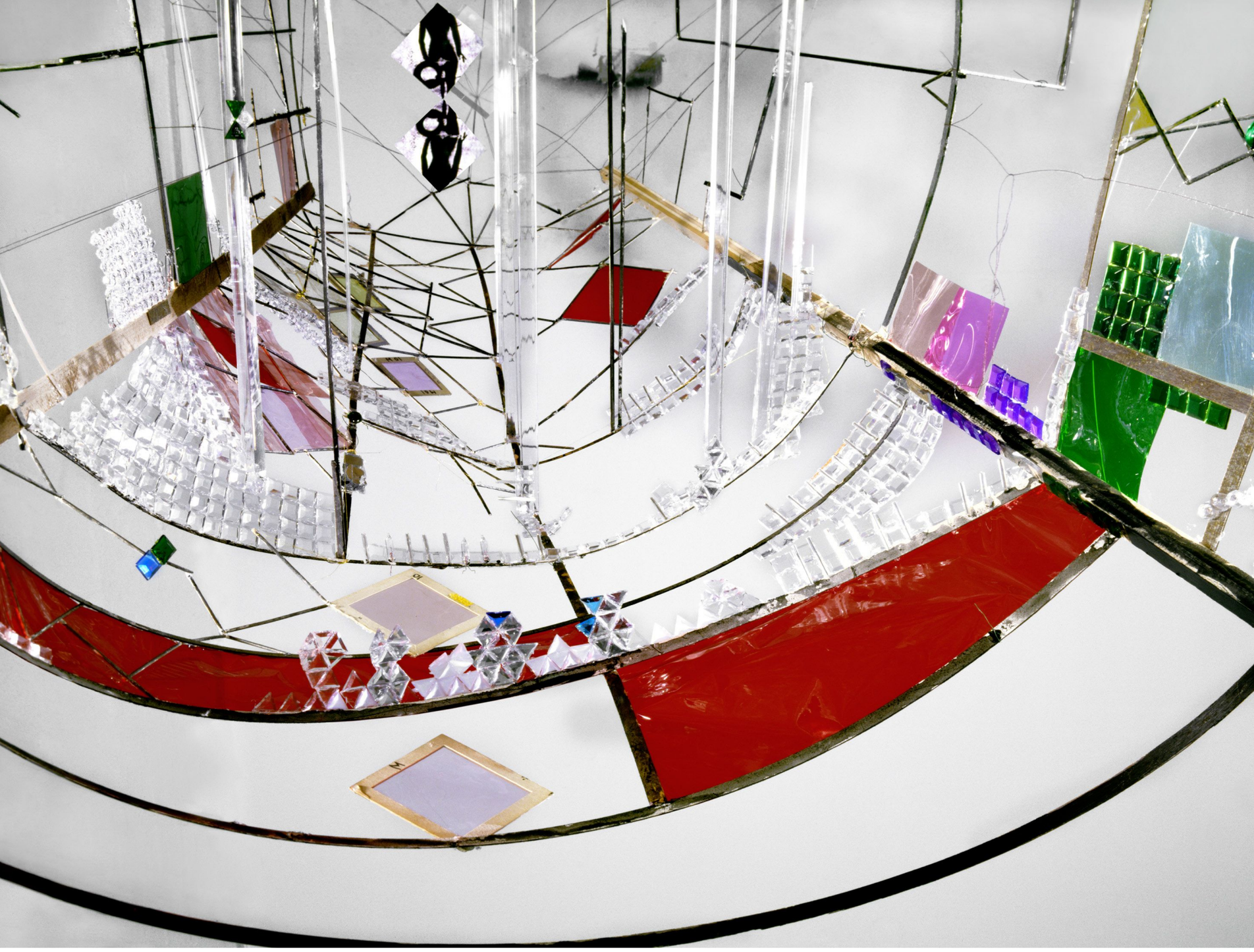


PHOTO PAGES

CityBeat Cincinnati

cincinnati art museum

Volume 1 Issue 3

THE ART OF DEMOCRACY?

Paintings are aristocratic, photographs are democratic. That has been one of the rallying cries photographers and their supporters have used to legitimize a medium that until recently struggled to rise above its reputation as producing snapshots and news images. Because it is perceived to be easier to take photographs than it is to paint, because they are by their very nature reproducible without limit, and exactly because they are so often reflections of daily life, rather than images of imaginary or posed situations, there is a truth in the statement.

