

Stephanie Dinkins

Elizabeth Mellott-Carreón

Anni Holm

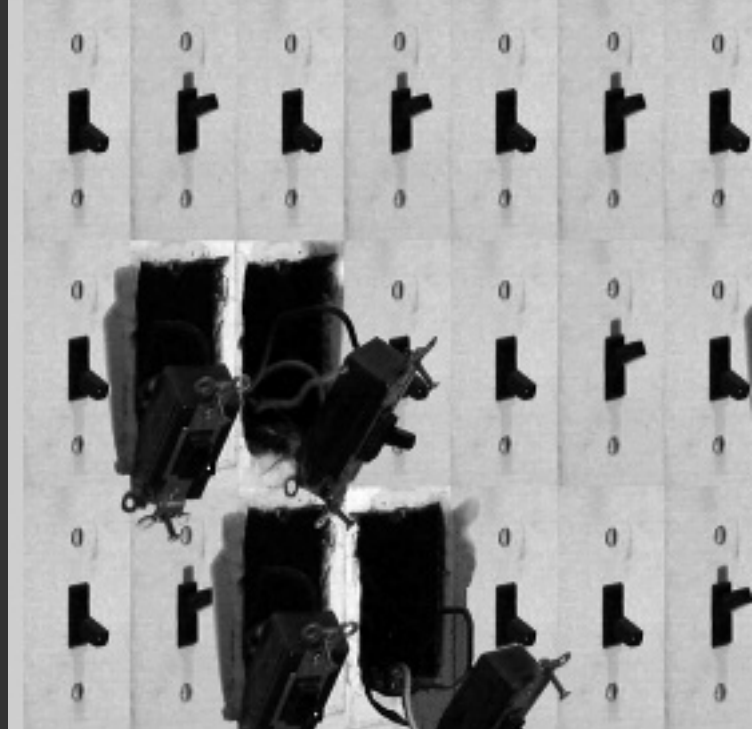
Debora Hunter

Edwin Jager

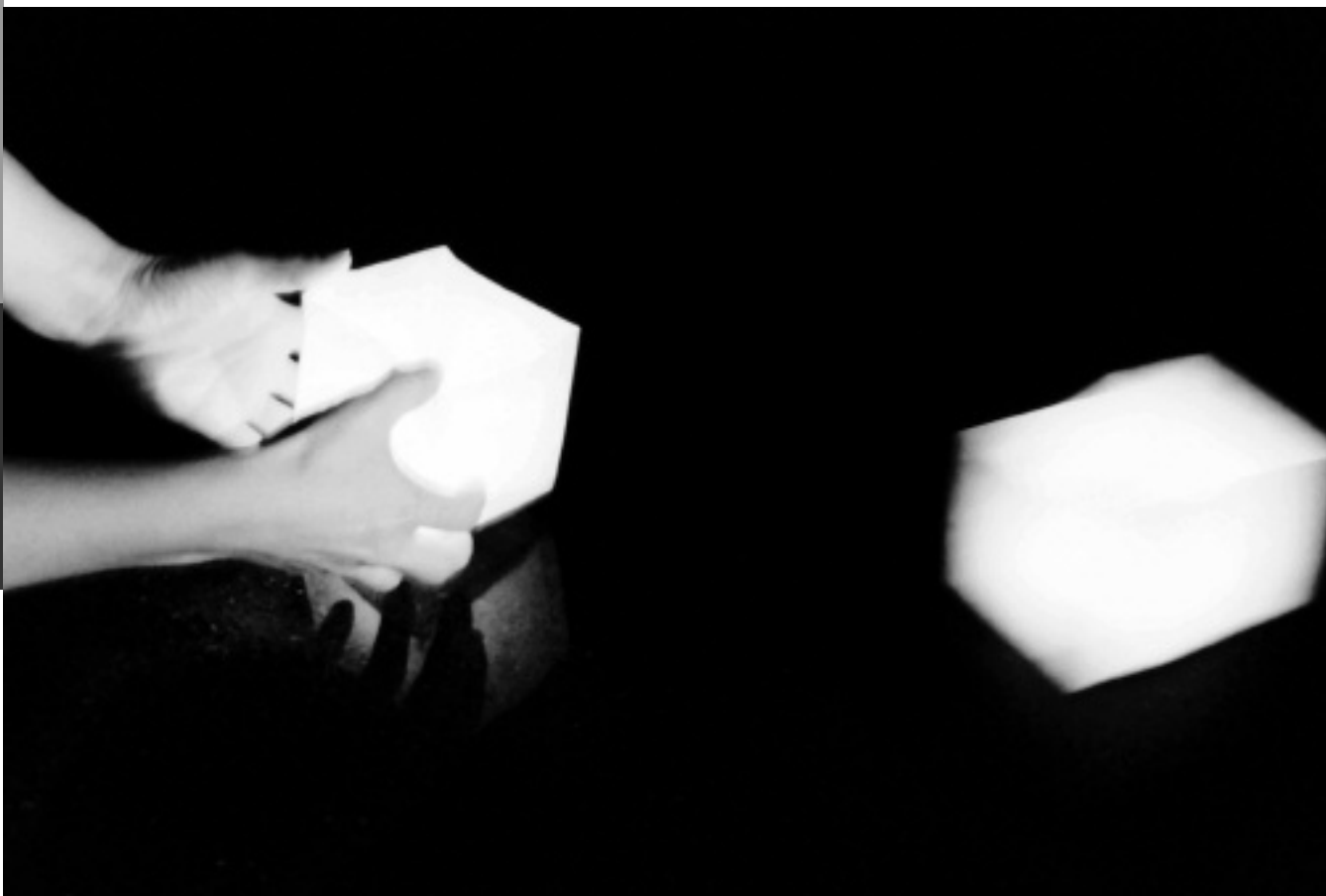
Steven Silberg

John O. Smith

Kevin Todora



# d\_i\_s\_t\_a\_n\_c\_e & trace





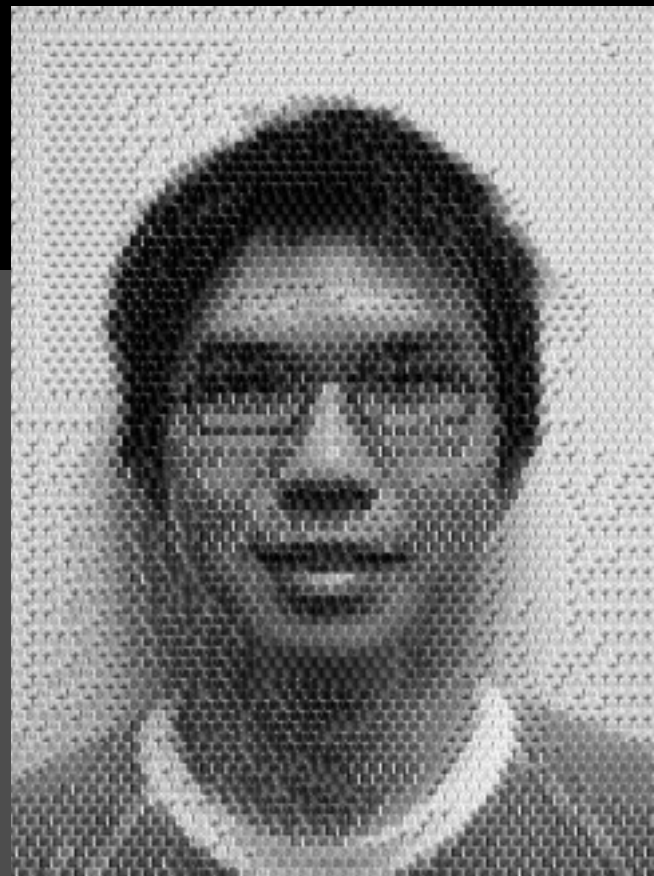
*Distance & Trace*, an exhibition curated by Associate Professor Marilyn Waligore, examines the distance between the original and copy produced as a result of processes of reproduction. *Distance & Trace*, on view in the Visual Arts Gallery of the University of Texas at Dallas from March 17 through April 15, 2006, features the work of eight artists: Texas artists Debora Hunter and Kevin Todora of Dallas, and Elizabeth Mellott-Carreón of Denton; Edwin Jager and John O. Smith of Wisconsin; Anni Holm, Chicago, Illinois; Steven H. Silberg, Baltimore, Maryland; and Stephanie Dinkins, New York. These artists have embraced processes of reproduction and have exploited their potential for creative possibilities, for investigating how our view of subject matter is altered or changed through digital and light-based processes--from artists' books to digital projections to unique photograms. These mediated images investigate concepts of the real, the copy, the dream, and the imagined.

