

St. Mary's College of Maryland

Fabricated Environments: A Photographic Construction of Experience

April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Morgan Lempke

St. Mary's Project

Art & Art History Department

I pair photographs of architectural structures. By merging the images based on color, line, and form I create fabricated environments. I combine multiple photographs as a way to create a composite image that expresses the active experience of a place rather than the static visual one. Throughout the year my work has maintained a similar theme. During the first semester of SMP I used photography to combine photographs about experiences based on dynamic relationships. I constructed multiple photographs as one while now I present a pair as one.

It all began with my multi-image piece from the Marathon. The Marathon was a challenge we were given in the beginning of our St. Mary's Art Projects. The prompt was to create 20 different works in 20 days. While pushing myself to experiment with new ways to create art, I created *Something that Hangs, featuring the St. Mary's Shoetree* (See Figure 1). This piece sparked my interest in using many photographs to document my exploration of an object. This seven-image piece used multiple perspectives to show my experience of exploring the Shoetree through my lens. I did this by taking multiple photographs of a single subject just as a regular photographer would. Yet, when I returned to the studio I realized I was able to combine all of the pictures as one. I was able to arrange the photographs based on whether or not their subject matter could fuse with another's. I did this by matching the curve of one image's tree limb to the curve of the others tree limbs, as well as maintaining the same orientation of gravitational pull of the hanging shoes. By showing the numerous perspectives in which I explored the tree *Something that Hangs, featuring the St. Mary's Shoetree* allowed me to document my experience with the tree.

This interest in multi-image assemblages led me to David Hockney. Hockney is a British artist primarily known as a painter. However, he is also known as the king of work

that documents the difference between how the human eye and the camera lens see. His work expresses an experience in a multi-image display rather than a single photograph. He achieves this through two different formats, grid and photomontage. Hockney first began with a Polaroid film grid. He reassembles his Polaroid prints due to the geography of the scene but shifts in vision due to camera angle and his movements. He captures the foreground while the camera lens is pointed downwards. Then he positions space according to himself in order to capture how he views the space. The Polaroid prints allow Hockney to build from his already developed images in order to capture the entire scene. Hockney then began using a film camera to create photomontages. He would pan the scene attempting to capture the landscape similar to his Polaroid grids. The difference was that his film camera did not produce instant prints. He was unable to read from the images he had already taken. As he captured his photomontages with a film camera, he had to attempt to capture the vast majority of the subject without a reference to what he had already captured.<sup>1</sup> Documenting through photomontage allows Hockney to divide the scene into numerous instances. These works pushed more for the audience's eye to connect his pictures in order to see the entire full image.

In order to record my experiences, I began making my own montages. As I progressed within my work, I came to realize the different effects between a single photograph and a photomontage. The traditional single photograph approach provides a snapshot of a scene. Single photographs are taken from one vantage point. They represent a static point of view. They do not allow for the progression of time or constant changes. Single photography captures a single moment from a single location. It lacks the ability to

---

<sup>1</sup> Weschler, Lawrence. *True to life: twenty-five years of conversations with David Hockney*. University of California Press, 2008.

show how the scene alters over time or as the camera lens moves.<sup>2</sup> A single photograph captures an instant while a photomontage is a shared an experience that establishes a multitude of ways to look at an expanse of space or exploration. Photomontages entail a physical experience in space as well as the memory of an experience. The importance of montage is that it requires memory to recreate these explorations. When I return to the studio I must use memory in order to combine photographs based on my experience. Using my memory portrays how I personally experienced and understood the scene. Each single photograph is also a representation of my memory, an instant in which I explored the scene. Photomontages allow the audience's experience to become active. The audience interacts when trying to understand why each image was placed in that specific location. This allows them to discover each photograph's individual meaning in accordance with the whole. Understanding Hockney's Polaroid grids and photomontages allowed me to understand that I was trying to use art to share my experiences with objects and spaces with others.

