

CHUNG | NAMONT
presents



CURATOR'S CORNER

A Deeper Look into the Artists' Practices

Questions from
Gallery Curator
Emmanuelle Namont
(EN) for a deeper
look into the Artist's
practice. This edition
features Bay-Area
artists Arielle Rebek
(AR) and Ron
Moultrie Saunders
(RMS).

EN: *You have both developed practices that are far away from traditional photography as it is conventionally defined. How would you define your relationship to the medium of photography?*

AR: I have a deep love for the medium of photography in its most essential and minimal form. For me, there is a bit of magic at play when light and time unite on a light sensitive surface to create an image. I am very interested in the most basic materials needed to make a photograph and how I can push these materials in new ways. There is also something both beautiful and devastating about a photograph's link to a distinct point in time that cannot be repeated. Conceptually, this relationship to a moment lost, is what attracts me to the medium. I have a longing to hold onto things that represent the past.

The abundance of photography and digital photo technology has pushed me to investigate the analog materials and history of the medium even further. I am much more interested in using the medium to *translate* my surroundings and reveal something new rather than using the medium to record faithfully to human sight.

RMS: My relationship to photography is part of a long line in the history of creating photographic images without a camera.

As I pursued the exploration of creating photograms I discovered that this camera-less technique was one of the earliest forms of photography. I did not study art in art school so I had a lot to discover. William Henry Fox Talbot is credited with making the first photographic negatives which he called photogenic drawings but now known as photograms. Then I discovered Anna Atkins produced a book of photogram cyanotypes of algae in 1843, which are fascinating to see in person. And then there is Man Ray and the Bauhaus artists who used photograms to experiment with creating abstracts work of art.

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EN: *What inspires you?*

RMS: I'm naturally curious about the world. I'm inspired by nature, natural phenomena, science, viewing art in museums and galleries, music, reading, architecture and traveling.

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AR: This is difficult to pinpoint! Inspiration for me comes from a variety of encounters, experiences, and observations. There are a few general categories that come to mind, however. I'm inspired by the medium of photography itself, the evolution of photo technology and our relationship to images. I have a collection of photo archives, including prints and 35mm slides, some that belonged to my family and many that have been found. This collection inspires my interest in the vernacular and the visual patterns of photo archives. The natural landscape is another constant inspiration for me. I'm interested in how the land communicates, what patterns can be observed, and how the land has responded to human impact. And finally, I am inspired by material behavior - the wrinkles of fabric, the folds and tears of paper, the reflection of glass, and the variability of light itself.

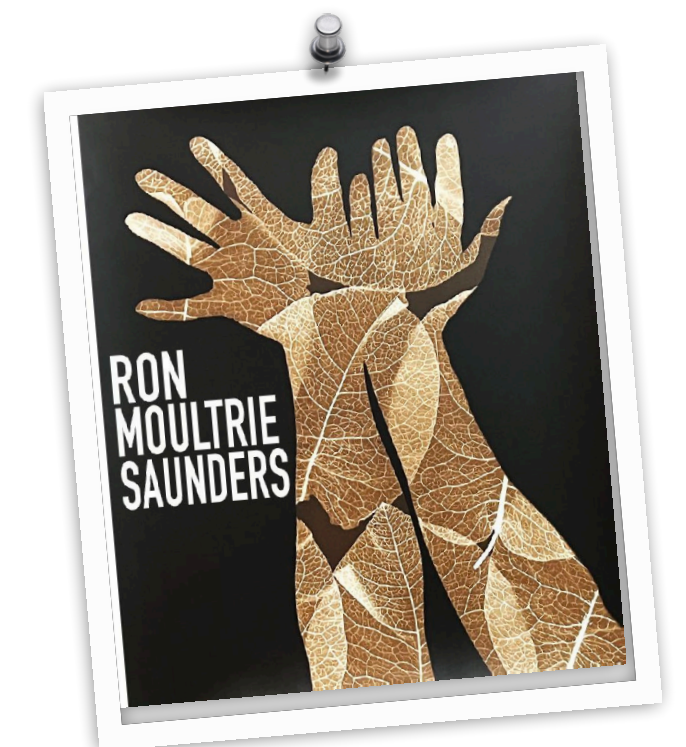
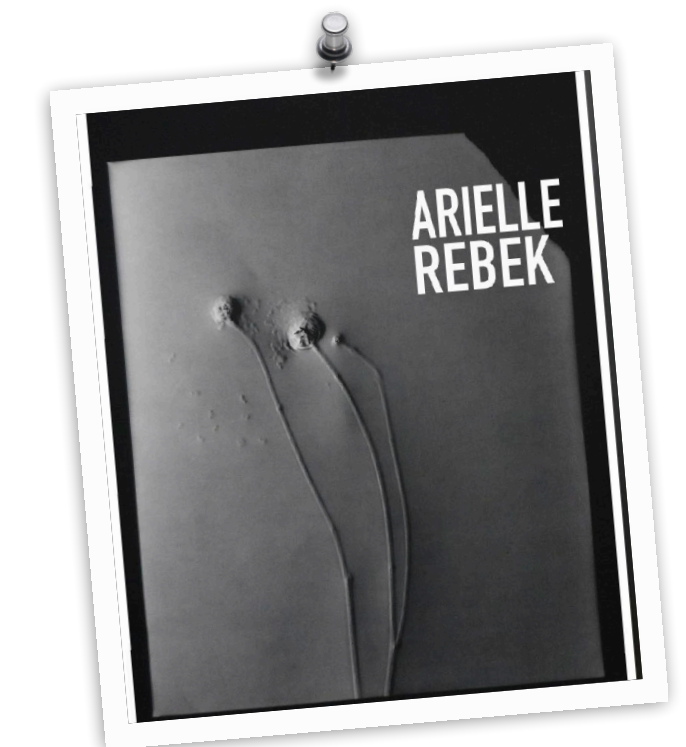
EN: *How would you define your vision of the body within your practice?*

