



SECOND SIGHT

MARCH 28TH - MAY 14TH, 2015

OPENING RECEPTION

SATURDAY, MARCH 28TH, 2015 FROM 6 - 9 PM

**GALLERY ONE**

SECOND SIGHT: NEW REPRESENTATIONS IN PHOTOGRAPHY

Kate Bonner  
Chris Engman  
Sean C. Flaherty  
Megan Flanders  
Ken Gonzales-Day  
Valerie Green  
Soo Kim  
Nikki S. Lee  
Joshua Mark Logan  
Gina Osterloh  
Nancy Popp

Curated by Chris Reynolds

Second Sight refers to the apparent power to perceive things that are not present to the senses. Conversely, this term is also adopted by theorist Roland Barthes in his criticism and theorization on photography, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Barthes states that the “photographer's 'second sight' does not consist in 'seeing' but in being there”. *Second Sight: New Representations in Photography* ventures beyond our preconceived perceptions of what is and what is not photography today. Whether they investigate photographic image-making as object, history, truth, or trompe l'oeil, these artists challenge, push, and ultimately expand upon the lexicon of photography.



# I READ THE NEWS TODAY, OH BOY: A DAY IN THE LIFE OF PHOTOGRAPHY

LAUREN OSTER

In 1995, high school students who took the AP United States History exam were given Charles Moore's 1963 photo of a police dog tearing the trousers from a Birmingham demonstrator; the low-resolution scan was one of eight 'Documents' with which they were to analyze the civil rights movement of the '60s. Two decades later, the Republican National Committee has inspired six state legislatures to consider defunding AP U.S. History classes by contending that the College Board's test-prep guidelines present "a radically revisionist view of American History that emphasizes negative aspects while omitting or minimizing the positive."

Last fall, the Whitney Museum of American Art's Youth Insights outreach team had its own document for high school students: a handbill produced for distribution at its Jeff Koons retrospective. "KOONS IS GREAT FOR SELFIES! Take a selfie and post it on Instagram! Use: @whitneymuseum and #Koons #ArtSelfie." For every selfie proponent, of course, there is an equal and opposite selfie obstructionist: museums around the world have banned or are moving to ban selfie sticks (handheld monopods), social media optimization via optimized amateur self-portraiture be damned.

An AP U.S. History teacher would argue that photojournalists such as Moore—producing primary source material, privileging particulars of their field research, and developing critical narratives—are historiographers performing a sacred duty. Susan Sontag maintained in "In Plato's Cave" that photographs "alter and enlarge our notions of what is worth looking at and what we have a right to observe. They are a grammar and, even more importantly, an ethics of seeing." What, in turn, are the selfie-snapping teens at the Whitney's Koons retrospective? If its critics are to be believed, self-portraiture as executed by tourists whose engagement with their surroundings is superficial verges on onanism (the first selfie stick/vibrator hit the market in March of this year).

*Second Sight's* contributors survey the terrain between Moore's rhetorical battleground and #ArtSelfies that struggle to pronounce more than their own names; they then break camp and resettle in foreign territory. In the angles and distances between their approaches to photography, we approach a new map of the medium.

Via audio engineering software, Megan Flanders becomes datasets that corrupt her source material; reformatted as image files, the artist's intonations of her own name produce unique glitches as intimate as an infant's inherited phenotype. Flanders' assertion of dynamic authorship is viral rather than maternal—selfies, as it were, on a cellular level. In Nikki S. Lee's accumulated self-portraits, by contrast, the artist's image develops like striations in sedimentary rock; in an assembly composed entirely of distortions, Lee's authorship asserts itself in her presentation of the deviations between street artists' perceptions of her. Here is evidence that Lee saw Seoul, or evidence that Seoul saw Lee.

Sean C. Flaherty, in turn, offers mere hints of his documents' original subjects (*Disneyland, Focal Point, Grandpa's Pool*). Overlaid with Flaherty's memories of those absent family photographs, would a viewer's imagined versions of them seem more dissonant than Lee's aggregate portraits? If not, what purpose does a photo album serve? The conspicuous absences in the most recent installments of Ken Gonzales-Day's *Erased Lynching* images recall the activism in Moore's civil rights photography. Initiated in response to the misrepresentation of victims of vigilantism in the history of the West, the series now challenges the invisibility of contemporary racial violence; the past, as William Faulkner wrote in *Requiem for a Nun*, "is never dead. It's not even past." It is, however, vulnerable: Josh Logan's meticulous *Generation Loss* registers the quality we sacrifice to expediency in low-density data transmission.

*Second Sight's* elegiac notes are counterbalanced with play and transmutation. Chris Engman's *trompe-l'oeil* installations delight in their artificiality, and the deliberate imperfection of Gina Osterloh's hand-rendered grids on seamless backdrops lends them a coltish grace. Nancy Popp offers documentation of her explorations of identity and public space that is both borderless and generous. Kate Bonner rends her documents and presses them into service as building materials with a finch's lack of sentimentality. (We mustn't forget that photographs are objects.) Soo Kim's meticulous scissorings, in turn, reveal her subjects' poetic architecture: a gallery wall revealed in a cut is a caesura, not an absence.

Finally, Valerie Green's minimizer functions as Roland Barthes's celebrated *punctum*, that which pricks and bruises us. Here, it reminds us that all the world's a screen, and all the men and women merely pixels. How, in 2015, do we avail ourselves of Barthes's "second sight"? Sree Sreenivasan, the Metropolitan Museum of Art's chief digital officer, encourages selfie-stick enthusiasts to explore exhibit-friendly, wide-angle attachments for their devices. "You can also hand your phone over to someone and ask them to take it like we did growing up with a camera," he adds, "and you can make sure the tallest person in the group is always reaching out and taking the picture himself or herself."