My experience with an object or space is different than the audience's experience. My exploration is consistent, similar to the experience of watching a video. I progress around the object and experience its entirety completely. My experience is not stopped or broken. The audience's experience is not as complete of a whole as my own. Their experience is inconsistent because it is a multi-image piece. The viewer must work to piece together the gaps between my photographs. When a group of images pushes the viewer to understand the imperfect alignment and image gaps, it pushes the audience to use

---

<sup>2</sup> Livingstone, Marco. *David Hockney*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1996, 325.

cognitive fill. This allows them to understand the relationship that combines the images together.

My work changed from a documentation of my experiences to a fabricated new environment emerged from my experiences. My more recent work merges images of different subjects, locations and times. Where as the fall work, I began taking different shots of the same subject and combining them. Now I combine different shots of different things. The end result is an invented amalgamation. What dissatisfied me about my first body of work was how repetitive it felt. It always seemed as if I did the same exact thing and it always resulted in a similar body of work. So I turned to the idea of street photography and began to research Lee Friedlander. Friedlander is an American photographer who figured out a way to combine and juxtapose his images with solely his lens. He used reflections and shadows as a way to layer different subjects and scenes within a single image. From Friedlander, learned that I could adapt images through my lens rather than strictly through Photoshop.<sup>3</sup> I began to use shadow and reflections in my work to establish opposition. I began to juxtaposition in order to contrast the definition of a single image's subject. My works began to contrast the definition of their subject. *Lantern* contrasts light by capturing the shadow of a light source while *Daylight Building* contrasts windows by capturing the outside scenery of a window for the outside. As I continued this work I found it difficult to come across similar scenes. I then began to approach my work in a different way.

Friedlander does all his work on the street where as I alter off the street back in the studio. When I return to the studio I place all of my photographs into Adobe Bridge. I alter

---

<sup>3</sup> Galassi, Peter, and Richard Benson. *Friedlander*. Museum of Modern Art, 2005.

the layout so that I can see a grid numerous images at once. This format allowed me to notice that my photographs have a general correlation; I tend to photograph architectural structures. I began to match structures and later realized they possessed dynamic relationships. I then became interested in what would happen if I merged pairs together. These pairings became a discussion about time, space and location rather than a single scene and subject. Each picture was captured under different circumstances rather than being at the same place and time, such as my photomontage and single photograph work. These composited pairings differ from Friedlander because he created juxtaposition with a single shot through the use of reflections and while I establish juxtaposition by merging two photographs, establishing my own construct.

Unlike my fall work where I divided a single scene into multiple shots I am now doing the opposite, creating a single print from multiple scenes. By aligning two photographs' formal elements, such as line and colors, I am able to construct various types of photographic relationships by loosening their original concepts. Sometimes my pairings begin to lose sense of their differences when butted against one another. When first glancing at *Window* it appears as though the images are very similar (See Figure 2). Both appear to be of the same bridge out the same window. The further you examine the more you begin to realize that one image is looking forward while the other is looking backwards. Their combination creates a juxtaposition of perspective because the audience views them at once. Sometimes I purposefully find things that want to suggest a coherent new identity from these new things and the effect therefore is a new hybrid. In *Grecian Structures* the images are so similar that they look like they are of the same object (See Figure 3). I was able to create this continuity by aligning the image's stone pillars. But the

more you look the more you come to realize that the photographs are of two different architectural forms from a similar architectural style. Other times I establish pairings that would not generally merge. I do this because I do not want to combine their attributes rather I want to increase their contrast and juxtaposition. This is seen in my pieces *Lights* (See Figure 4). I chose to combine two very different structures from very different locations. At first when I saw these images side by side I was unsure as to why they fit so well together. After merging them, I established their combination of light and shadow produces a strong sense of juxtaposition. It almost appears as though the bright light in the left image created the shadow in the right photograph.