It is, of course, an oversimplification. These days some photographs are as expensive as the finest painting. Photographers who aim to make art, rather than documentation, limit the prints they make to create scarcity. Using computer technology as well as their imagination, photographers often create wholly artificial worlds that are as strange and difficult to decipher as anything the old masters might have dreamt up.

Yet photography can't help itself. It keeps returning to social issues, focusing on environmental devastation, social discrepancies, and both the mundane nature and the suffering of daily life. It also questions the very nature of what an image, or an original, might be, thus undercutting the exclusivity of the work of art.

Above all else, photography (as well as video and computer-generated art) is the medium that, more than any other, pulls art into daily life, both in subject and as an object, and asks us to look at ourselves and our world in a critical manner. As it does so, it tends to destroy itself. It dissolves into reportage, into newspapers, websites, or debates, but it also loses its definition. What is a photograph that was not made by a camera, or that disappears as a recognizable image? What is an art project that is part of a political or narrative project? What about paintings based on photographs, or a combination of painting and photographs?

Distinctions are dissolving, the field is getting messy, the pictures are getting tougher to interpret and define. Sounds pretty democratic to me.

At the Art Palace of the West, we are happy to welcome these great, tough, democratic pictures.

Aaron Betsky
Director
Cincinnati Art Musem

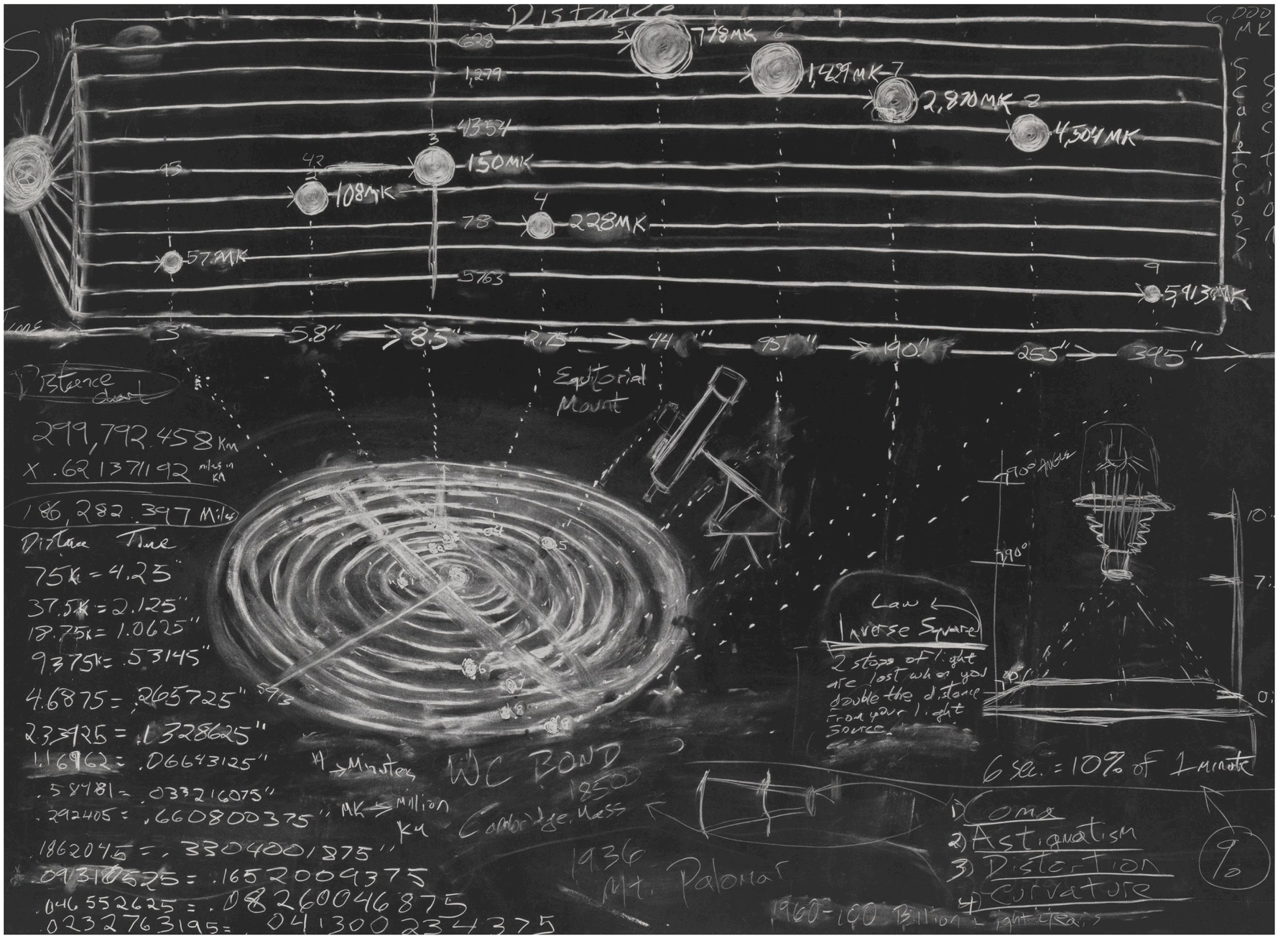
ABOUT THE CINCINNATI ART MUSEUM COLLECTION OF PHOTOGRAPHS

The photography collection at the Art Museum consists of nearly 3,000 objects spanning the history of the medium from its inception in 1839 to the present day. Noteworthy examples from the nineteenth century include works by William Henry Fox Talbot, Gustave Le Gray, Julia Margaret Cameron, Matthew Brady and Carleton Watkins. The Art Museum began exhibiting photographs in 1896, in a period that saw a great debate concerning the medium's status as an art. The Art Museum's photographs from this particular period include works by such artists as Heinrich Kühn, Clarence White, Emile Joachim Constant Puyo, Arnold Genthe and Herbert Greer French. Modernist works from the collection include photographs by Walker Evans, Man Ray, Paul Strand, Edward Steichen, Umbo, and Berenice Abbott, while the later twentieth century is represented by the work of masters such as Diane Arbus, Richard Avedon, Garry Winogrand, Harry Callahan, and Aaron Siskind, among numerous others. The Art Museum possesses an excellent array of pictures from the last two decades, including works by leading contemporary artists such as Matthew Barney, Nan Goldin, Adam Fuss, Gregory Crewdson, Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger, Tina Barney, and Carrie Mae Weems.