*For photography is an imprint or transfer off the real; it is a photochemically processed trace casually connected to that thing in the world to which it refers in a manner parallel to that of fingerprints or footprints or the rings of water that cold glasses leave on tables. The photograph is thus generically distinct from painting or sculpture or drawing. On the family tree of images it is closer to palm prints, death masks, the Shroud of Turin, or the tracks of gulls on the beach. For technically and semiologically speaking, drawings and paintings are icons, while photographs are indexes.<sup>1</sup>*

--Rosalind Krauss

Critic Rosalind Krauss has written extensively on the photographic index and the status of the photograph as trace, as shadow, as an imprint of the real. With the introduction of digital technology into the domain of photographic production we can consider how artists have explored the potential of digital processes, while also reflecting on the connections between the thing itself, the object in the world, the point of origin for a work, and the images these source materials engender. We may consider not only the trace itself, but also the status of the original referent. Photographs, often the only remaining echo of an original object or experienced event, are ideal tools to record the transitory or fleeting

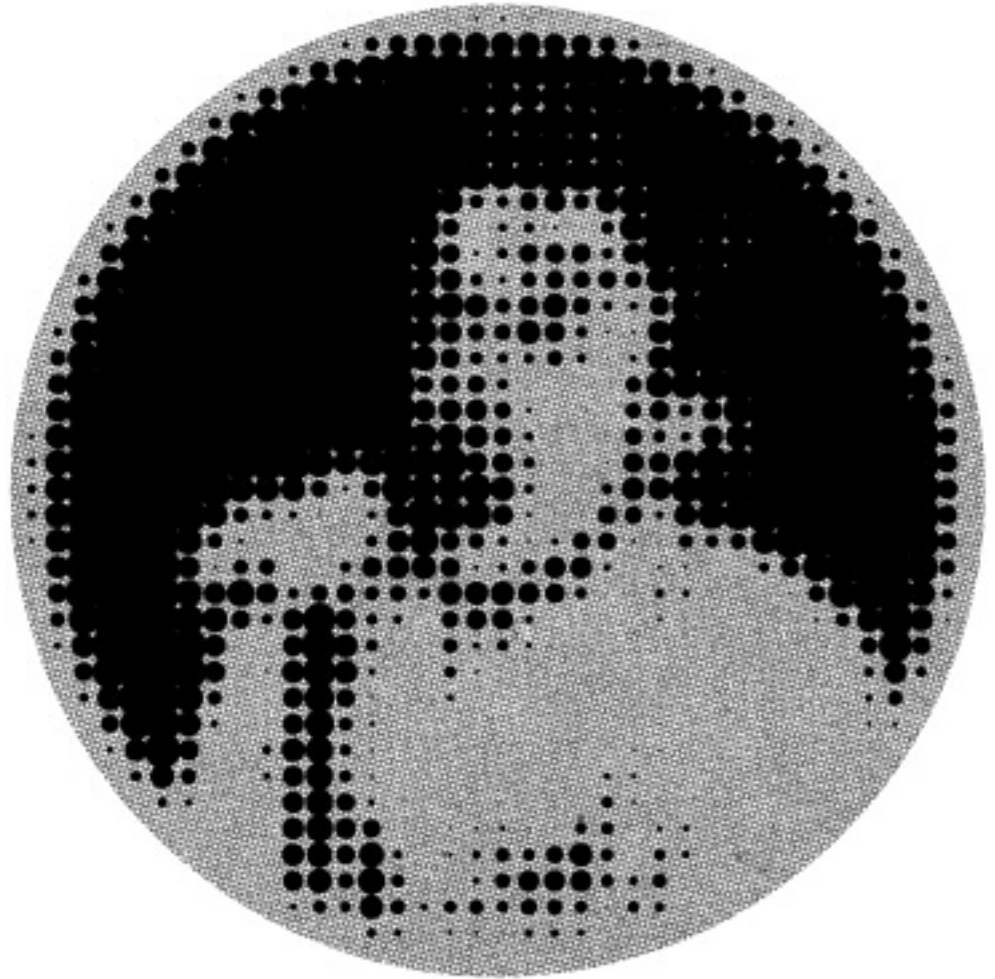
In *Distance & Trace*, lens-based or light-based technologies are adopted by these artists, but the tension between copy and original varies greatly among the works on view. Anni Holm, Kevin Todora, Steven H. Silberg, and Stephanie Dinkins employ digital media to perform this transformation. **Anni Holm's** portraits of international students are generated using a matrix, a pattern derived from the fingerprints of her subjects. She fuses commentary on identity with that of homeland security, as a response to the U.S. government's monitoring of individuals from abroad. Her large-scale portraits recall the gridded works of Chuck Close. However, her passport images, with their obsessive reference to the subject through the use of 4000 life-size fingerprints to comprise the final image, parallel the massive collection of information on foreign visitors to the United States and the merging of photographic and electronic means of data acquisition.<sup>2</sup> Holm, a native of Denmark, invites international students, Anwa from India, Michael from Singapore, Reo from Japan, Jana from Germany, to pose for her camera. Merging two forms of identification, the fingerprint and the headshot, she questions