After creating these pieces, I wanted to discover a different way of presenting them. I loved that they had become new fabricated environments and wanted them to reflect real scenes. Therefore, I began to research Wolfgang Tillmans in order to understand the strengths and power of curating. Tillmans is a German photographer who groups photographs. He never merges his images; rather he separates them as a way of using display to change the way we give meaning to each piece. Each photograph varies, some are different sizes, some black, some white, some with frame tape, some with different spacing, and so on. He uses grouping as a display tactic as a way of saying consider these together.<sup>4</sup> He uses juxtaposition as a way to establish meaning. The images he chooses to group, as you can see, are not always easily understood together. Through grouping he tries to push you to see the images against one another. Tillmans wants his images to create a conversation but continues to group them in a way that their relationship is hard

---

<sup>4</sup> Tillmans, Wolfgang, Julie Ault, Daniel Birnbaum, Russell Ferguson, Dominic Molon, Lane Relyea, and Mark Wigley. 2006. Wolfgang Tillmans. n.p.: Los Angeles : Hammer Museum, 2006., 2006.

to understand.<sup>5</sup> His display choices help to cope or deal with the image differences. His choice in display tactics destabilizes the meaning of the story, deconstructing how we read and make sense of these functions. Tillmans work focuses on contrast not allowing his images to merge into a single object.

While Tillmans uses groupings to create meaning I create fabricated spaces by merging images. Pairing line and color allow me to combine two photographs into a single, unified image. These choices allow me to construct new, yet feasible spaces. In some circumstances the way I present my images enhance their ability to be read as true to life. I treated *Archway Door* and *Window* as real-life objects. By printing my photographs life size, they transform from fabricated images to real spaces. I printed and installed them in a way that is similar to how they would be experienced in everyday life. For *Archway Door* I printed the merged image to be similar to the size of a doorframe (See Figure 5). I then mounted door framing around it in order to establish the photograph as a doorway in and of itself. Similarly my *Window* print is of similar size to a car window and still shows of structure that frames the window in place. I then mounted the merged image of onto compressed PVC board and added a cleat in order to bring the piece off of the wall. This allows *Window* to be seen as more of an object than a print because it physically possesses and visually includes similar characteristics its subject possesses. These transformations allow me to turn my fictional locations into actual objects that you can interact with. You are able to picture how you would fit and feel within the framework of *Archway Door* and *Window*. Ideally I would have loved to print and create *Blues*, *Grecian Structures* and *Lights*

---

<sup>5</sup> Bracewell, Michael. "Everywhere, All the Time and at Once: The Art of Wolfgang Tillmans." Serpentine Gallery, September 19, 2010, 11.



in life-size form but I believe their gargantuan size was not feasible for me. Although I was unable to make all of my pairing parallel to their life counterparts, I think about how people interact with these objects and how I can best represent and recreate that.

Understanding how to capture an experience and recreate it as an object in which my audience can experience it has been my goal for the past year. I feel my most recent work has most successfully captured my goals.

## Figures

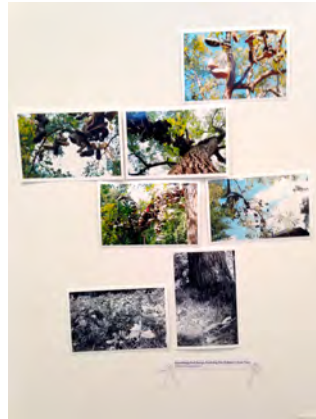


Figure 1: Morgan Lempke *Something That Hangs*, featuring the St. Mary's Shoetree September 2014 photomontage



Figure 2: Morgan Lempke *Window* March 2015



Figure 3 (left): Morgan Lempke *Grecian Structures* April 2015

Figure 4 (right): Morgan Lempke *Lights* April 2015



Figure 5: Morgan Lempke *Archway Door* March 2015

## Bibliography

Bracewell, Michael. "Everywhere, All the Time and at Once: The Art of Wolfgang Tillmans."

Serpentine Gallery, September 19, 2010, 11.

Galassi, Peter, and Richard Benson. *Friedlander*. Museum of Modern Art, 2005.

Tillmans, Wolfgang, Julie Ault, Daniel Birnbaum, Russell Ferguson, Dominic Molon, Lane

Relyea, and Mark Wigley. 2006. *Wolfgang Tillmans*. n.p.: Los Angeles : Hammer

Museum, 2006., 2006.

Weschler, Lawrence. *True to life: twenty-five years of conversations with David Hockney*.

University of California Press, 2008.