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Conscious Delusions

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Graduate Thesis Report

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts,

Independent Film and Digital Imaging

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Abstract

Views of the world come from watching, looking, and feeling emotional relationships between people, things, and places. This fabricated series establishes the willingness to believe the images are actual photographic records by combining subjects viewing a variety of images. Metaphorical narratives show a vision of the incongruent world. The engagement begins with a shadow or back of someone or thing looking into the frame. Color, texture, and form within produce a voyeuristic psychological and emotional response. The paradox is what pushes the edges of expectation. Synchronicity of the elements within the images thrust us into a surreal moment. Belief in the supernatural is rooted in the memories and observations. Fear and absurdities of human behavior are recognized and personalized to create ambiguous and independent interpretations.

These dream collaborators have deep symbolic elements that are abstracts of delusions depicting current day culture, societal habits, and rituals. The dichotomy of the foreground subject and the background image allows one to wonder where the narrative begins, where the audience belongs, and what the perception of the voyeur is. Unsettling projections and perceptions show and create a relationship and a reflection of a personal vision while commenting on voyeurism and privacy.

Keywords: Digital photography, surrealism, voyeurism

Conscious Delusions

Art is a human activity consisting in this, that one man consciously, by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that other people are infected by these feelings and also experience them. (Tolstoy, 1960, p. 51)

Conscious Delusions is a group of manipulated photographs portraying the psychological revelation that occurs when we look at art. These portraits mimic dreams, feelings, and remembrances while creating mysteries that provoke the reflective expression of the self. Aspects of Dada, Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism, and Contemporary artistic movements are incorporated in a view of a watcher and the watched. The spectators encounter an instinctive response as they enter the photograph. Imagination provokes confusion in these photographs as they entice the belief in the surreal. A spontaneous flow of ideas and emotions about reality and privacy are felt. These images report what was behind the camera rather than in front, stimulating the audience to develop individual interpretations. The pictures here provide an escape for memories and non-intellectual ideas while creating paradoxical responses.

Using digital photography as a palette, the phrase "everyone can take a picture" has resulted in this artist guaranteeing her images cannot be reproduced with a mere camera. These artificial images of socially repressed ideas show how controlled we have become. Photography is her means of delivery. Photography is viewed as the "pictorial equivalent of vision and the source of our unshakable belief in the congruence of picture and world" (Warehime, 1996, p. 57). This

artist uses this innate belief to enlighten and encourage the viewer to redefine the lucidity of the external world and perceptual truth.

No photograph is accurate since the photographer is the one interpreting the object for the audience (Warehime, 1996, p. 61). The spectators also interpret what they are seeing while they projecting their own visions onto the work. This was recognized from watching viewers contemplating art in a gallery. This artist realized there was a deep connection. Art appeared to communicate with them while provoking an emotional reaction. While watching, the artist in turn sensed she was being observed. By manipulating photographs to reveal these covert subconscious thoughts, she felt she could construct a visual record of their experience. This relationship between the spectator and the art became the basis of this work.

Martin Hand (2012) said, “Photography has always been a myth-making practice, and so revelations about the constructed nature of image-making and consuming would seem to be continuous with the history of photography” (p. 38). Here he was speaking about studio portraits. The subjects dressed in their finest clothes to give the appearance of success. These photographs were used as a means of recognition, but they were not a realistic portrait of life. As static remembrances of the self, they show what the subject wants you to see. The purpose of these mementos was to keep the subject alive in their loved ones' eyes and then eventually become the memory (Warehime, 1996, p. 57).

The artist in *Conscious Delusions* allows us to see the invisible fundamental decision making of the subconscious mind. Using Adobe Photoshop

to merge, adjust, and reconstruct multiple images, the artist acts as a director and producer of the scene. Created is an entirely new and unique image. This kind of manipulation of images occurred as early as 1858. O.G. Rejlander created his *The Two Ways of Life* (Appendix A). This composite print was made from thirty negatives. Rejlander wrote: "The production of a perfect picture, require[s] the same operations of mind, the same artistic treatment and careful manipulation, whether it be executed in crayon, paint, or by photographic agency" (Leighen, 1977, p. 133-34). The current methods of manipulation have expanded to allow constructing totally new photographs made from an imagined concept. This overtly manipulated photography, where the result is more important than the process, has been developed in *Conscious Delusions*. These photographs are created with a computer instead of in the darkroom. According to Patricia Leighen (1978), overtly manipulated images play with reality to create an unreality or a new irrational or symbolic reality. The variety of one's response to the convincing quality of the image is precisely the reason for overtly manipulated photography (p. 320).