Florian Maier-Aichen (Germany, b. 1973), *Der Watzmann*, 2009, C-print, 71 3/4 x 47 5/8 inches (182.2 x 121 cm)

Courtesy Blum & Poe, Los Angeles and 303 Gallery, New York.s

The Meaning of Photography Today: New Acquisitions



JAMES CRUMP, CHIEF CURATOR AND CURATOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

"I sometimes don't think that I really take photographs so much as I frame things that I see. A lot of it has to do with the residue of something else. Something that's been burned or abraded, something that's been scratched up; there's a light reflecting off of something else, and there ends up being a pattern. It looks something like a painting a lot of the time." Sasha Frere-Jones describing the photographs he posts on his blog.

Perhaps the discipline that most challenges our perception about art making today is photography, an irony given how much photographic images permeate every waking moment of our lives. Photography's acceptance into the fine arts is no longer contestable; it is the dominant medium of so much contemporary art. And yet, just when we have become comfortable with it, when photography has crawled out of the narrow corner prescribed to it much earlier, technological change asks us to tame it anew, to place new definitions upon it; new limits to describing it and false rules about when and how to use it. What of the millions of perfectly rendered views made with the iPhone or the latest point-and-shoot? Which of these are "photography" in all its high mindedness and which are merely the work of dilettantes, or even accidents

(far left) Bill Davis (United States, b. 1967) *Palimpsest 9*, 2009. Digital silver gelatin print, 41 1/2 x 54 inches. Museum Purchase: Thomas R. Schiff Photography Gift Fund. © Bill Davis. All rights reserved.

(left) Hiroshi Sugimoto (Japan, b. 1948), *Mathematical Form 0004 (Onduloid: A Surface of Revolution with Constant Non-Zero Mean Curvature)*, 2004. Cincinnati Art Museum Permanent Collection. Acquired with The Edwin and Virginia Irwin Memorial Fund. © Hiroshi Sugimoto. All rights reserved. Courtesy Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco.

or random mistakes that increasingly seduce us with their glimmering surfaces and super saturated colors and painterly effects? Some would say that it is difficult to make a bad photograph today. Separating "fine art" from amateur's play may become a fool's errand and perhaps this explains why so many specialists in this field—purists, really—decry the death of photography, the medium that more than any other was continually evolving technologically as it does today, changing and facilitating the very means of producing images.

