



CONTINUUM

Works by Noah Doely, April Friges, John Steck Jr., and Kristine Thompson.

DURING THE FIRST DECADE OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY, what is now commonly referred to as analog photography suddenly became obsolete with the proliferation of digital photography. The invention of the digital camera dates back to 1975 when a young employee at Eastman Kodak named Steve Sasson developed an eight-pound device that could capture an image at 0.01 megapixels.¹ That also happens to be the year in which the iconic American landscape photographer Ansel Adams proclaimed, “the future of the image is going to be in electronic form...You will see perfectly beautiful images on an electronic screen.”² It would take almost thirty years before Sasson’s invention could realize Adam’s prophecy in the form of a compact and affordable consumer product capable of taking quality images. In 2003, the sales of digital cameras surpassed the sales of film cameras for the first time in history, and it became clear that the majority of photographs would soon be captured through digital technology.³ This emergence of digital photography put into question the future of film, which defined the world’s relationship with the medium for most of the twentieth century. As film cameras quickly fell out of fashion with the general public, the future of analog photography appeared to be in danger. During this period, some legendary brands in photography faced difficulties adapting to this new digital landscape. Eastman Kodak, largely responsible for popularizing photography to the masses at the start of the twentieth century, fell into bankruptcy. Fujifilm drastically scaled down the number of film lines in production, and Agfa sold off its entire consumer photography division. Cameras, films, and darkroom papers that were readily available in stores only recently became increasingly difficult to find as the emphasis of sales shifted to digital.

This state of obsolescence for analog photography was determined by a consumer market that favored a technology that was seemingly more convenient and could capture more images. Film photography itself did not become useless overnight in terms of its ability to create perfectly acceptable images. In fact, film was still capable of producing a picture arguably equal or superior in resolution to an image recorded by a digital sensor. The notion

that taking photographs with film and printing images in the darkroom would constitute an “analog” practice was not even possible until digital photography became the predominant format in the early 2000s. However, the fact that film and darkroom papers gained this new status as being “outmoded” also presented an opportunity for artists to approach film-based photography and darkroom printing in a context that did not exist before. As analog photographic practices quickly became obsolete with the emergence of new digital equipment, a growing number of artists started to gravitate towards these older materials and processes to perform new experiments. Their interest in analog photography did not conform to the logic of the consumer market, which had deemed it no longer desirable. For some artists, the fact that these equipment and supplies became a form of anachronism may have even lifted the burden to use them following conventions established over the course of history. In many of these artworks, the materials and processes themselves became the central focus. Photography’s past that was quickly abandoned by the market was salvaged by artists in ways that challenged existing ideas of the medium and proposed new possibilities in its uses.

This exhibition features four artists who represent this recent interest in employing “outmoded” materials and processes in making photographs. The works by these four artists represent an unexpected turn for analog photography after its supposed obsolescence and suggest that it will continue to evolve as an idea within the field of contemporary art.

— **NORITAKA MINAMI**, *Curator*

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¹ Michael Zhang, “The World’s First Digital Camera by Kodak and Steve Sasson,” *PetaPixel*, August 5, 2010, accessed February 1, 2016, <https://petapixel.com/2010/08/05/the-worlds-first-digital-camera-by-kodak-and-steve-sasson>.

² Paul Hill and Thomas Cooper, *Dialogue with Photography*, (New York, NY: Dewi Lewis Publishing, 1998), 337.

³ Jefferson Graham, “Film Fades to Digital in Camera Sales,” *USA Today*, February 27, 2003, accessed February 1, 2016, http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/tech/techreviews/products/2003-02-27-digital-film_x.htm.



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NOAH DOELY lives and works in Cedar Falls, where he is currently an Assistant Professor of Photography at the University of Northern Iowa. In his series *Above & Below*, Doely links the most primitive form of photography (pin-hole camera) with the most primitive form of vision among living species (nautilus' eye). Unchanged after 500 million years, a nautilus' eye is nothing more than a hole on its body. The way a nautilus' sight works mirrors the design of a camera obscura, the historical precursor to the invention of photography. In a camera obscura, light passes through a small opening and projects an image on the opposite side of the darkened chamber. In *Above & Below*, a pin-hole camera loaded with film captures dioramas intricately constructed by Doely inside a water-filled glass tanks to resemble the deep-ocean habitat of a nautilus. These deep-ocean dioramas are also illuminated by a small, single source of light like the interior of a camera obscura. These photographs emphasize that light is the essential element that makes both an image captured within a camera and the scene in front of the camera perceptible.

APRIL FRIGES currently lives and works in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where she is the BFA Program Director and Assistant Professor of Photography at Point Park University. Friges' works employ basic principles of the photographic medium to explore the qualities and boundaries of its materials. Her recent sculpted photographs titled *CMY RGB* challenge the ways in which photography traditionally functions. In this body of work, she focuses on the materiality of the paper itself by not employing it as an "invisible" substrate that merely acts as a surface to record images shot on a camera. Friges works in the darkroom with only photosensitive paper and light to create works based on the basic properties of the RA-4 process (chemical color printing). The colors of the works are determined by subtractive and additive primary colors that are the basis of all color darkroom prints. The papers are then physically manipulated to become three-dimensional objects that go beyond the flatness and rectangularity normally expected of a photographic print.

JOHN STECK JR. is a visual artist and educator based in Chicago. He currently teaches photography at Loyola University and Waubensee Community College. Steck's practice draws attention to the materiality of prints and the memories they are meant to preserve by intentionally allowing the images to gradually disappear from sight. The photographs are created with traditional gelatin silver papers but without the use of a darkroom or chemicals. By disregarding the traditional steps of making an archival print that "fixes" an image, Steck creates photographs that remain sensitive to light and eventually disappear from the surface as visual information. Steck's approach contradicts the idea of permanence historically associated with photography as a form of document. He points out that photographic images and the memories they represent are impermanent like all things in the world.

KRISTINE THOMPSON is an artist based in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where she is an Assistant Professor in the School of Art at Louisiana State University. Thompson's *Images Seen to Images Felt* is an on-going series of photograms made by pressing light-sensitive photographic paper on the screen of a computer inside a darkroom. They are the direct impressions of images of contemporary events Thompson has meticulously collected from a range of online news sources. She performs this process in order to transform photographs that exist in virtual space into tangible objects that confront the viewer in the physical space of a gallery. The contact printing turns the original digital images into ghostly presences and forces the viewers to slow down in analyzing the information present in each scene. This idea of slowing down is crucial in Thompson's attempt to have people contemplate the horrors depicted in the photograms in a way that may not be possible through digital media.

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