

# *Phenomena: The material image*

NOVEMBER 16, 2014 TO  
JANUARY 11, 2015



Raissa Venables | *Green House*, 2014

TIMOTHY AMUNDSON  
JON SCOTT ANDERSON  
DAN FRUEH  
MICHAEL POINTER  
PAUL ANTHONY SMITH  
KATI TOIVANEN  
RAÏSSA VENABLES  
MARY WESSEL

THE EPSTEN  
GALLERY

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▲ Jon Scott Anderson  
*book of grass #1*, 2012  
Edition of 7 | Archival Pigment Print  
Courtesy the Artist and Haw/Contemporary,  
Kansas City



▲ Raïssa Venables  
*Green House*, 2014  
Archival Pigment Print | Edition of 5  
Courtesy the Artist and Galerie Wagner + Partner,  
Berlin



▲ Kati Toivanen  
*Transformations: Images in Motion #4* (image still), 2014  
Digitally composed video  
1 minute continuous loop (approximate)  
Courtesy the Artist

Evolving notions of abstraction, artifice and the “real” are indicative of our increasingly multi-dimensional life experience. As the ability to alter and invent multiple realities occurs in modes that are simultaneously actual, virtual and conceptual, means of processing and articulating imagery and information are in constant flux.

**Phenomena: The Material Image** explores these ideas within a range of works evincing the expansive use of photography as a medium within the broad spectrum of contemporary art. The artists – Timothy Amundson, Jon Scott Anderson, Dan Frueh, Michael Pointer, Paul Anthony Smith, Kati Toivanen, Raïssa Venables, and Mary Wessel – utilize photography to achieve a range of hybrid works that resonate beyond a material image.

Through analog and digital means, unconventional applications of traditional photo-processing techniques, and physical and conceptual manipulations of imagery and objects, the artists cross boundaries between reality and fiction. Altered landscapes, constructed environments, de-contextualized imagery and evocative abstractions correlate to present new ways of seeing and understanding our world.

## Altered Landscapes and Constructed Environments:

In her digitally composed videos, *Transformations: Images in Motion #4*, Kati Toivanen activates her constructed still-lives through a process of seamless digital collage. Compositions packed with suggestively sensual and mysterious organic forms exist, as she describes, in a “continuous cycle of blooming and withering, much like the flora in the world.” The rich color and texture of these forms in motion have an intoxicating, dream-like quality both curious and enchanting.

Whereas Toivanen’s compositions spillover with form and color, Raïssa Venables edits imagery out of her compositions in her recent series of photographs, *Clearing Space*.

Venables is recognized for her dramatic, dizzying interiors created digitally from hundreds of vantages composed into one seamless image. Her archival inkjet prints in this show, *Green House* and *Icy Orchard*, composed via analog and digital photographic techniques, represent her move from interior to exterior space.

In *Clearing Space*, Venables literally removes excess space that she describes as “distractions in the environment” to create

an abundance of “white space” in a response to our “over-saturation of technologically communicated information in our society.” These images reveal distortions and rough edges, deviating from seamless digital collages while creating visceral and unconventional perspectives akin to Cubist paintings.

Sharing some technical aspects with Venables are the photographs of Jon Scott Anderson, whose works, *book of grass* and *book of branches*, feature nature as a motif. Anderson describes these pieces – combinations of images from multiple perspectives of a site – as narratives “of how we see and understand space.” Likening his process to filmmaking, painting and classical Chinese poetry, Anderson creates what he describes as a “pattern language found in landscapes.”

Having collected images for his “books” over a five year period, Anderson describes a process of returning to photograph a location at different times, resulting in “ever-changing readings of place.” This literal and metaphorical record of time’s passage carries a certain sense of poignancy, yet Anderson also employs a sense of play as he creates visual riddles, particularly evident in *book of grass*, in which a face emerges.