Method

The images in *Conscious Delusions* are thought-provoking combinations produced with a camera, the computer programs Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Bridge, and a mind for observation, imagination, and deviation. These manipulations are a result of a union of dream and reality. The tableau-like portraits form scenes similar to painting compositions but are more believable

because they are photographic renditions. They represent imagined allegorical portraits within an observed environment. Richard Avedon wrote:

A portrait is not a likeness. The moment an emotion or fact is transformed into a photograph it is no longer a fact but an opinion. There is no such thing as inaccuracy in a photograph. All photographs are accurate. None of them is the truth. (Van Riper, 2004)

Synchronicity, casual connections, remembrances, dreams and the non-intellectual converge to assemble these photographs. These are the tools used take our comprehension of truth and distort it. The crucial component in these creations is the artist's willingness to expose her soul. The pictures have the appearance of truth and yet are visualizing the secrets of the subconscious mind while spewing feelings. Imagination must be employed to uncover the nature of the illusion. These photographs should be seen aesthetically, as new documents having their own reality, and not examined for their technical merits or as traditional darkroom photographs.

Adobe Bridge is a navigation program which shows thumbnails much like a contact sheet. This computer program allows organization and review of digital images in a variety of ways. Often images randomly appearing next to each other dynamically relate. This synchronicity, a process marked by chance, coincidence, and luck is employed by the artist to join peculiar photographs that would not normally be brought together. Using this approach, basic creative

instincts are unlocked deep within the mind. It reverses the process by which comprehension normally dawns deliberately in our mind, and the picture takes shape. As stated in *The Imagery of Surrealism*, this Surrealist method creates an unexpected disorder (Matthews, 1977). This artist feels it is advantageous in her images. The Surrealist intuitively joins photographs causing enigmas. Other images may begin with a thought but as they migrate through Bridge and Photoshop, cryptic connections are made and instinct guides exposure of subliminal thought.

At the beginning of her journey, the artist thought Photoshop would be a quicker way of painting a picture. She has found it is not, it is merely an alternative way. With the ability to do anything, editing decisions are a struggle. Adobe Photoshop is a graphic computer program that has a vast array of tools to create and adjust images. By using these tools, recognizable faces and elements appear in her photographs. Photoshop is used to enhance these new facets and, by going beyond enhancement, she constructs an entirely new photographic picture. These new tableaux entice the viewer to search and wonder if the subject is in the foreground looking or in the flat plane of the picture itself. Combining photographs establishes the delusional vision sought by this artist. After a rumination time, she uses subconscious intuition to perfect her images. Reworks are many as she attempts to keep the pieces fresh. Her critical self-evaluations or boredom of her own work will eliminate many. Color and sharpening are employed to enhance and direct the eye of the viewer. Printing unearths additional changes needed. Synthesizing the reflection, incorporating Surrealist

and Dadaist thought, and allowing the image look "photoshopped" are the ways the artist acknowledges the audience's knowledge of digital work. The possibility of reality opens the narrative and allows the spectators to escape into their own adventures. The ability to confuse photography with reality and reality with the dream world is shown. The audience is encouraged to enjoy the fantasy produced.

These metaphorical paradoxes generate an anxious reaction reflective of deep psychological feelings. This anxiety pulls us into the nightmare. Subjects contained in these works project unknown introspection as they contemplate the vision in front of them. The audience's position in these compositions is determined by their experiences, gender, and the ability to delve into their own imagination. The results are private to each individual. The viewer's ability to imagine and identify in the picture will intensify their emotional response.

Robert Henri (1939) found "before a man tries to express anything to the world he must recognize in himself an individual, a new one, very distinct from others" (p. 133). The artist relates her experiences with the external world, makes sense of it, and realizes what she sees in her images is not what is seen by others. We can only see how things appear through one's particular set of eyes. This ambiguous voice of the unconscious is symptomatic of surrealistic work. André Breton (1990), a Surrealist painter, sees image making as "a conduction wire between the far too distant worlds of waking and sleep, exterior and interior reality, reason and madness" (p. 86). In *Communicating Vessels*, Breton (1990) lays out the problems of everyday experience and of intellect. Breton insists on the freedom of procuring any emotion he liked through the image. He also

combined the verbal and visual, stating it has liberated the unconscious from rational restrictions. Timothy Sweet (1996) wrote Breton maintained “child logic” which is also considered “surreal logic” because childhood comes closest to real life, the life of effective, risk-free possession of oneself (p. 53).

During children’s play there are no restrictions. It is not real, it is only an adventure. A player doesn’t care what the outcome of the game is. The game, like a story, only needs a beginning and an end, not a specific end. (Moltmann, Neale, Keen, David, & Miller, 1972). As explained in the *Theology of Play* (1972):

To be in a state of play is to be in an illusion. The adventurer has a sense of unworldliness. He is not out of this world like the insane who have been overcome by anxiety, but neither is he in the world like the sane who have been overcome by their defenses. Whereas the insane have lost the old self and the normal are caught by it, the adventurer has discovered something new. What is in this world but not of it is a new self without anxiety. (p. 83)

Photoshop is this artist’s way of playing. Through play, she communicates with and transmits her inner self. In *Man, Play, and Games*, Roger Caillois (1961) describes play like art. It can be either representational or abstract and in both cases still remain on an imaginative level. The camera, computer, and Photoshop and Bridge are the toys used to create *Conscious Delusions*. They supply an entrance to the passages of the imagination with unlimited transformations, however, all the choice and potential it offers is actually a challenge too.

