



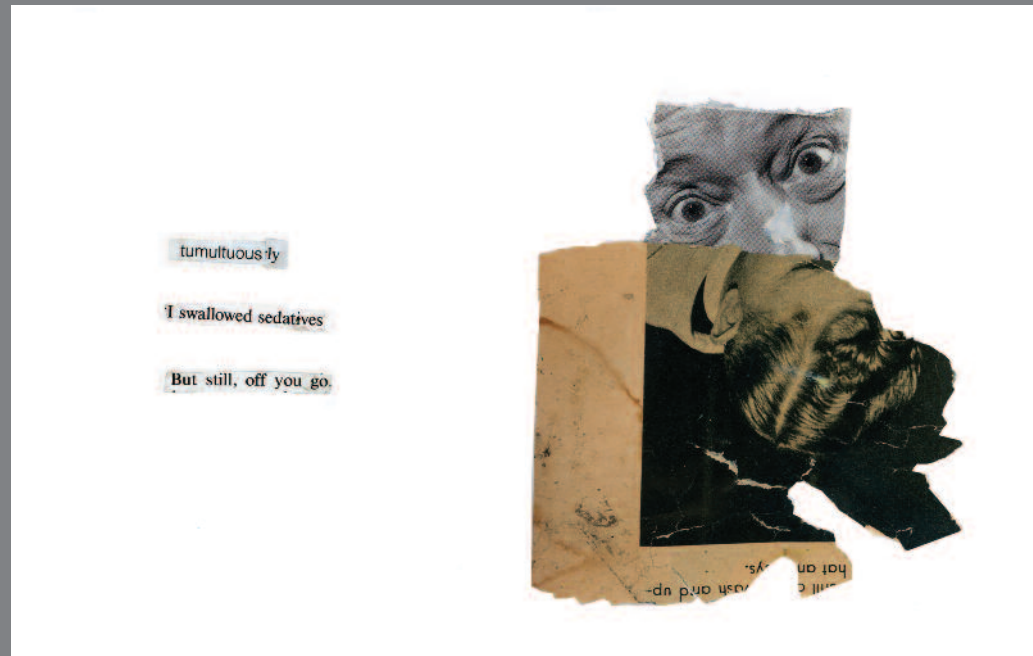
Yoon Cho

Enrique Fernández Cervantes

Carolina Kile

Stephen Marc

Gordon Young



legacy of photomontage

engineering the photograph

This exhibition curated by Associate Professor Marilyn Waligore features work by several artists including including Yoon Cho, Austin, Texas, Carolina Kile, Forney, Texas, Enrique Fernández Cervantes, Dallas, Texas, Stephen Marc, Tempe, Arizona, and Gordon Young, Dallas, Texas. These contemporary artists expand upon the practice of photomontage: they infuse their experiments with new cultural influences; they adopt critical frameworks for examining their subjects; and they continue to discover innovative digital processes for the combination and alteration of photographs. New or unexpected associations permitted via the process of montage foster reinterpretations of the photograph or image fragment.

All of these artists employ digital methods in their images, acknowledging the potential of new technology to expand the creative potential of montage. Their inspiration comes from theater, music, performance, poetry, fiction, and historical narrative. From political critique, to the generation of narrative, to a challenge to our concepts of reality, these images pose questions about the methods we rely upon to construct meaning.



Yoon Cho, *Thumbprint*, 70" x 32", digital c-print, ©2006



Carolina Kille, *Untitled*, 25" x 37", digital print, 2006

Montage, a term aligned with modernism, refers to a cut-and-paste method for the combination and alteration of photographs and film. Photomontage was "invented" by the Berlin Dada artists who, according to Dadaist Raoul Hausmann, thought of themselves as engineers seeking "to construct, to assemble" their works. As art historian Dawn Ades notes, "Montage in German means 'fitting' or 'assembly line', and Monteur 'mechanic', 'engineer'.¹ These images also take on a political importance in John Heartfield's montages, which are critical of Nazi Germany. The biting, stinging satirical works of these innovators occupy an unique place in art history. Dawn Ades quotes Sergei Tretyakov who in 1936 writes about Dada artist John Heartfield :