## De-Contextualized Images and Objects

In his multi-media installation, *Habitat for Humanity* and *Plant Nativity*, Amundson critiques contemporary commerce and technology and the implications of them upon nature. A complex fusion of signifiers includes polyester pillows printed via Dye-sublimation with photographs of “Anthropocene environments” upon IKEA tables and a similarly printed polyester panel containing a foliage pattern installed like a flag.

Amundson links the new IKEA store in Merriam, KS to the nearby Turkey Creek, commenting upon the purported green practices of IKEA in relationship to the massive restructuring of the Turkey Creek Watershed. He uses the term “designed planet” to describe and speculate upon humanity’s impact upon Earth.

An acknowledgement of the entropy of the built environment informs the photographic works of Dan Frueh. “My work portrays the inevitable decay of materials and surfaces people have made in an effort to dominate and control their surroundings,” Frueh writes in his artist statement.

His images, including *Prairie Fire* and *Waterfall* capture details upon surfaces he finds such as sheet metal, concrete retaining walls, and other industrial surfaces that show evidence of rust, color shifts, cracks and other changes resulting from age, wear, and deterioration. Frueh finds these details beautiful, and defines them as testimonials to the constant tension between human intervention and natural cycles that disrupts it.

Environment, economy and memory are thematic elements in the work of Paul Anthony Smith. Smith utilizes a technique he describes as picotage, a process in which he alters a digital photograph by way of meticulously picking away at the surface with a ceramic tool to alter the image and texture of the work.

In his new picotage for *Phenomena*, Smith captured an image of an old, eroding hotel in Jamaica on an abandoned island, formerly a tourist destination. After the picotage technique, the photograph is malleable like fabric and is installed

like a garment blowing in the wind on a clothesline, emitting fresh fragrance. Born in St. Ann’s Bay, Jamaica, Smith’s work often incorporates Jamaican imagery and themes related to African diaspora, identity, economic disparity and culture.

## Photographic Abstractions

The central metaphor of “painting with light” is key for Mary Wessel, who engages a range of experimental darkroom techniques to create her gestural, cosmic-like photograms. While exploring the physical properties of photography, Wessel identifies a preoccupation with “the idea of forces, process, and time,” which become underlying themes in her *Worldscapes* series.

Wessel spreads various liquids and chemicals upon light-sensitive paper with paper towels, sponges, eye-droppers and other materials at hand, and then exposes them to colored light via a color enlarger to create dense, expressive compositions that invoke deep space, the ocean, tangled webs, cellular structures and technology.

Michael Pointer produces photographic works “that are anchored in the reality of photography with the extended metaphor of painting.”

His two pieces in the show – *Fallen* and *Transfixed* – are unlike any other works in the exhibition in that they incorporate the human figure. *Transfixed* was literally drawn by Pointer with photographic fixer, and although inspired by a portrait photograph he took earlier, it bears no photographic image. *Fallen* is from a series of Armageddon images, and incorporates a paper negative with physical interventions by Pointer to create an ominous ground surrounding a figure that floats upon paper with curled edges and a visceral texture.

As seen within this show, the technological age is ushering in profound changes in the way we perceive and articulate our life experience. Our cognition of this phenomenon and the transformations taking place in our mind and our material world are harbingers for the future we are embarking upon.

**Heather Lustfeldt**  
Curator



▲ Timothy Amundson  
*Habitat for Humanity* (detail), 2014  
Dye-sublimation photo prints on polyester, pillows,  
IKEA “Lack” tables, riprap  
Courtesy the Artist



▲ Michael Pointer  
*Fallen*, 2012 | Gelatin Silver Monotype Print  
Courtesy the Artist



▲ Dan Frueh  
*Prairie Fire*, 2014 | Archival Ink Jet Print  
Courtesy the Artist



▲ Mary Wessel  
*Untitled* (From series *Worldscapes*), 2013 | Type-C print  
Courtesy the Artist

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### FRONT COVER:

Raïssa Venables  
*Green House, 2014* (detail)  
Archival Pigment Print  
Courtesy the Artist and  
Galerie Wagner + Partner, Berlin

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