2006 Escheresque maze of a domestic staircase, "Wehrle Stairs." However, other images are clearly definable as a series of photographs, each representing a distinct memory patched together to form a larger memory of a place in time.

"A moment is never a moment, or a hundred moments. It is an infinity of moments," Kossy explains in her statement. "One photo, or a hundred photos, can only pretend to represent reality."

Almost as if to contradict Kossy is artist Flounder Lee's work, "All My Photos." Lee presents every image taken over four years - sorted by year - as very small images. At first, the space between the images forms a maze-like pattern between blocks of color. Peering closer, however, reveals a series of miniature images in the order Lee took them.

"There's no editing," Grillo said, explaining how the images we see in photography are the results of vetting by the photographer, to select the "iconic image" that we recognize. Lee's work is a rejection of that, presenting every image Lee took in his attempts to find that elusive, perfect image.

"We get into the shoes of the photographer," Grillo said, "revealing the photographer's eye at the moment of their experience, rather than just one selected piece of it."

Other photos stand out for their visual impact, documenting true events in unique ways. Christina Z. Anderson presents a series of Gum prints - a 19th-century photographic method - that she made in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

In "Ground Zero," we see a beautifully colored image of massive destruction. A pickup truck smashed into the ground, surrounded by barren trees and piles of loose, scattered debris. From a distance, it has the look of a religious image, a testament to the odd sense of awe that overcomes us at moments of total devastation.

"When you remember Hurricane Katrina, all we have are television images," Grillo said. "All we have to it are references to media."

Anderson says the work is her "mediation and meditation." Her near-obsolete method of image making requires a great deal of time looking at the images, saying, "the process is a coping mechanism."

In a world where photographs of wars can present an agenda through a few clicks of a mouse button, Anderson was interested in capturing something more honest, while allowing the beauty of the images to connect us to the emotion of the event.

Annette Elizabeth Fournet, who documented the transition of Eastern Europe away from Communist rule, used a plastic-lens camera that was popular and inexpensive at the time of Soviet rule, but are now growing obsolete. She uses the camera's obsolescence to document the obsolescence of the way of life it once represented, for better or for worse.

Bob Kiss, another photographer in the show, presents images of former slave homes in Barbados, printing the images directly from the camera to a negative. The camera takes images at the same size that we see them in the show, in what Grillo calls "an extremely direct process."

Grillo also expressed his gratitude to Majo Kaleshian, who runs the Lord Hall gallery.

The exhibit runs every weekday through March 16 at Lord Hall Gallery. Admission is free.

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