RMS: I use the human body to express the spiritual nature of the human form and our connection to nature. My artistic focus is personal as I explore relationships, feelings, and my place in the world as a black male with African, Irish and Native American roots by using the body as a vehicle to tell stories.

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AR: For much of my cameraless photographic work, I see the final prints as evidence or remnants from an encounter. A coalition of material, environment, light, and my body forms in the process of making work. In *Returning To...(Develop before 1972)*, I shattered photographic slide plates using various methods in the darkroom (drop, hammer, wack), exposed the pieces to light, and then developed the shards. These glass fragments were then used in the making of photograms on full glass plates. An important aspect of the project were my encounters with the glass plates and how I navigated their preciousness and fragility.

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EN: *Arielle, some of your work presents sculptural aspects. How would you define your practice in relationship to the medium of sculpture?*

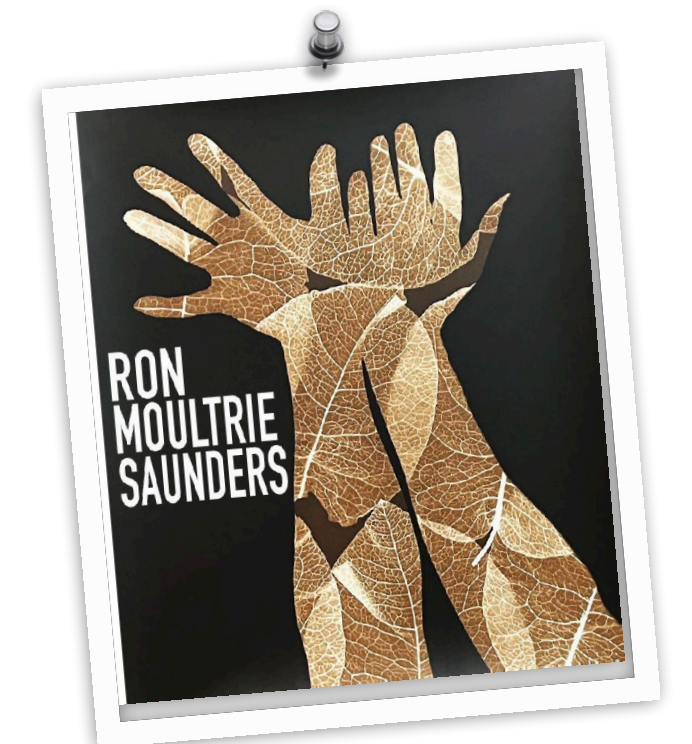
AR: I'm interested in the photograph as a physical object with tactility and dimension. I've come to create more sculptural works as a result of exploring how the image can come off the wall and become a physical art object that makes you aware of its presence (as opposed to a window into another time.) I'm also really drawn to materials, especially fabric and glass, and will often try to accentuate the properties of my materials, which takes me down a more sculptural path.

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EN: *What is the role of abstraction, if any, in your practices?*

RMS: Some viewers may see the work as abstract because they may not be sure what they are seeing at first. As more time is spent with the work the image reveals itself. One could say that the some of my work is abstract because it doesn't represent a complete picture of reality.