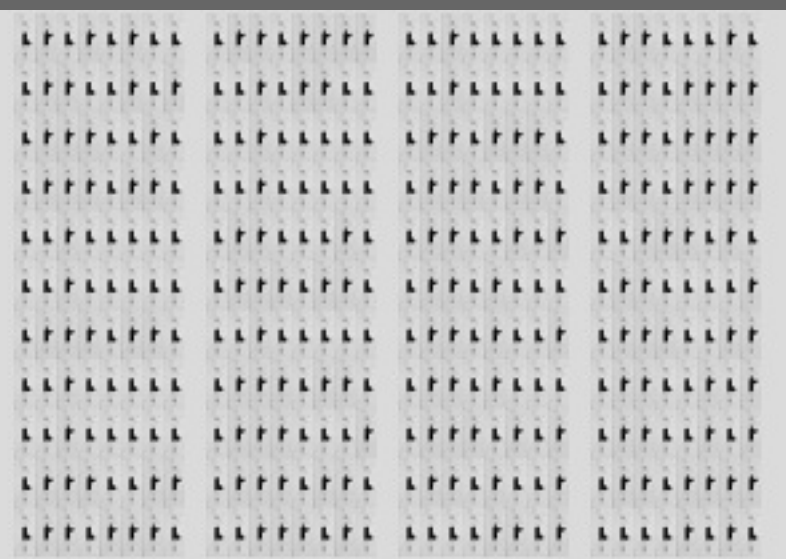
data-gathering mechanisms that have been introduced in the United States since 9/11, and "the use of this information as a tool to secure America."<sup>3</sup> These towering digital prints of 57" x 43" provide the sitters with a presence, rendering them significant, while denying the system of categorization that reduces the individual to digital data and archived profiles.