It is important to note that a photomontage need not necessarily be a montage of photos. No: it can be photo and text, photo and colour, photo and drawing...If the photograph, under the influence of the text, expresses not simply the fact which it shows, but also the social tendency expressed by the fact, then this is already a photomontage.²

This definition presents a view of photomontage that remains unconstrained by an emphasis on technique. Ades affirms that "the ideal use of photomontage is dialectical and that above all the idea behind it must be clear."³ Montage represents the response of the early 20th century artists to the expanding picture press in Weimar Germany. These avenues for distribution of images from across the globe in some ways parallel our ready access to information via digital means, only amplified even further. What term could be devised to best represent the combination of images in a digital context? The engineer was the ideal figure for the early 20th century, so do we now embrace the programmer, the hacker, the gamer, and navigator of networks? Art historian Maud Lavin presents a cautionary note regarding early 20th century attitudes regarding the engineer: "[D]ivisions between workers and management were elided by the mythic creation of the celebrated engineer, an amalgam of labor and management: creator, producer, thinker, doer, above all--the efficient man."⁴ How do new models for innovation coincide with our frameworks for how we define creativity within our own era?

But contemporary practice in image assembly exceeds those early methods. By categorizing various "flavors" of photomontage, both past and present, we can begin to consider how these techniques do guide our reading of images. From additive to subtractive methods, from abrupt juxtaposition to subtle superimposition, from overlay to merging, the combination of image fragments in new digital photography has never been so varied. **Gordon Young** combines image and text like a poet to craft visual haiku. Paralleling the concise Japanese poetic form, Young limits the number of elements that appear in each montage and encourages the viewer to generate associations between visual and textual information. He assembles small fragments to intentionally frustrate interpretation, to explore what he describes as "the arbitrary nature of meaning--meaning as an artificial construction."⁵ Young's work recalls John Baldessari and Roy Lichtenstein; snippets suggest characters who populate these composites. Like comics, the matching of text and image suggests a narrative, yet we continue to search for a clear message. Psychological states suggested through the depiction of a lone

chair in one image, a pair of bulging eyes which return our gaze in another, are echoed by disjointed text fragments. **Enrique Fernández Cervantes** is an avid storyteller, both a fiction writer and a creator of narrative images. He notes how he responds to stories by Italo Calvino "that join together the real and the invented by creating a unique world where tangible reality coexists with allegorical, magical and surreal elements."⁶ Fernández Cervantes' settings and characters appear on theatrical stage sets, where he combines elements from past, present and pure fantasy, in the tradition of magical realism. His image *Trinidad* represents the story of a young woman, the artist's mother at age 23. Here the artist fulfills the dream of his mother, who always wanted to see the ocean. Seagulls burst across a field, like a soul released from the constraints of the body. Fernández Cervantes explores a reality that is not physically possible, but that appears believable.



Enrique Fernández Cervantes, *Twenty-three Written Stories*, 12" x 16" digital print, 2006

Stephen Marc has travelled across the United States as well as Canada, photographing locales that housed the Underground Railroad, visualizing the hidden history embedded in the geography of these communities and the artifacts that remain. He has produced tens of thousands of photographs at historically documented sites that originally served as safe routes for slaves. Marc merges old and new, making references to different historical periods within a given image. In *Walking in the Footsteps Series* nineteenth century documents, dated Mississippi, 1836, float over the full color photograph of a reconstructed landscape. The graceful script, generated with quill and ink, recalls the past. By contrast, the richly colored photograph pulls the viewer into the present, guiding a re-reading of this 100 year old text from a contemporary perspective. The names and numbers that fill the frame prompt our reflection that measurements of shoes may function as a document implying travel. In the larger context of Marc's research on the Underground Railroad, we may reflect on how these shoes were not only purchased by the master for his servants, but might also facilitate their flight to freedom. Marc combines images of locales, artifacts and individuals to produce complex visual narratives.

Yoon Cho employs performance and documents the self while inserting graphic elements into her photographs to reference culture and identity. She comments that her "themes focus on the loss of and search for identity, the conflicts that occur when building a new identity, and conforming to social surroundings."⁷ Her overlay of graphic elements explores a hybrid method of montage. She locates herself in space, both externally through markers such as a compass or neighborhood map, and internally, by presenting medical documents that record her physical state. The diagrams and graphs function to ground the body through a connection to a site, to definitions of space and to physical measurements of the body itself.