According to Catherine McIntyre (2014), the computer is the tool that allows artists to express themselves with more freedom than ever before. When you can do anything, you have to decide what to do. When united and orchestrated in Photoshop, images respond, appearances change, and relationships show insights into our society and ourselves.

Dada was a liberating movement interested in free expression and the deconstruction of both forms and conventional ideas. The work nevertheless remains cryptic enough to allow the viewer to interpret them in a variety of ways. It inspired innovation and rebellion. Dada's satirical paintings and tradition of the irrational led directly to the Surrealist love for fantasy and expression of imaginary art based on the unconscious. The Art Story Foundation (2014) stated the Surrealist movement was founded in Paris by a small group of writers and artists who sought to channel the unconscious. They believed the conscious mind repressed the power of the imagination, weighing it down with taboos. Surrealist artists tap the creative powers of the unconscious exposing the complex and repressed inner worlds. André Breton saw photography "as both a blind instrument and a source of images of paralleled emotive power" (Sweet, 1996, p. 43).

The revelations of this artist are expressed in the Surrealistic narratives in *Conscious Delusions*. The relationships of the observer, the environment, and the interior image reveal private repressed stories. The entrance into these delusions may be a mere head, a hand, or a symbolic indication of a soul. These are used as portals to pull the spectator into the vision. Once inside, empathy, experience, and

knowledge establish a uniquely personal space as the audience projects their feelings onto the image. This kind of "art enables us to find ourselves and lose ourselves at the same time" wrote Thomas Merton (1974, p. 387).

Surrealism depended upon guiding the spirit, not through logic and linearity, but through feelings and tapping the pre- and unconscious, revealed Carr and Zanetti (2000). This method of creation used by this artist was later recognized as therapy. Surrealists in the 1920s came together and played a variation of a child's drawing game called the "Exquisite Corpse." Megan McShane (2004) said this game embodied collective creation, automatism, chance operations, and black humor. Players took turns adding to a single drawing. The first person might draw the head, with two lines protruding for the neck. The paper was then folded so the next person could not see what had been drawn. It was passed to the second player, who added the torso with lines protruding across new folds. This was so the arms and legs could be added without seeing the figure being created. The point of the play was to join artists in the production of unconscious and subconscious creative powers. This work unleashed the marvelous and non-rational, while assisting in the recovery from despondency (Caws, 1997). The freedom to express the inner visions without trying to match the previous drawer allowed the players to be uniquely themselves. According to Megan McShane (2004), playing this game aided the undiagnosed PTSD many of these artists had as a result of WWI. McShane (2004) disclosed in her thesis *Exquisite Corpse: the Surrealist Practice of Collective Drawing, 1925-1941*, the following:

The Surrealists viewed their games as a method of exploring and exposing concepts that might have been lost in civilized society due to an emphasis placed on productivity and efficiency....they were not just games, but were seen as a systematic method to study irrational thought and contagious manifestations of ideas. (p. 89)

Through this game they disclosed repressed thoughts and purged feelings.

Sally Mann's series *Proud Flesh* was her expression that not only relieved stress and gave her purpose, but visualized what was going on around her. Her six-year study documenting the effects of muscular dystrophy on her husband Larry shows her perception of the deterioration of her beloved spouse (Artnet Worldwide Corporation, 2014). *Proud Flesh* was not a series of pretty photographs but a cathartic release for her. From there she created a series of photographs depicting cadavers, which this artist thinks, was another response to her husband's looming death. These intimate conversations are the way this artist shares her emotions with the audience.

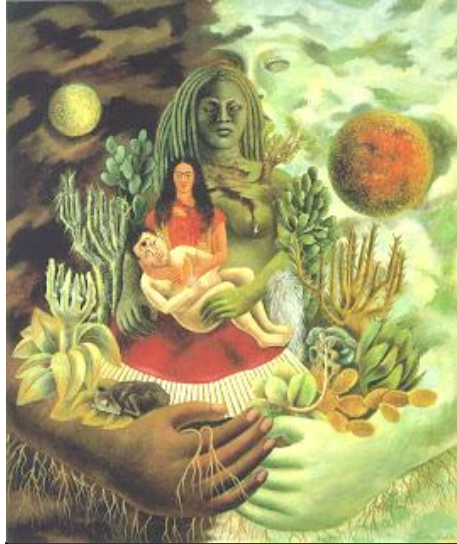
Pablo Picasso explained the secret of art is passing through states of fullness and of emptying. "I take a walk in the forest...I get an ingestion of greenness. I must empty this sensation into a picture. The painter paints as if in need to discharge himself of his sensations and visions" (Ghiselin, 1952, p. 59).

This purging allows the artist to move onto new thoughts and expressions.

Production of the images in *Conscious Delusions* is the mechanism by which this artist is able to enter a personal calmness. Her visions disclose her view of the world as a member of this quickly changing, bizarrely unique,

destructive society. When the artist makes these photographs, she is playing and feels free. As the images emerge from her subconscious, stress is alleviated. Her visions and sensations are expressed in the art.

