

AFTER IMAGE

JUNE 12TH - AUGUST 17, 2024



RACHEL PHILLIPS

Rachel Phillips began photography while completing her undergraduate degree at Skidmore College, graduating in 2005. In numerous group and solo exhibitions, she has presented a series of projects exploring the photograph as object, often resulting in unique works incorporating materials ranging from old envelopes to 19th century cabinet cards. A frequent theme in the work is a desire to “reanimate” the vernacular photographs and paper ephemera in her collection by reworking them in a variety of ways to create imagery that is resonant with the past yet has a new vitality and reflection of our own time and perspective.

She has served as a board member for SF Camerawork and Medium Photo, and as the Executive Director of PhotoAlliance. Through her imprint Treadwell Press, she publishes artists’ books and small collaborative editions. These works are widely held in special collections across the country, including Harvard University, MassArts, Museum of Fine Arts Houston Special Collections, SFMOMA Library and Archive and Yale University. She is represented by Catherine Couturier Gallery in Houston Texas, and in addition to photography, works as a tutor for children with learning differences.

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ARTIST STATEMENT

Vanishing Point

Archival pigment prints in original frames

Vanishing point embraces an ethos (and perhaps an oxymoron) of what could be described as "material conceptualism," presenting a seemingly simple series of original antique frames each holding a picture of itself—a picture of the empty frame inside the frame.

Through this conceit, the work asks: how do we represent absence or loss? What is the material weight and spatial presence of the lack of something? What was held in these frames before? Where did it go? Did these images abscond of their own accord, or were they spirited away by an outside force? What is lost, of both the subject and the artist, when images that once were are now gone? Conversely, What is gained by an empty portal becoming a canvas for our imagined stories?

Fixed

Distressed archival pigment prints from antique snapshots

Begun in 2014, *Fixed* is a series of photographs made by Rachel Phillips' alter-ego Madge Cameron—an aging archivist at a private library in San Francisco. Originating at a time when digital innovations were either revolutionizing or killing photography—depending on whom you asked—this evolving series of glitch-scanned photographs embraces what is both gained and lost in the translation of analog objects into digital files—and back to physical objects again.

The project started with the fictional Madge Cameron working to digitize her collection's extensive photographic holdings with a flatbed scanner. A poor technician in a new digital era, Cameron discovered accidentally that by moving the photograph while the scan was happening, she could separate the image into its color channels, resulting in images that seemed to be both breaking apart and compounding. At first irritated with what she saw as failed work, Cameron eventually came to embrace the "process of interruption," as she puts it. "I came to see these imperfect digital rendering as a metaphor for what I do as an archivist; each piece becomes a visual cross-reference of itself."

A new iteration of the work began in 2022, when Cameron found herself equally alarmed and intrigued by the discovery that original analog snapshots in the archive were showing signs of digital manipulation and deterioration. Photographs that had never been digitized by Cameron had apparently begun altering of their own accord, or via the hand of an unknown ghost librarian in the digital ether. "It's fantastical," Cameron said. "It seems to represent a dissolution of the boundaries between our physical, analog world and this ever-expanding digital one. What does it mean if some 'Artificial Intelligence' can reach out and alter our physical reality? What does it mean when we can't be sure of a safe retreat into an analog space if we find overwhelming corruption in a digital one? What does it mean that these alterations, though undeniably lossy and destructive, are also, somehow, mysterious and beautiful?"