Whether there is room for an artful high-resolution photograph of a tree alongside photographs of beef-colored Gummi bears has less and less to do with the technological differences than with conceptual approach and the issue of subject matter for art photography. Today some claim that "digital media" is an oxymoron, but such arguments aren't going to slow the production of these kinds of images nor the popular embrace of them. What determines the success of photo-based art are the choices that artists make about materials, formats and presentation; and none of these can claim greater legitimacy over another. The archaic process of black-and-white analog film may seem primitive to some, for example, but employed with intelligence this medium still has a power to help us better comprehend photography's present condition and also its past. Viewing older forms of art makes us visually more acute and discerning in our study and appreciation of newer ones. The past can be a place for retreat or for refreshment. Some artists today, for instance, are questioning the mammoth, tableau-sized color print in favor of smaller, more intimate formats associated with an earlier era. In referencing the past, artists conversant with history are challenging popular notions about how camera images are constructed. Mixing media, techniques and conceptual approaches, their work underscores the relationships that photography always shared with sculpture, painting, drawing, and performance art. However, rather than shrink from the technological advances, these artists embrace them wholeheartedly, recognizing in them a panoply of new options and opportunities.

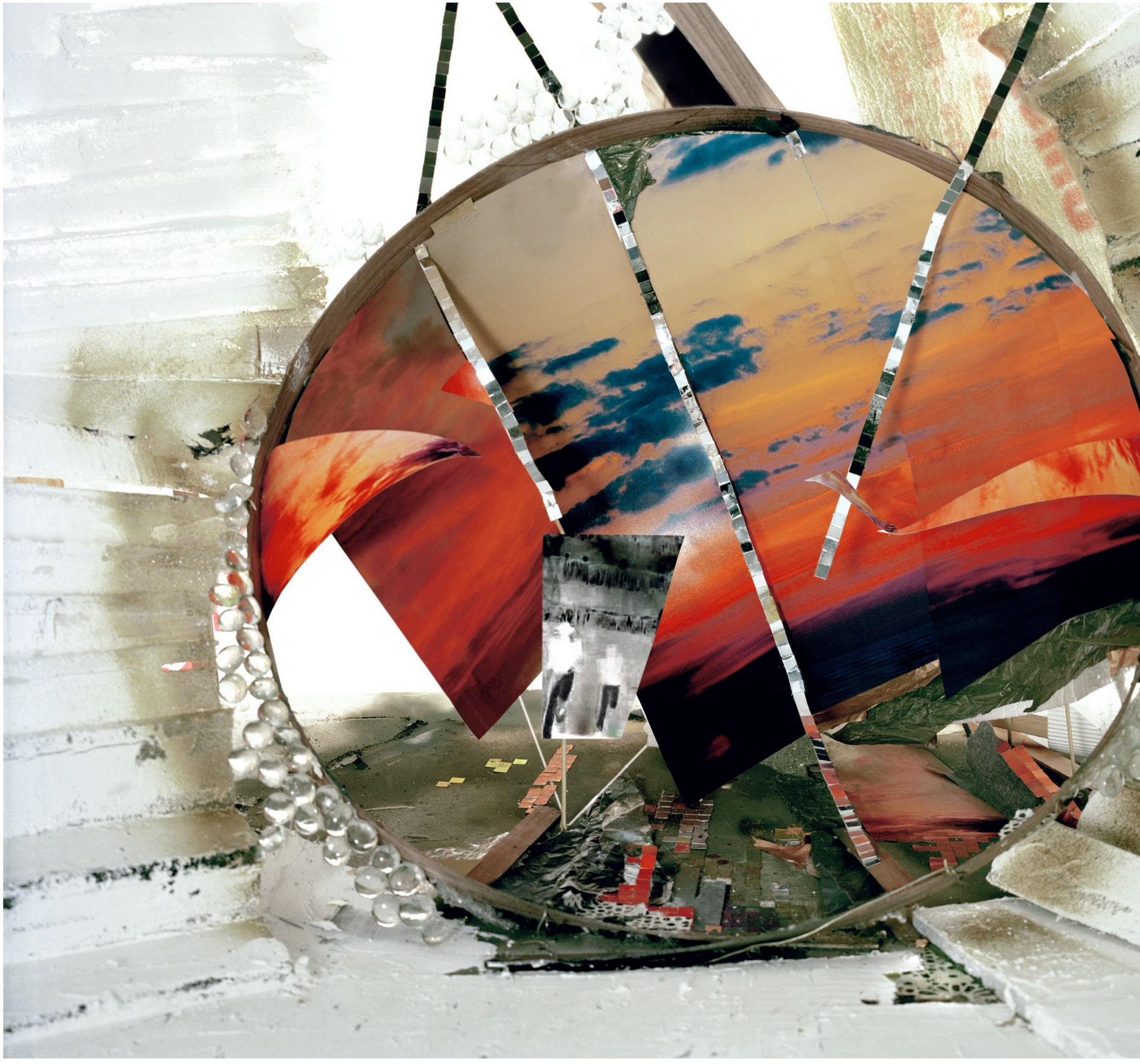
The latest acquisitions of photography at the Cincinnati Art Museum call attention to the myriad ways in which this medium is used to make art. Viewed alongside works already admitted to the permanent collection, the latest photographic acquisitions allow one to glean shared themes and genres, but also pictorial affinities and differences with earlier works, in all media. These recent additions demonstrate excellence in sometimes singular approaches to photography that witness the vibrancy of this art. In other examples, new acquisitions assist in creating continuity, serving otherwise to fill voids that exist in the collection or to round out a specific area or body of work by an artist.