Influences



The Love Embrace of the Universe, the Earth, Diego, Me, and Señor Xolotl, oil on canvas, 1949. Frida Kahlo

Frida Kahlo, a surrealist painter, has influenced this series. She used the canvas as a cathartic release of sadness as she explored herself, physically and mentally, in her self-portraits. Here she could come out from hiding and divulge her troubles in paint. Kahlo represented her relationship with her husband in "The Love Embrace of the Universe, the Earth, Diego, Me, and Señor Xolotl." In her unconventional

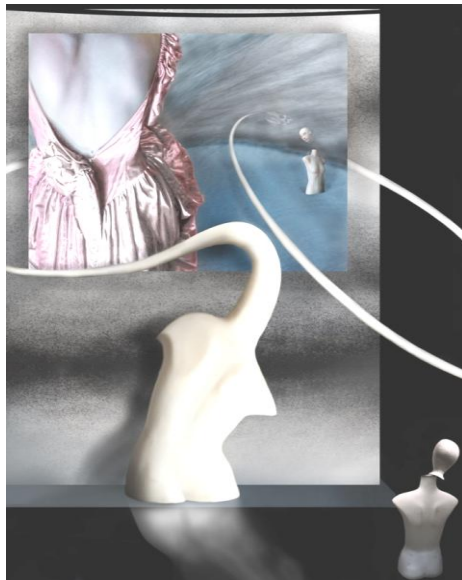
marriage she resolved herself to be a mother to her husband and she treated him like the baby she could never have. Her painting shows her as the earth mother and he as the naughty baby. This is how she coped with her unfaithful husband (Lindauer, 1999).

Kahlo's painting was an inspiration for "Warrior," the portrait of a woman left behind during a military deployment. As the mythical mermaid, she is waiting for her husband to return home. The visualization of an armless figure symbolizes her inability to change her situation. The military has control, not only of her husband, but of her life too. As the foreground subject, she attempts to



retrieve her man from the picture. He is not there; he is merely a picture on the screen. She is helpless. Only backs are shown to allow the spectator to identify with and project their interpretations and feelings. Her hand reaches under the frame into the picture to embrace her husband. This duality of being in the image and outside the image is indicative of Surrealistic art.

Knowing her place, she waits supportively since she also was schooled by the military. Afghani arms embrace the entire scene. This experience is shared by the people in the military world. The symbols of the flag below and flying stones, express an abyss. Only he is recognized as the hero. This symbolism enables us to experience their dream state and the surreal reality they are in.



“Cultural Axis” is an acknowledgement of our paradoxical selves. We see both a subject and a voyeur within the picture. Unconscious ideas allow the construction of perfection in the photograph as the mid-ground torso tries to reinvent itself. Patricia Leighton (1978) found "It is possible to create any image one thinks of; this possibility, of course, is contingent on

being able to think and create. The greatest potential source of photographic imagery is the mind" (p. 320). As Kahlo represented herself in her paintings, this manipulated photograph represents the social constraints of sexuality, perfection, and uniformity. The formation of stereotypes and complications of gender are addressed here and in doing so, the traditional reality of a photograph is shattered. The falling head in the foreground figure is a premonition of the impending failure of the paradigm. The cynical perspective toward social values represents visions from the Dada movement.



In "Minion" the artist develops an allegory of a teenager. Everything needs to be perfect. Teen brain synapses are weaving wildly in her subconscious and in the image. This portrait uses an expressionist painting reflecting the teen's view of herself. Symbolic life lines are added to stabilize and create a vortex that is intentionally vague (Preble, Preble, & Frank, 2004). The

metamorphic self-portrait of deviant beauty in a social culture that dictates you are judged on your appearance is shown. She stands before colored brick wall of change as she recognizes the burden of beauty. This portrait and Frida Kahlo's self-portraits suggest underlying unity behind the dualities of the human experience (Preble et al., 2004). Stepping closer to herself she recognizes faces in

the painting mirroring her animalistic metamorphosis. The artist's synchronistic faces are shown in this abstract on the wall.

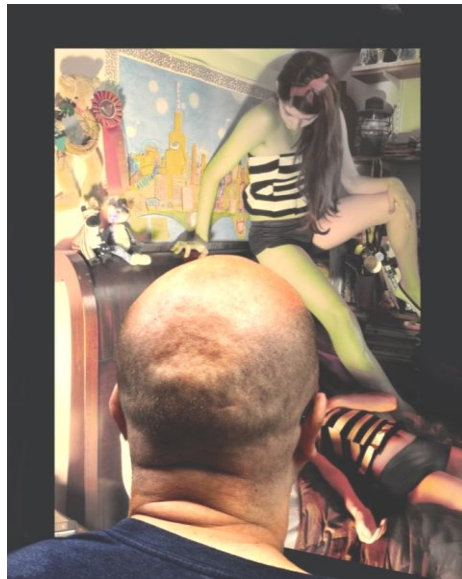
The colors of Vincent Van Gogh, a painter, have influenced this artist throughout *Conscious Delusions*. In "Night Cafe, Arles" (Appendix A), Van Gogh uses complementary colors to create contrast and tension. In a letter to his brother Theo, Vincent Van Gogh writes:

I have tried to express the terrible passions of humanity by means of red and green. The room is blood red and dark yellow with a green billiard table in the middle; there are four citron yellow lamps with a glow of orange and green. Everywhere there is a clash and contrast of the most disparate reds and greens (Kemp, n.d.).