AR: I work with experimental analog processes in order to transform my environment or reveal something that was not initially visible. In this way, I am abstracting space and intentionally distorting reality in an effort to peel back new layers of meaning from a subject. I'm very interested in a photograph's ability to both reveal and withhold information. There is always something left out of the frame. Abstraction is important in my work because it welcomes the viewer to embrace the illusion of photography and find multiple meanings.



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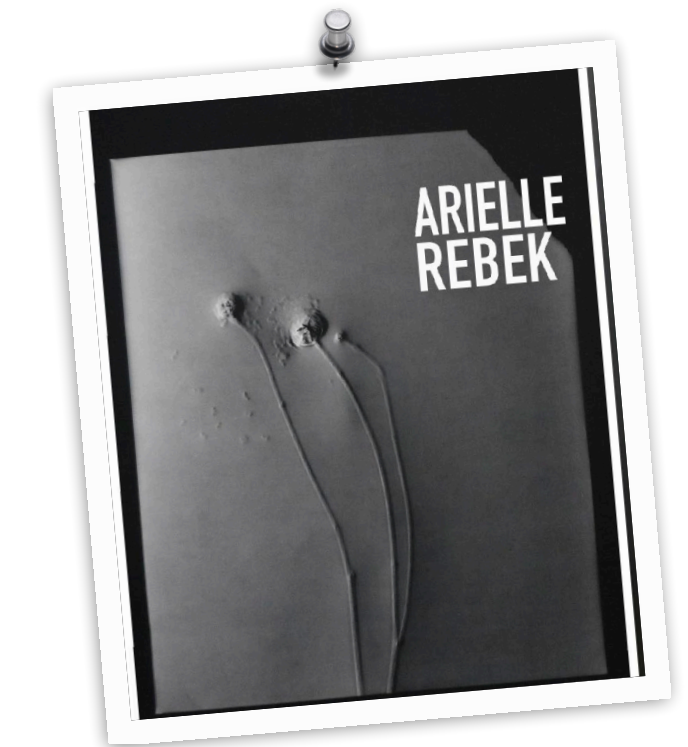
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EN: *Both of your works convey the idea of “wonder”. I am thinking about your pinhole series Arielle, where the viewer walks into a sublimated landscape and your series of plants, Ron, in which you create a new world from everyday plants. Does that concept resonate for you in your practice?*

AR: Wonder is important in my process as well as my finished work. In my studio practice, I embrace chance encounters and unknown results. In other words, I want my work to surprise me. I continually experiment with materials and create technology limitations in order to maintain unpredictability and wonder. I enjoy working with pinhole photography for this very reason. The simplistic pinhole camera offers minimal control and wildly unexpected results, especially when layering exposures. In my *For Visibility* series, the landscapes instill a sense of wonder as they remain both familiar and bewildering, like a scene you vaguely recall from a dream.



RMS: A sense of wonder for me is equivalent to a desire to know something. For many years I used a camera to document landscapes, architecture and places. However, a little over 20 years ago I was confronted with issues around mortality and decided to explore creating an autobiographical story via photograms. Could I explore emotions and identity without using a camera? By taking a deep dive into “the secret life of plants” series I could look at life from beginning to end. And the sense of wonder is seeing what was not immediately visible at first glance.



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EN: Ron, some might link your work to historical practices in photography, I am thinking particularly about some photographer of the New German Objectivity, like Karl Blossfeldt? Do you see any connection/ clear distinction with these practices?