Kevin Todora, *Darby series*

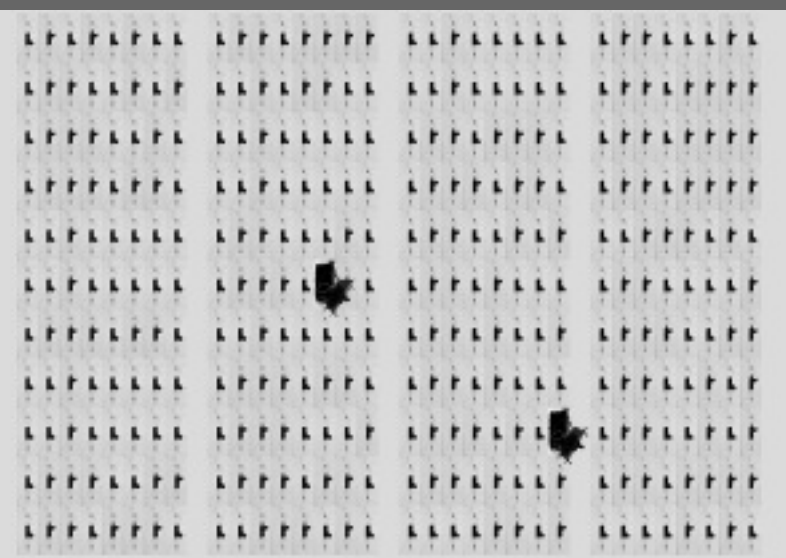
Kevin Todora, like Holm, also explores portraiture and processes of print reproduction, applying an exaggerated overlay, an enlarged dot pattern, to overwhelm the subject. Reminiscent of Andy Warhol's famous celebrity paintings, Todora creates serial portraits that float in a sea of half-tone textures. His merging of painted stencil and photographic surface confuse the distinction between painted marks, printed dots, photographic grain, and digital noise. Todora recycles images of Darby Crash, an innovative punk rock musician, but unlike Warhol's Elvis, Marilyn, or Jackie, Darby appears to sink into the background of these varied hued circles. Darby's cult status in the punk rock music industry contrasts with the wide-spread appeal of Elvis--the latter still occasionally sighted by neurotic fans. Todora references lost celebrity or unrecognized creative activity lying outside of mainstream pop culture. Rather than amplifying Darby's position, Todora allows the face to merge into the half-tone dot screen of the printed page, like a fading photograph or a yellowing, crinkled newspaper. We no longer discern the reference to celebrity status, but we sense a connection to an indistinct memory, underscoring the photograph's long-standing position as document.



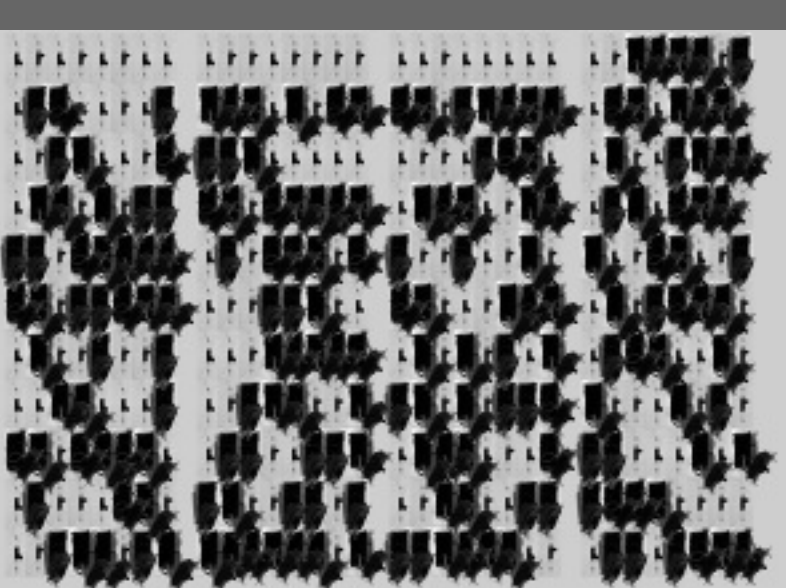
Similar to Todora's experiment with the image distortion, Silberg introduces noise into his DVD projection, *Bit Transformation*, to visualize the degradation of data. **Steven H. Silberg** pushes at the margins of new technologies through study of the relationships between temporality and image data. For Silberg, "By reassessing the relationship between the disruptor and the organizer, degradation can be considered a constructive process. Noise becomes a tool of creative expression."<sup>4</sup> In *Bit Transformation*, the image visually disintegrates through the introduction of noise, hinting at our reliance upon potentially fugitive digital archives. Silberg notes that he begins with the statement, "To Be or Not To Be," due to the connection of the actual phrase to binary values. He employs the binary values of ASCII equivalents for each letter to calculate this initial statement, which becomes altered over time through the removal of individual "bits." "Each time a bit was removed, the text was retranslated to text using a binary to ascii translator found online. Each translation is



"To be, or not to be: that is the question:"



"To be, or not to be: pDÂè@Ôæ@èDÉ@æ•ÎV½ ð4"