This use of simultaneous contrast directs the eye and creates tension.

Simultaneous contrast is most intense when two complementary colors are

juxtaposed directly next to each other.



In "Pest" the artist uses simultaneous contrast to intensify the relationship between the subjects. Many see this image charged with deviant sexuality. The artist sees it as merely intertwining of foreground and background figures. The orange and green colors create tension arousing and exploiting psychological agitation.

Vibrations of the colors create an anxiety just as when a bee is annoying you. The stripes on the girl are another reminder of those bees. The collage of figures in the background negates the ability to read this image as genuine. Some men will reveal themselves by immediately relating to the man and sensing the guilt of voyeurism. The figure adjoining the ear may be symbolic of death. It is personalized to the voyeur and may be his punishment for looking. The audience will experience various reactions. Some will see it as voyeurism while others may not. The response is dependent on the sexual identity and experiences of the viewer.



"Freedom of Choice"

presents the cultural dilemma of our aged in nursing homes. Simultaneous contrast enhances the comparison of the love for our elderly and the predicament of caring for them. The words and visual clues are inspired by the Dada movement and the movie *Soylent Green*. The premise of the movie was to recycle the aged so they could feed the remaining young people. Here we see one of the "runners", as the movie called them. He is one who chooses to live and not be processed into food. Symbolically his suspenders show he is marked, just as a tree in our society is marked for destruction. This contrast is intensified as we realize the elderly are not nourishing the young, but are draining all of their resources. As we see the

row of our elderly waiting, the words describe their feelings. The words switch for the obvious "age" to the subdued "rage". The barrier, symbolic of the beginnings of a coffin, contrasts with their chairs. Their value is in the creation of income for nursing homes and their employees. The option of euthanasia is illegal but many think about it. Here the elderly are watching dinosaurs as they themselves are becoming dinosaurs. There are no constraints here leaving the audience free to feel the impact individually. According to Duane Preble (Preble et al., 2004) it has become the artist's task to probe and reveal hidden worlds and to make the invisible visible.



Uncertainty of the Poet, oil on canvas,
1913, Giorgio de Chirico

“Giorgio de Chirico sought to create an alternative reality that could communicate with the unconscious by removing objects from the natural world and presenting them in incongruous relationships” stated Preble (Preble et al., 2004, p. 426). This was Dadaist rejecting reason and logic and embracing irrationality and intuition. The "Uncertainty of the Poet"

by de Chirico was part of his dream reality paintings. This representative of the Dada movement displays many associations and a rich interplay with the experience of those who gaze upon the work. Familiar objects were painted authentically and placed together in an unfamiliar setting give a new presence to the senses (Carr & Zanetti, 2000).



"Nesting Instinct," similar to de Chirico's painting, shows the irony of the Dada movement. Here the artist implies gender inequality by showing the juxtaposition of a fry pan handle and the shadow of a girl. The reflection of the cut out girl, the handle of the fry pan, and the skewed perspective creates a bizarre disjointed atmosphere. The background contemporary photograph is a representation of feminist art. The sliver of a man's face as the voyeur is an entrance to this image. The satirical comment on the girl, not even a woman, is the male vision of a wife. It is antiquated but still a viable goal for some men. This is a joke on the sexual biased social culture that continues.

Rene Magritte, a leading figure in the visual Surrealist Movement, has also influenced this artist. Magritte painted objects juxtaposed in dreamlike surroundings creating a new form of illusionistic Surrealism. He said during an interview:

Everything we see hides another thing, we always want to see what is hidden by what we see. There is an interest in that which is hidden and which the visible does not show us. This interest can take the form of a quite intense feeling, a sort of conflict, one

might say, between the visible that is hidden and the visible that is present. (Sylvester, 1992, p. 24)

The preoccupation of wanting to know what is hidden has always been there. The communication begins when audience asks what is going on. "Not to Be Reproduced" (Appendix A) by Rene Magritte is a painting of a back of a man looking into a mirror and seeing his back. "Comfort