Carolina Kile relies on her physical response to music to guide her selection of elements and their arrangement within her montages, as she locates a visual equivalent to rhythm and sound. Her seamless composition reminiscent of Surrealist montage, merges dream and reality. Kile places herself, or a stand-in for herself, into the landscape. The human figure resembles a glyph; the body becomes expressive form.

These artists embrace the intersection of digital technology and photography to investigate the legacy of 20th century practice and 21st century innovation. The resulting combinations of image fragments and text extend the potential for creative expression while providing contemporary responses to our shared world.

--Marilyn Waligore, 2007

¹ Dawn Ades. *Photomontage*. New York: Thames and Hudson. 1976. 12.

² Ades 17.

³ Ades 17.

⁴ Maud Lavin. "Photomontage, Mass Culture, and Modernity: Utopianism in the Circle of New Advertising Designers." in *Montage and Modern Life: 1919-1942*, ed. Matthew Teitelbaum. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press. 1992. 45.

⁵ Gordon Young, Artist's statement, 2007.

⁶ Enrique Fernández Cervantes, Artist's statement, 2007.

⁷ Yoon Cho, Artist's statement, 2007.

legacy of photomontage: engineering the photograph

march 16 - april 13, 2007

curated by: Marilyn Waligore

exhibition reception:

friday, march 23, 6:30 - 9:00 p.m.

This lecture is co-sponsored by the School of Arts and Humanities and by Richland College in conjunction with The Parallel Festival
<http://www.richlandcollege.edu/multimedia>

Honored Speaker

april 4 – Stephen Marc

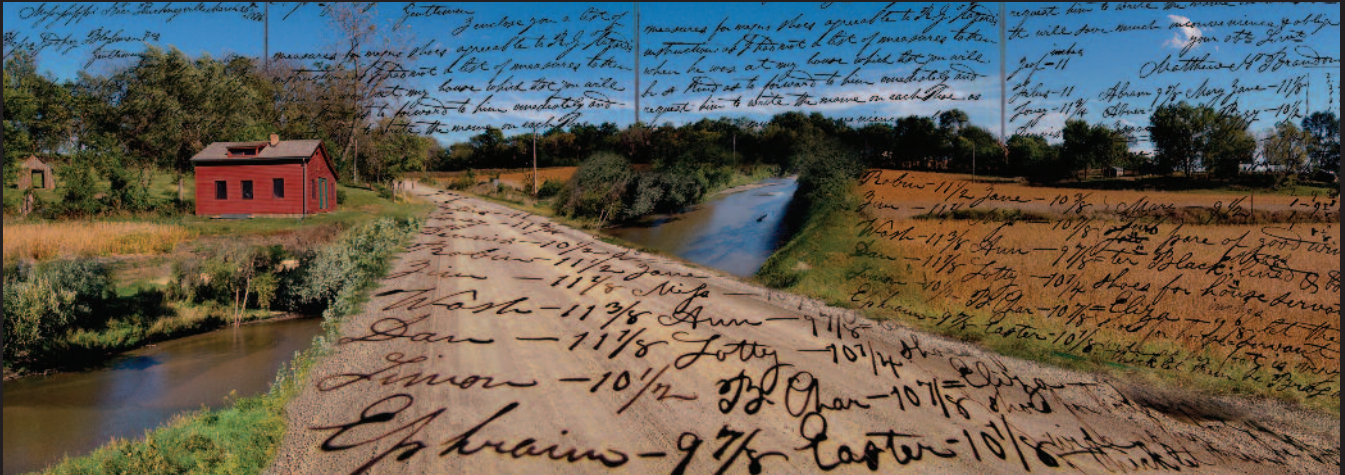
7:00 p.m., Jonsson Performance Hall, JO 2.604

Walking in the Footsteps: Dealing with Remnants of Slavery and the Underground Railroad

Stephen Marc, photographer and art professor at Arizona State University's Herberger College of Art, will lecture on his imagery, which references the African Diaspora and the history of the Underground Railroad in North America.



Stephen Marc, *Walking in the Footsteps Series*, 18" x 52", digital print, 2006



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Cover images:

Top: Yoon Cho

Hysterosalpingogram

Center: Gordon Young,

Haiku Hermeticum Series