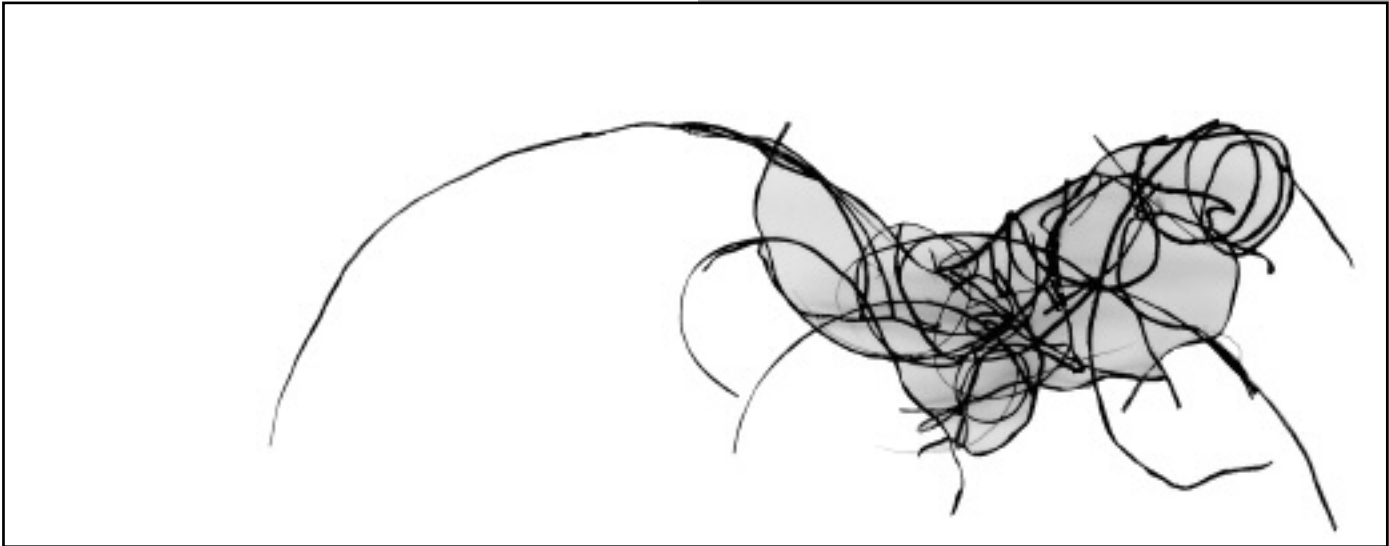


"To be broken, or not"

presented with each image." 5 Within the frame of the video projection we view a grid of cells, filled with an array of commonplace light switches. The switches gradually spill from the surface, exposing their innards, the circuitry behind the wall. As each switch becomes transformed, the quote from Shakespeare's Hamlet becomes more and more unintelligible. Silberg embraces the processes that are integral to image and data creation and destruction as he notes, "While the introduction of noise into an existing structure or system creates something new, it does so at the cost of the original."<sup>6</sup>

**Stephanie Dinkins** also relies on digital technology to generate new imagery, using a flatbed scanner to collect images of human hair. Her *Hair Drawings* apply 21st century process to the reinterpretation of the 19th century photogram--or "photographic drawings" as adopted by Henry Fox Talbot, one of the early innovators in the history of photography. Stephanie Dinkins challenges our assumptions about distinctions made between drawing and digital "direct image acquisition technique."<sup>7</sup> Her *Hair Drawings*, "derived from random configurations of hair scanned directly into the computer,"<sup>8</sup> suggest commonplace subjects, such as insects, while they also represent the sinuous black lines of discarded body hair, encouraging readings on more than one level. She notes that her focus on visual interpretation, "marks an effort to reconnect with my experientially gained definition of what art is, how art is made, and the cultures, both familial and societal, that inform my work. Inspired by my grandmother, who would often ask if I could see, as she did, a flower, a face, a horse... lurking in the shape of an amorphous cloud."<sup>9</sup> Dinkins explores aspects of human perception and the potential for engaging the viewer in a more complex manner--parallel to the cloud photographs of contemporary artist Vik Muniz, which challenge the *Equivalent's* series of photographic icon Alfred Stieglitz. For Dinkins, "these 'drawings' are an attempt to simultaneously work within the realm of an art form long exalted by the Western art canon while challenging that canon by removing the handwork from the process and by working with a material, discarded body hair, that rides the line between seduction and disgust."<sup>10</sup> Unlike Muniz' fluffy cotton balls, forms that suggest both objects and partially cloudy skies, Dinkins work recalls the body. The reference to sexuality and physicality imbue these images with a verifiable presence. The delicate, curvilinear "marks" produced by the hair suggest a kind of play, and Dinkins invites our participation.