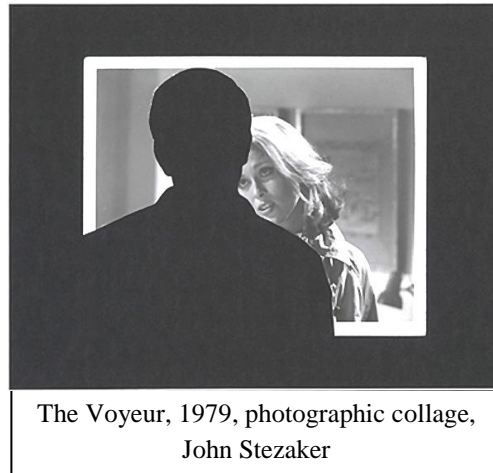


Station" was created with this in mind. In this image you can see a mirror with the back of the subject's head. This reflection in the mirror is incorrect; his face should be reflected. Here is a salute to Magritte and his vision. A déjà vu feeling is given with the use of a rest stop washroom that we are

compelled to use. Comfort is sought as we enter an unpredictable area. Seeing this nude in a public venue may be disturbing but not surprising. The voyeuristic reaction of the audience will be remembered when they travel. Rest stops give assistance to many and the spectators reaction to this nude will disclose how they feel subconsciously. Added to the wall is an ironic sign visually directing the visitor on what one should do in a restroom. A spider on the wall acts as the voyeur. Colors create a cold

sterile atmosphere while being contrasted with the dirty yellow tinged floor.

Discussion



"The Voyeur" by John Stezaker is a simple composite that can be compared to the images in *Conscious Delusions*. Taylor (2004) explains, Stezaker is a conceptual artist whose idea or concept involved in the work takes precedence over traditional aesthetic and material concerns. His work, which is

surreal in tone, is a collage of appropriated images from postcards, film stills, and publicity photographs. The contrast is not between represented and real, but between the unknowing primitives of popular culture and the viewer of post-modern images. In contrast, *Conscious Delusions* is made up of original photographs taken by this artist. Nothing has been appropriated. A voyeur can be seen in some of the photographs and in others the audience becomes the voyeur. More refined than Stezaker's image, this series allows the audience to enter the delusion, feel sadness, fear, and empathy for the subject. As they mature, their thoughts about these ambiguous images will elicit different responses. The audience may need a narrative or they may just enjoy the fantasy. The rich details in these images strive to entice the audience and capture them in the work. Once

inside, their subconscious may decipher a metaphorical message or they may just respond emotionally.

Faces are not seen in *Conscious Delusions*. This contemporary pictorial device of depicting figures with faces turned away creates anxiety and uncertainty about the meaning of an image, explains Charlotte Cotton (2009, p. 59). The audience, denied any facial expressions for clues, has to pull from their experiences and knowledge to determine the relationships in the image. Cotton (2009) also discloses “tableau photography has visualized collective fears and fantasies with an emphasis on the uncanny (p. 64). This has been a powerful visual and psychological device. The audience identifies what is going on as they find their position in the work, and then by connecting with it they create their own story. Some of the images appear to be straightforward and could have been taken with a camera, but with these images, there is always more going on. The relationships are the key to finding the intent of the piece.



"Embrace" is similar to Thomas Struth's "*Galleria dell'Accademia I. Veneza*" (Appendix A). His image of people walking in front of art in a gallery immediately makes you feel like you were there or someplace like it. In "Embrace" the artist has fabricated a gallery with a couple viewing a mural. She hopes the mood is similar to Struth's photograph, but creates

an isolated and disturbed aura. Subconscious awareness and attitude will be reflected in the audience as they respond to this couple. The mural exhibits many relationship possibilities. Gender and life choices are shown on the sides and in the center abstract. The mural, also made from a combination of photographs adjusted and transformed in Photoshop, indicates controversial feelings inside of people. The division of the expressionism and photorealistic sides creates a dichotomy. Since we do not know the couple's relationship, our psyche takes over and creates the narrative for this image. The decisions we make in our world are explored. The feeling of being there and watching this couple guides us into a sensation of the modern voyeur. This is the same feeling the artist felt when she began this series of work.

Throughout *Conscious Delusions*, the artist is communicating with the audience. According to Bal and Bryson (2004), this is the "way of addressing the spectator," and speaking to people without being there and without confrontation or opinion. The spectator's life experiences will be mirrored in in the art, and the understanding of the art is dependent on their comprehension (p. 6-7). David Perkins (1994) in *The Intelligent Eye* explains works of art demand various kinds of cognition. Each work asks us to encounter it fresh, drawing on past experiences and many kinds of knowledge within. Many details in *Conscious Delusions* are noticed. These images are portraits unmasking the subject's inner feelings while exposing the spectator's views. Explanations are not needed to enjoy this work. According to J. H. Matthews (1977), "Surrealism is really exciting and fully rewarding only to someone who, as he responds to it, naturally and sincerely

dispenses with the need to understand with his mind and who embraces the surrealist work in the act of love" (p. 238).

These portraits photographed from behind the subject deviate from the traditional. Subjects are unrecognizable, allowing us to easily identify with them. The reflections of their decisions, wants, and chaos are revealed but we determine the scenario. Emotional responses are precipitated as the surrealistic nature relates to the worlds of the subconscious. This subconscious is projected into the picture showing our inner selves.

