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## Searching for California's Hang Trees

Ken Gonzales-Day  
*Scripps College*

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# SuperMassiveBlackHole

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**SuperMassiveBlackHole** is dedicated to the photographic imagery resulting from the time-based processes found in many interdisciplinary art practices today. The magazine seeks to engage and represent respective projects and ideas which utilise Photography (digital or analogue), New Media (high or low tech), Performance and Sculpture (through documentation). Fine Artists are encouraged to engage with the magazine as a way of exhibiting, testing, developing and experimenting with new (or old) ideas whether it is through a single image or a structured project.

## *Time, Space, Light and Gravity are what drive SuperMassiveBlackHole*

### **Submit**

*SuperMassiveBlackHole* is a free online magazine, and is published three times annually. *SuperMassiveBlackHole* accepts almost anything involved with the photographic process, from straight photography to video, performance documentation or written treatments. All submissions should be sent via Email. Please check the submission guidelines at:

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Cover: *Nightfall, 2006* by Ken Gonzales-Day

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# Theme

***Death & the Ritual*** is a theme for the dark days of winter, when another year comes to an end and our place in the natural world feels all the more real. But death is not limited to the seasons, unfortunately, it is with us every second of every day. Indeed, some may argue that this constant threat, this persistent shadow, is what makes us all the more alive; we expect it, but we can never be sure. This is the mystery and the fear that possibly spur us on to create and to procreate. How we deal with the anxiety and acceptance of the inescapable truth that like all living things, we too shall fade and become but memory is evident in our workings, our actions, our words and our objects. We engage in rituals that help deal with our own passing, and we take part in rituals that help understand the passing of others. Sometimes they show our naked fear and hatred, and sometimes they extoll our empathy and love. One may be forgiven for asking, is life itself not the greatest of these rituals?

# Leifur Wilberg Orrason

(b. Iceland. Lives Germany)

## **Anatomies**

Photographs  
2010

**The** absence of thought, whether it is possible, interested me in this series of photographs. Tiredness makes thinking difficult and I have proposed myself to instigate it on the portrayed people by insistently photographing them underwater. Tiredness becomes gradually visible in their facial expression transporting to the viewer a pleasant sense of quietness or death. The direct contact with the water makes the bodies seem weightless. Their forms seem lose at the same time that faces become expressionless, accentuated by the closed eyes. Light and space conditions contribute to the abstract notion of timelessness.

*Anatomies* was digitally photographed to later be analogically enlarged on warm-tone fiber paper. The matt surface of this paper alludes to dryness contrasting the subject.

leifurwilberg@gmail.com





(Before) *Anatomies III*; (Here) *Anatomies VII*; *Anatomies IX*

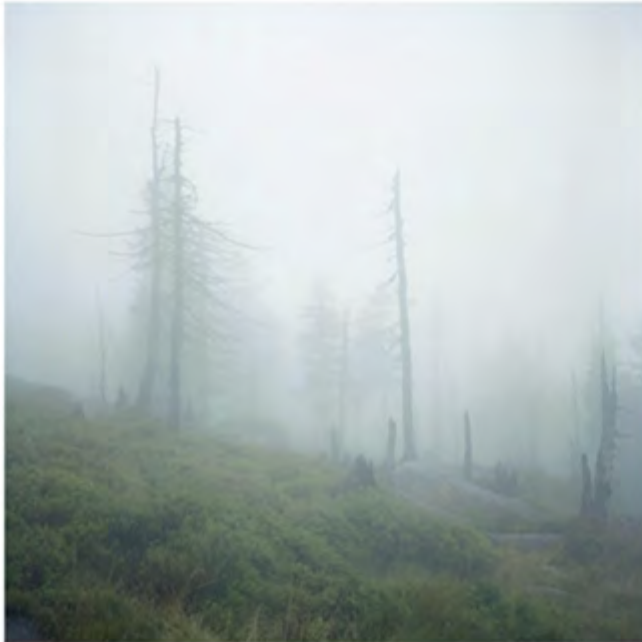
# Alicja Dobrucka

(b. 1985, Poland. Lives UK)