Debora Hunter, Elizabeth Mellott-Carreón, John O. Smith, and Edwin Jager compare the real with the imagined or the replica. **Debora Hunter** documents the Frontiers of Flight museum, at Dallas Love Field Airport in Texas, where "for eighteen years the museum's collection of aviation artifacts and memorability was displayed in the former Luau room on the second floor of the concourse in Love field Terminal."<sup>11</sup> Debora Hunter photographs model planes, which populated the previous Frontiers of Flight Museum, a place of "untidy accumulation, in which real artifacts are mingled with reproductions."<sup>12</sup> The artist sees this museum installation as "metaphorically rich. We sift for meaning amidst a cluttered history. Our significant achievements float alongside the flotsam and jetsam of our endeavors."<sup>13</sup> Her model of a large 747 colliding with a Christmas tree festooned in red indirectly references 911, and reminds us that our experience of air travel has forever changed. Cabinets of model planes hover in space or lie on surfaces that suggest cluttered runways, while planes suspended overhead are blurred to suggest flight. Beyond the glass separating



the small museum from the airport itself, life-size planes await commands from the air traffic controller, introducing a kind of doubling through contrast of scale. Her photographs are copies of copies. Hunter embraces the "mom and pop" style museum" that demonstrates an "enduring attempt to preserve, witness, understand and honor" <sup>14</sup> our collective past. The former museum of replicas documented by Hunter has now been replaced by an expansive, new, relocated 100,000 square foot structure on Lemmon Avenue in Dallas, the latter which finally allows for "the displaying of actual aircraft rather than only replicas and memorabilia." <sup>15</sup> Hunter has documented a site which no longer exists, and model objects that now have been replaced by their originals.

Elizabeth Mellott-Carreón, John O. Smith, and Edwin Jager explore the power of objects to promote associations and narratives, making connections between the real and the replica, or between lived experience and the dream. **Edwin Jager's and John O. Smith's** collaborative book project, *Threshold*, has its point of origin in a poem written by Edwin Jager, and its virtual counterpart in an elaborate website. The voices of two fictional characters lead the viewer through this visual narrative as they "interact in a world where the borders between the real and the imagined are tenuous."<sup>16</sup> The book project is designed to document a performance, "placing the protagonists in various situations and exhibiting their contrasting approaches." <sup>17</sup> Gridded pages present serial images, adopting geometry as a visual code. The characters engage in rituals to construct transitory sculptural objects--paper rings and floating cubes of light--evoking poetic language through visual association. Jager and Smith use repetition of action and gesture to signify a series of events, "the activities as presented in the non-verbal language of the photographic sequence."<sup>18</sup> The resulting visual narrative fosters an innovative transformation of the poetic text. According to the artists, "The layout of the book is influenced by references to film, encouraging viewers to 'read' the images sequentially."<sup>19</sup> As viewers we see glimpses of actions presented in chapters entitled Belief, Habit, Logic, Illumination, and Permanence. Smith and Jager use photography to translate the content of a poem to a visual format, but in doing so,

Elizabeth Mellott-Carreón, *Wedding*

generate a new work that embraces storytelling through performance.

Mellott-Carreón constructs dioramas based partly on "her imagination of what war is like"<sup>20</sup> and on her soldier husband's experiences in the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts. **Elizabeth Mellott-Carreón** mines the distance between the experiences of her husband, a U.S. soldier serving in the Iraq/Afghanistan War, and her interpretations of those conflicts. Her assembled dioramas include photographs, shadows collected from objects placed in arrangements, which reference varied narratives. She pulls source material from her own dreams, stories told by her husband and his friends, and news from the Middle East. The intimate shadow boxes present unassuming, delicate arrangements of objects, such as a small dress. In *The Long Hike Back* a plastic military toy soldier points his gun toward a sky strewn with wilted blossoms. The child-like presentation appears shrouded in mystery, providing insight into a secret code, and drawing the viewer close. Tiny lights illuminate the dark corners of the frames. Solarized photographs of solitary flower stalks punctuate the alternating black rectangles of the diorama display, transforming the images into memorials. For Mellott-Carreón these staged events represent interpretations of the war, lost lives, "the emptiness and consciousness of distance evoked by physical separation."<sup>21</sup> The gravity of the work gradually overcomes us as we consider the larger context of the work, references to military conflict far removed from our daily lives, but close to home for those individuals serving in the military and their families.

