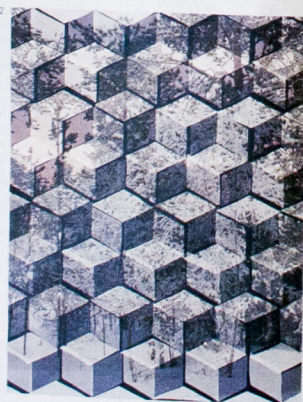
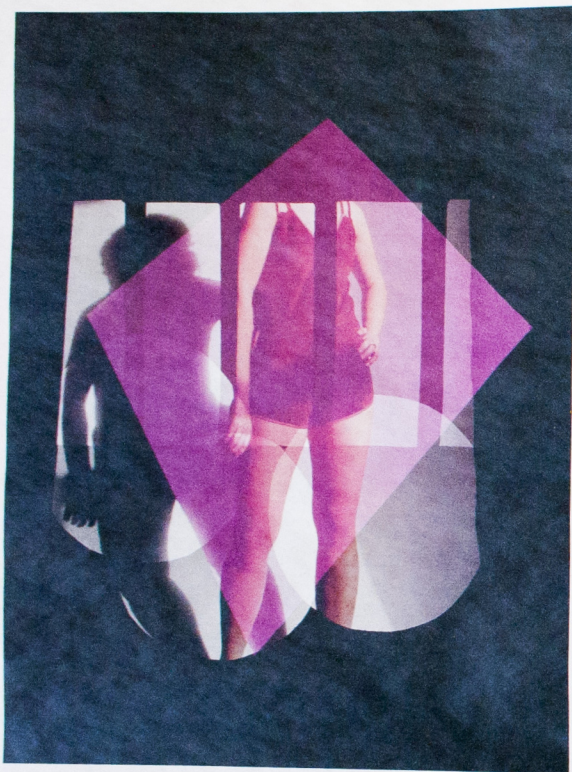


Hannah Whitaker

presented by Galerie Christophe Gaillard



PREMIERE

Q Your work is a radical departure from 'straight' photography. How did you come to work within an experimental framework?

A I bristle a little at the way the term 'straight' photography is frequently invoked without properly defining its parameters. It reminds me of the US Supreme Court justice who failed to define pornography and famously resorted to "I know it when I see it". All photographs are manipulated in some way – there is no such thing as a perfect window onto the world. I don't think breaking photography down into categories of what looks like the world and what doesn't look like it is the most productive way of thinking. It leads to a fixation on process rather than looking closely at the image itself. I began intervening in the picture plane a few years ago, but I don't think of it as a radical departure. I've always been interested in formalism and that interest is now perhaps more overt.

A few years ago when I was first experimenting with controlled light leaks, I realised that a given number of holes left a given number of dots on the photograph. That led me to the idea that the photograph could both depict the world *and* have a quantity. This was a really important idea for me. Once a photograph has a quantity it can fit within a numerical system, in addition to linguistic and musical systems.

Q Shooting through cut-out cardboard and using light leaks, your way of working embraces a more handcrafted, artisanal approach. Is this intervention into the photographic process important for you as the artist or for how the viewer reads your work?

A For me the geometric parts of the photograph are a way to approach a kind of ideal. The perfectly straight lines and perfectly round circles invoke a way of visualising that only really exists on an

abstract or theoretical plane. But, since these parts of the photograph are made by hand they are imperfect, so that ideal is constantly being undermined. In addition, this allows for the possibility of employing visual languages that are not rooted in the photographic. Being able to apply a grid or a set of shapes to a photograph allows an engagement with other non-photographic art forms, which is really interesting to me.

Q Experimentation is often born from a frustration with the limits of the medium, but you have commented that using analogue within your process has actually helped limit the endless possibilities of post-production. How does your technical approach relate to your ideas on the photographic medium?

A For me post-production offers a dizzying infinitude of possibilities. I find the limitations of analogue film to be generative. The possibilities of film are of course also infinite, but you might think of it as a smaller infinity. I've begun to think about the 4x5 sheet of film as both a physical and a conceptual space, so that my photographs become prescribed by the inherent qualities of this material. I ask myself: What are the things I can and can't do here? And then the work becomes partly about this structural framework. But I'm not a Luddite. I scan my film, remove dust, do basic colour and contrast adjustments, and print digitally. However, since the conceptual parameters are important to me, the real content of the image is done in-camera on a single sheet of film, through analogue means.

Q A near painterly concern with abstraction underpins your work. Can you talk a bit about the position of abstraction within photography?

A I like thinking about abstraction as non-photographic. One could argue that abstraction in art came about because of the pointlessness of realistic painterly depiction after photography was invented. There's a great and famous essay by Rosalind Krauss called *Grids*, where she positions the grid as a totem of modernism defined by its status as anti-natural or anti-mimetic. I would also add anti-photographic.

Q Some of your work contains 'straight' photography. How and why do you choose the images that you work over?

A I don't really think of the images that are layered, any differently than I do those that have only one, unimpeded exposure. They are all part of the same set of ideas, just performing different functions. The screens are recorded onto the film with the same fidelity as whatever is in front of the camera, fibres and all.



Through a variety of handmade interventions, the work of Hannah Whitaker (b. 1980, the US) explores and expands the photographic medium. She talks about abstraction and developing a broader perspective on the term 'photography'.