Sandra Zalman (2012) reported, "For contemporary artists, the possibilities offered by Surrealism would prove to be porous, open to investigation and reinterpretation" (p. 103). As in the Exquisite Corpse game, the artist has released her inner feeling during the production of these images and shares these emotions with the viewers. The audience, the receiver of this enlightenment, explores and reflects on these ambiguous images. Our reactions show our essence. The artist Robert Henri (2007) discloses:

There are moments in our lives, there are moments in a day, when we seem to see beyond the usual. Such are the moments of our greatest wisdom. If one could but recall his vision by some sort of sign. (p. 9)

Here the artist has created the signs.

Results

As the audience stares at these pictures they may become uncomfortable. They see their reflection in the images and sense they are being watched. We have

become a society of voyeurs. Jonathan Metzl (2004) writes, Hitchcock's *Rear Window* was a voyeuristic film but was never named as such until the late 1970s. *Candid Camera* was the beginning of voyeurism on television in 1948. No one labeled these shows as voyeuristic since the original meaning of voyeurism connotes sexual deviance, perversion, and other psychiatric terms. Wanting to watch and enjoy these shows without shame opposed the societal taboos. The popularity of these shows began the process of changing culture views. According to Metzl (2004), contemporary American culture now defines voyeurism not so much as a deviant psychopathology, but as a guilty pleasure. Anyone with a television set or computer has joined the nation of voyeurs that obsess for information about others. Anna Quindlen (2001) writes society has become voyeuristic sofa slugs:

TV is the purview of those with nothing better to do. But this boom in the vicarious is instead the hallmark of a people with not enough time on their hands, people who have a to-do list instead of a life, people for whom the download can never be quick enough. What could be easier than cutting out the middleman of our own daily existence and instead watching the high points of life on tape. (Last Word section, para. 5)

Expanding the definition indicates that we have all become the modern voyeur. Facebook, *Big Brother*, and *Survivor* are all examples of voyeurism. In a study about peoples social judgments on individual privacy, one interview participant simply said, "We have eyes and we're gonna end up watching other people.

We're interested in other people" (Friedman, Kahn, Hagman, Severson, & Gill, 2006, p. 255).

Keep this thought of the modern voyeur in mind when you examine *Conscious Delusions*. What we see will mutate, linking the subconscious and unconscious minds, as we become the watchers or the watched. Titles are given and yet the audience feels they tease instead of helping decipher these photographs. Only here in her thesis does the artist explain her ever changing perceptions of them. She prefers the audience to recognize themselves in these works, relate to them, and find their uniquely personal meanings. According to Mieke Bal (2004), "There can be no such thing as a fixed, predetermined... meaning. Visual elements to which no iconographic meaning is attached, unsettle... thus activating the viewer" (p. 77). This artist gives the audience power to either interpret these images or just enjoy them for what they are; interesting images.



"Failure to Launch" spells out what is happening. The subject is hesitant to choose to travel through the forest of life and grow up. In the right lower corner is the sleeve of a man watching. Visual clues on what is happening here are seen, but are not obvious. The screen before her is indicative of how Millennials relate to each other in today's society. The subject here builds

relationships and lives through her computer screen. She is becoming part of the screen as she views it. This artist allows the audience to determine and reflect on the psychological questions throughout the images. The subject's maturity is arrested since someone is still watching. The audience's visual knowledge and experiences determine the narrative.



Throughout the thesis process, this artist has made discoveries about herself. One is seen in in "Popsicle Sticks." She originally felt this was about the digital age and the importance of the cherished cellular phone opposed to a physical friend. The cell phone gives the delusion of connection and safety. Strangers are passed without acknowledgement or eye contact.

Communication electronically lacks warmth and faces of genuine unpredictable people. Here she used a pinhole photograph to symbolize a time when people spoke to each other face-to-face and relationships did not begin and end with a text. Yearning to return to the past, the subject is mesmerized by his connection with his ancestor shown in the pinhole photograph. As this paper developed, this image became symbolic of the extinction of the family album. Popsicle sticks are what remain of the Popsicle just as photographs are remembrances of the family. Our current civilization has changed from having the old fashioned photograph album to now having digital photographs stored on a computer. That old photo

book was used to show us our history and give us a sense of who we are. No longer do we sit and speak about the past; there is no time. Paper is becoming obsolete as we grow confident computer programs and files will remain viable. The subject standing in front of the photograph realizes his images will be lost if that computer crashes. If the digital images become corrupted, he disappears. If we have no programs to open our jpg files, we will not be able to view his photographic history. He is the degrading jpg photograph. The realization of what has been lost will not be known until it is gone.



"Grandma's Dilemma" is a scene captured with an eye for shapes. This simple arrangement shows an older woman viewing a photograph of a garden in a gallery. The garden, representing retirement, is filled with flowers and fledglings. The woman becomes part of the image as she loses herself and she becomes the caretaker to the garden and the babies.

Whose babies remain the question. Similarity in the shapes of open beaks and open tulips design this delusional garden while the fledgling resemble this grandmother. The viewer determines her place and her feelings about this new role. The interpretation of this relationship will reflect the feelings of the spectator.