These artists practice methods that we use to duplicate, to archive, to record, and to document the everyday as well as historical

events. Their insistence upon process both affirms our reliance upon methods of reproduction and duplication, and also acknowledges, despite herculean efforts, our inability to permanently and exactly fix the image or archive information, both remnants of our lives. Mellott-Carreón's haunting dreams, Silberg's witness to degradation, Dinkin's body drawings, Hunter's replaced models, Jager and Smith's records of performance, Todora's transformations of celebrity, and Holm's multiplication of identifying marks represent varied approaches to how we archive our existence.

*"We live in a technocentric society. The transient nature of information has been mapped upon the tangible aspects of our lives. We desire to hold on to our pasts and embrace the speed of the future, all the while looking for the balance between stability and flux and for the beauty within each."*<sup>22</sup>

--Steven H. Silberg

<sup>1</sup> Rosalind Krauss, "Photographic Conditions of Surrealism." *The Originality of the Avante-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press. 1985. 110.

<sup>2</sup> Anni Holm, Artist's statement, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Anni Holm, Artist's statement, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Steven H. Silberg, Artist's statement, 2005

<sup>5</sup> Steven H. Silberg, email communication, February 26, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Steven H. Silberg, artist's statement, 2005.

<sup>7-10</sup> Stephanie Dinkins, artist's statement, 2005.

<sup>11-15</sup> Debora Hunter, artist's statement, 2005.

<sup>16-17</sup> Edwin Jager, John O. Smith, Artists' statement, 2005.

<sup>18-19</sup> Edwin Jager, John O. Smith, email communication, March 1, 2006.

<sup>20-21</sup> Elizabeth Mellott-Carreón, Artist's statement, 2005.

<sup>22</sup> Steven H. Silberg, Artist's statement, 2005.

Debora Hunter, *Frontiers of Flight Museum Series*



## Acknowledgments:

I am indebted to Sonya A. Lawyer, 2004 Conference Chair, Society of Photographic Education, Mid-Atlantic Region, who organized the *DIALOGUE: art.technology. imagery* conference in Maryland, which featured the work of many of these digital artists. I also want to thank Cheryl Younger and Ruth Schilling Harwood for their contributions to the *DIALOGUE* exhibition. And a special thanks is extended to all the participating artists who lent their work for this exhibition.

--Marilyn Waligore, 2006



Elizabeth Mellott-Carreón, *The Long Hike Back*





## Artist's Gallery Talk

march 17

Anni Holm

3:30 p.m.  
Visual Arts  
Gallery

### distance & trace

exhibition dates: march 17 – april 15, 2006

curated by: Marilyn Waligore

opening reception: friday, march 17, 6:30 to 9 p.m.

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT DALLAS  
SCHOOL OF ARTS & HUMANITIES  
VISUAL ARTS BUILDING, MAIN GALLERY

**Visual Arts Building hours:**

Monday-Friday . . . 9 a.m. - 10 p.m.    Saturday . . . . . 9 a.m. - 6 p.m.    Sunday . . . . . Closed

<http://ah.utdallas.edu>

The University of Texas at Dallas School of Arts & Humanities, MS J031, P.O.Box 830668, Richardson, TX 75083-0688  
Please enter UTD at Campbell & University Pkwy. For more information, call 972-UTD-ARTS or visit our website.  
For assistance, call 972-883-2982 or Texas Relay Operator 1-800-RELAYVV. UTD is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer.

cover images:

Anni Holm (above) *Anwa, India*  
Steven Silberg (upper right)  
*Bit Transformation, detail*  
Edwin Jager & John O. Smith  
(lower right) *Threshold*