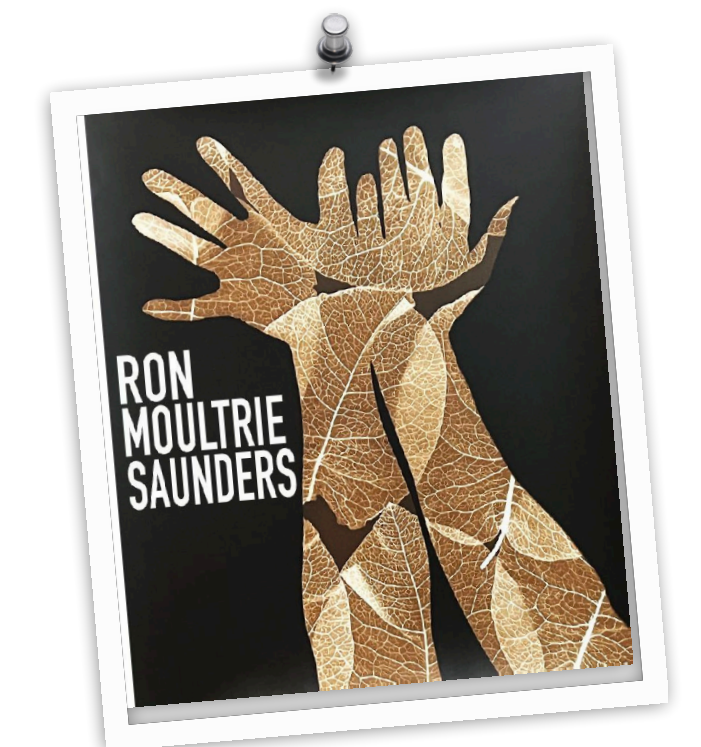


RMS: The link to Karl Blossfeldt can be made because he was inspired by nature and curious about how plants grew. I'm inspired by nature but want to investigate the interior life of plants not just the surface. Blossfeldt became a pioneer in the field of photography when he constructed cameras to record the intimate detail of plants.

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EN: Arielle, you define your process as one of intuitive action - walking, collecting, folding, wrapping -What is your relationship to the "land" in your work?

AR: My work is often inspired by and in response to observations made in the natural landscape. However, I don't often visit a specific location with a clear plan to create artwork. I love to just walk and observe how the natural world communicates, including patterns of growth and decay, relationships to sunlight, shapes found in nature, or prevalence of a species. In another life (and perhaps with another set of skills), I may have liked to be an ecologist! In a recent project, I became very interested in the abundant eucalyptus trees in the bay area. While eucalyptus pose fire risk and threaten other native species, their towering beauty and familiar scent is intertwined with the bay area landscape. I've been interested in their stringy and plentiful bark as a symbol of their opposing threat and allure.



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EN: *And now a difficult question: What do you want the viewer to take away from the contemplation of your work?*

AR: A difficult question indeed. In truth, I am not too interested in telling viewers what to feel or take away from my work. I'd be thrilled if my work left viewers thinking about illusion in photography - what is real and what is fabricated. It would be a delight to hear that a viewer began paying closer attention to the behavior of light and shadow in everyday life after viewing my work. But I want viewers to feel what they feel and make whatever associations they may have. I'm curious about all of it!

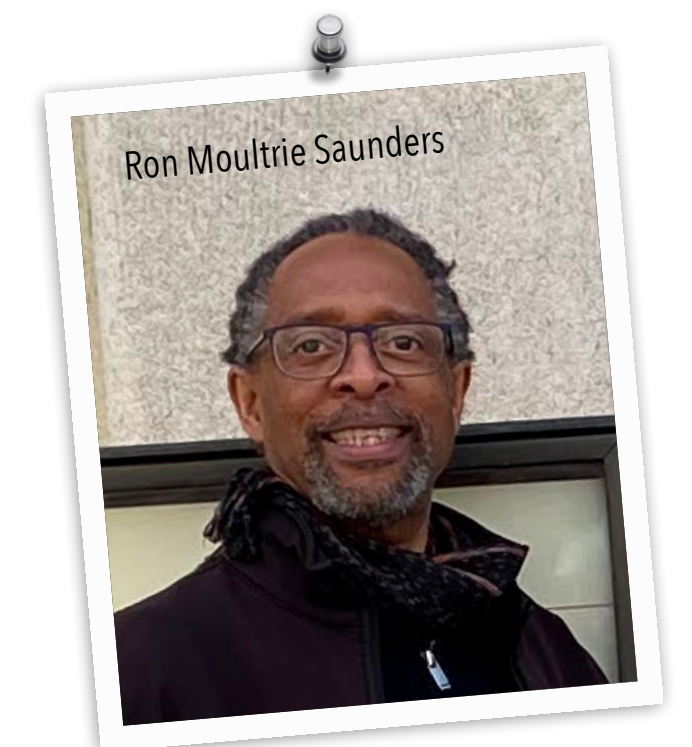
RMS: I want the viewer to take Time to think about what they are seeing and feeling.

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EN: *What is next for you?*

RMS: I'm working on completing a few public art projects in the Bay Area. And I'm exploring adding color onto my photograms.

AR: I have a few projects in the works and several planned for the future. Currently, I'm collaborating with an ecologist at UC Davis, Marina LaForgia, and making work in response to her research on plant seed traits and climate variability. I've been working more in textiles recently and have been developing a project that utilizes stereoscopy to explore relationships with the environment.



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