Conscious Delusions' first exhibit was in a hallway instead of a gallery. The 16 x 20 inch photographs were printed and framed without mats to encourage the feeling of looking through a window, a theater door, or a passageway. The artist anticipated an atmosphere in which the audience may not understand symbolism but be enticed by curiosity. "Most people spend only seconds with any work of art. Much thinking done under the guidance of our experiential intelligence is accomplished quickly" (Perkins, 1994, p. x). These dream collaborators are better experienced by a "walk by and pause" scenario instead of enclosed in a gallery. They were made for the average person who may only catch a glimpse of something interesting while passing, then return later to gaze.



In "Squeeze," the artist visually commands us to action. The subject is looking at and into herself. The door and pushing hands create a sandwiched feel as we read and receive the urge to push. With the depth of field skewed, glowing colors, open and covered doorways, we have an intense feeling of indecision, psychosis, and baptism. The definition of "Squeeze" can be joyful comfort or constricting pressure. This image gives questions about repressed thoughts, tattooed remembrances, and the erosion of our memories. The audience's interpretation and relationship to this image will reveal their subconscious thoughts.

The final three images in *Conscious Delusions* are a series: "Start", "Blink," and "Worship." Here the artist no longer allows us to determine our place but rather make us use her body as the entrance. As she looks through her kitchen curtains she pulls us into her delusion. The checkerboard curtain, a symbol of duality of choices, is another instinctual move made by this surrealist. As we stretch to see as she is, we look to the next image. She denies us the view showing us our own clouded pupil and glare of light and lashes. We read the title "Blink." We comply, obediently blinking as we move toward the next image. Here is a hall with a naked young man sitting and waiting. We are embarrassed and curious, and now feel like a voyeur. Here we are abandoned with our own self-identity. As with the entire series, we are left to our own introspection. To explain any of these images is to ruin the discovery within.



Conclusion

"From a biological perspective, it seems reasonable to assume that the human experience of privacy has grown out of biological capacities as a species to sense and to be sensed" (Friedman, et al., 2006, p. 267). As you sense the

person behind you, he sees your back and not only relates to the image in front of you but now also relates to you looking. He is the watcher and you are the watched. A photograph is taken of you and the art in front of you. This new photograph of you looking is now added to the others in *Conscious Delusions*. The feeling of being observed as we observe is shaped in the real world as it is in these images. With all the surveillance and web cameras, ubiquitous sensing devices, phones, and satellites some feel privacy does not exist anymore. As a society, people should stop worrying about it and adjust to the new world (Friedman, et al., 2006, p. 263-264). The freedom of privacy is gone. Only in play can we really be free.

The audience's subconscious merges with the art. We are the subject, the spectator, or the voyeur. What we see is who and what we are. As we view the subject looking, we are looking at what they are seeing and what has become their reality is becoming ours. This ambiguous image mirrors our vision of our reality. The compositions in *Conscious Delusions* have pulled you into a disjointed delusional world, repulsive, compelling, and emotional. Psychological reflections expose communications from the artist and from your psyche to yourself. Your face cannot be seen but the time you gaze at each image is observed, betraying the relationship. This reflection is your memento.

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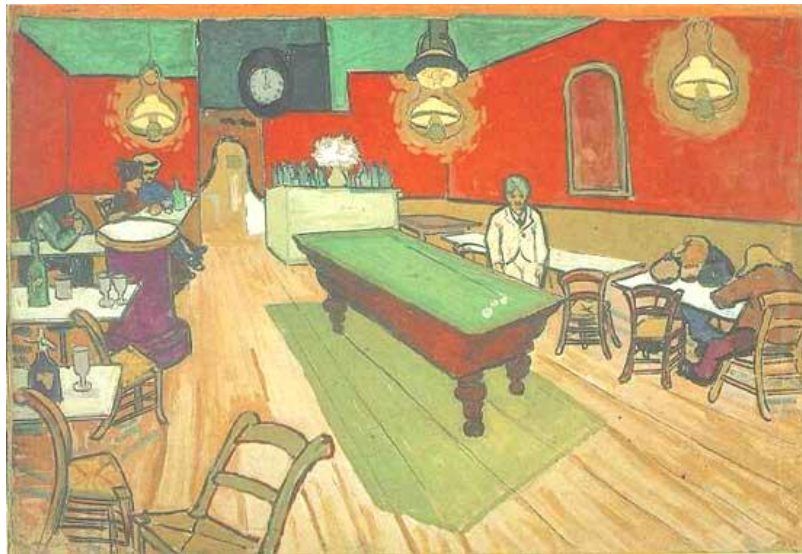
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Appendix A

Referenced Art



The Two Ways of Life, 1858, photograph, O.G. Rejlander



The Night Café, Arles, 1888, oil on canvas, Vincent Van Gogh



Not to Be Reproduced, 1937, oil on canvas,
Rene Magritte



Galleria dell'Accademia I, Venice, 1992, photograph,
Thomas Struth

Appendix B

Additional images in *Conscious Delusions*.



Predator Undetermined, 2015,
J.K. Hanacek



Worm's View, 2015,
J.K. Hanacek