Yamini Nayar, among the youngest living artists represented in the Art Museum, creates mosaic-like assemblages that fuse photography and sculpture together with results that are deceptively enchanting. *Cleo*, 2009, acquired this year, underscores Nayar's material interests in her use of objects she gathers from various sources: archives, the street, refuse and other found manufactured goods—a glass marble, for instance, or a scrap from an old photograph—repurposed for her elaborate constructions that she subsequently photographs. The constructed image has been a mainstay of contemporary photography in the last two decades and the Art Museum has periodically admitted works made in this fashion. What is most impressive about *Cleo* is the illusionistic space and sense of depth created by the wooden planks that recede in the composition and the fine, trinket-like details that seem to dot the surface. *Cleo* underscores the artist's interest in personal narratives and place and issues such as alienation, migration and otherness, but it is also simply ravishingly beautiful as an image.

While Nayar's *Cleo* is obviously a photograph, other recent acquisitions test our perceptions by stretching the definition of photography, thus blurring the lines between it and drawing, for example. Cincinnati native, Bill Davis's *Palimpsest 9*, 2009, confounds us with its graphic effects and compositional play. The artist uses chalkboards filled with marks and annotations, which in this example seem to derive from optical and chemical equations thus alluding to photography's analogue past. An exercise in visual fantasy, the numbers, words, patterns and designs and the mark-making associated with the ephemeral, erasable chalkboard have been photographed with film—thus made permanent—and digitally printed, adding an ironic layering of perplexity. The striking end result of this large format conceptual sleight of hand refers to memory—the essence of photography itself—while offering up somewhat an absurdist, dada-like puzzle that begs decoding and decipherment. The surface of *Palimpsest 9* is deceiving, rendering impossible the immediate discernment of the photographic medium. *Palimpsest 9* would seem as closely associated with numerous works on paper in the permanent collection, for example those of Cy Twombly, than any photograph.

In viewing these recent acquisitions, it is clear that contemporary artists today are breaking free from any one genre associated with the camera, challenging our assumptions about what a photograph is and how it sits beside other, more traditional, works of art. In this, the most exciting time ever in the medium's history, the Art Museum remains committed to building its ever expanding holdings of photo-based art.

James Crump is the Chief Curator of the Cincinnati Art Museum, and since 2008 the first endowed Curator of Photography. In these roles, Crump has spearheaded numerous acquisitions on behalf of the Art Museum. His film on legendary collector Sam Wagstaff, Black White + Gray*, has been screened extensively in Asia, Europe and North America and is available on Netflix and the iTunes Store.*



Yamini Nayar

LIGHTBORNE VISITING ARTIST AND LECTURE SERIES

In association with the Art Academy of Cincinnati, twice each year, the Cincinnati Art Museum hosts two visiting lens-based contemporary artists as part of the Lightborne Visiting Artist and Lecture series. Most recently, we hosted artist Yamini Nayar, with her lecture on October 6th and an exhibition at the Convergys Gallery that was on view from September 10 to October 8, 2010.

Yamini Nayar creates images that merge sculpture and photography and that explore issues of migration, fragmentation and place. Her work combines materials from various sources such as historical archives, architectural design, cultural artifacts and personal narrative. *Photo Pages* is pleased to present some of Nayar's most recent images. Please stay tuned for more information about the next Lightborne visiting artist, renowned photographer, Philip-Lorca diCorcia.

(left) Yamini Nayar, United States, *One of These Days*, 2008. C-print. 36 x 48 inches. Copyright Yamini Nayar, 2008. All rights reserved. Courtesy of Thomas Erben Gallery, New York and the artist.
(bottom right) Yamini Nayar, United States, *The Pursuit*, 2010. C-print. 30 x 40 inches. Copyright Yamini Nayar, 2010. All rights reserved. Courtesy of Thomas Erben Gallery, New York and the artist.