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Art in America

New Order: Interview with ICP Triennial Co-Curator Carol Squiers

by Carly Gaebe



A.K. Burns, *Touch Parade*, 2011, HD videos. Photo Gert Jan van Rooij.

The latest triennial at New York's International Center of Photography, "A Different Kind of Order" (through Sept. 22), showcases 28 international artists who exemplify a particular vein of art-making now: they make socially invested work that pulls from the digital world while focusing on the tangibility of the handmade.

*For example, Elliott Hundley's *Pentheus* (2010) is a massively intricate photo-collage that re-creates a Greek myth of power and revenge in a dizzyingly colorful tableau. Mikhael Subotzky and Patrick Waterhouse's three towering light boxes (*Ponte City*, 2008-10) show each door, window and TV set of a neglected 54-story apartment building in post-apartheid*

*Johannesburg, South Africa. In *Touch Parade* (2011), A.K. Burns re-creates soft-core fetish videos from YouTube. Snapping cucumbers and carrots underfoot or slowly squishing through a thick mud pit, she calls attention to the invisible online community who consumes these supposedly erotic videos.*

The show was organized by four of ICP's curators—Kristen Lubben, Christopher Phillips, Carol Squiers and Joanna Lehan. Squiers spoke with A.i.A. by phone last week about the onslaught of digital imagery, the role of artist as archivist and how the show came to be.

CARLY GAEBE What is the origin of the exhibition's title, "A Different Kind of Order"?

CAROL SQUIERS Christopher Phillips and I came up with the title at exactly the same moment. The origin is from an early piece by John Baldessari, which he based on something Thelonious Monk supposedly said to his wife. [Baldessari's] piece is about pictures that are arrayed on a wall, all crooked, and Thelonious Monk's wife looked at these pictures and straightened them out. [Monk] went back and made them crooked again and she said, "What is that?" and Monk said, "It's a different kind of order."

CARLY GAEBE How did the curatorial team discover that an increasing number of artists are moving to redefine and re-create order?

CAROL SQUIERS We saw it happening in the work we saw in galleries, and not only in photography but in other mediums as well. Over the last five or six years there have been such great shake-ups politically, culturally and socially: the world economy nearly collapsing in 2008, the Arab Spring, the increasing encroachment of the digital into our daily lives. [We saw the] impact it was having on art, and it seemed to be part of a reordering process too.

GAEBE A theme that runs through the show is the conflation of the virtual and the real. Why do you think there has been this push for artists to take videos and images that exist digitally and physically alter or add to them?

SQUIERS The apparent takeover of analog photography by digital photography was a shock to the system for those who work with images. You already had a tradition of people appropriating images, and what you have now is a hyper-fast, huge stream of images from the Internet. And the idea of the archive had been explored so much. Those are the two things that really powered this idea that you could work with images that were floating around in cyberspace and that you could do what you wanted with them.

GAEBE Many artists in the triennial make work to reveal an underreported truth. How does Thomas Hirschhorn's video of a woman's hand scrolling through photographs of dismembered and mutilated human bodies in *Touching Reality* [2012] differ from the work of traditional photojournalists?

SQUIERS In Hirschhorn's case, he is appropriating images. He has a very decided political stance; he has a manifesto of why people need to look at images of destroyed human bodies. [Photojournalists] are hemmed in by what they can show, by what newspapers and magazines will reproduce. Hirschhorn took [the images] that were the most irreproducible and put them all in one place.

GAEBE How do you think the works in the triennial challenge or further the idea of artist as archivist?

SQUIERS Sohei Nishino [*Diorama Maps*, 2006] is engaged with the notion of the city. He takes the photographs, he cuts them up and he arranges them into incredibly intricate collages, which are his imaginary versions of those cities. He ends up with an archive of each city, but his interest is in imagining how the city could be in some other dimension. Jim Goldberg [*Proof*, 2011] is engaging the notion of the portrait, with specific political and aesthetic reasons. With Goldberg, it happens to be with what I call unwilling immigrants, people who are refugees from one terrible situation or another. The number of photographs [in the work symbolizes] the sheer number of people who [are refugees], giving a sense of how enormous the situation is. Roy Arden [*The World as Will and Representation*, 2007] is a forerunner in collecting and reordering images he found on the Internet: tables with tablecloths on them, certain kinds of pipes, certain kinds of cars. His video takes you through them with such incredible speed that he makes you question what you're looking at and why anyone put them on the Internet.

Working with an archive always leaves you with questions because the archive of anything can never be complete. You have to reflect on what the notion of the archive means and how people can work with it in a way that isn't arbitrary or futile, that makes sense and that actually says something.