## *I Like You, I Like You A Lot*

Photographs

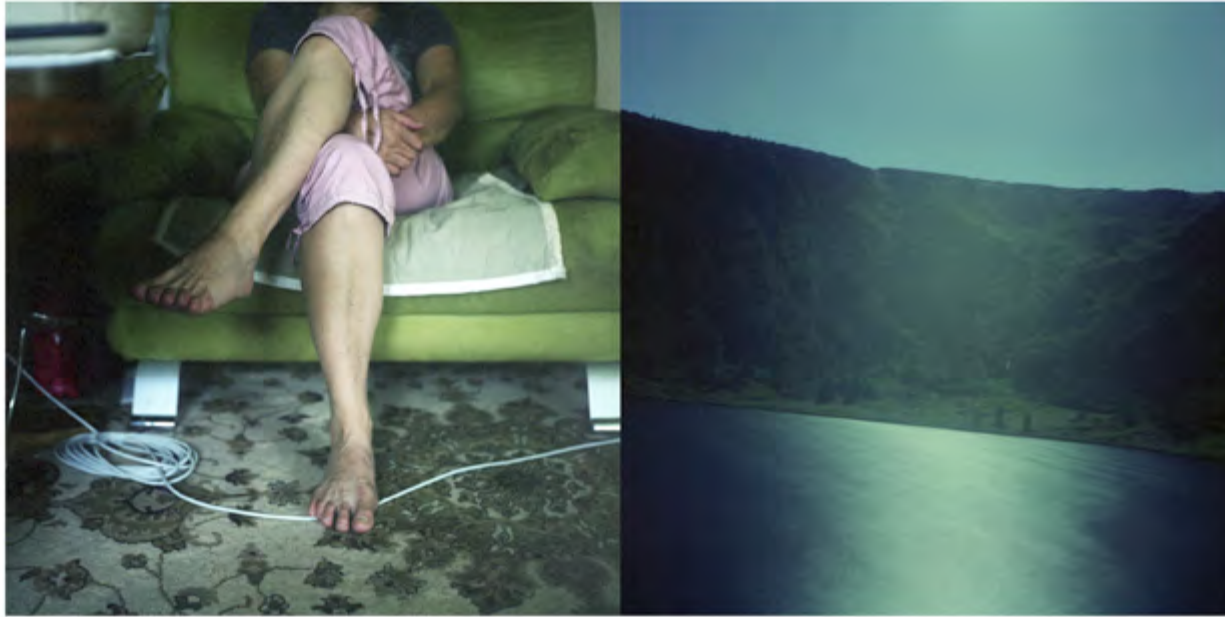
2010



*We photograph things in order to drive them out of our minds. My stories are a way of shutting my eyes. Franz Kafka*

**My** 14-year-old brother tragically drowned in 2008. In the immediate aftermath of the tragedy I attest to the materiality of death, engaging in private moments that the camera has candidly recorded. Over time, I reflect: the changes in me, what I remember, what I miss and of what remains. I am immersed in this push and pull between the rawness of emotion and the contemplation of the photograph, its own traces revealing impermanence; physical evidence eventually becoming fragmented memory.

[www.alicjadobrucka.com](http://www.alicjadobrucka.com)



(Before) *Untitled*; (Here) *Untitled*; *Untitled*



# Kristoffer Axén

(b. 1984, Sweden. Lives USA)

## *How We Evolved From Water*

Photographs

2009 - 2010

**The** landscape is deprived of all that once made it rich. The light has surrendered into a calm shade. The air is arid and hushed. Bendable instances of light lies about direction, this has been learned so now it's watched only with sedated interest. Faces melt with hills. Some that sees this find its attraction, other find its terror. The difference is minor and insignificant.

Built as a riddled narrative of essential fragments, *How We Evolved From Water* revolves around the state of isolation - not as a momentary occurrence of separation from other individuals but as the base and foundation of human thought itself.

As this is the case - that the tool we have to experience anything (translated through our senses) is the same implement creating a division - a clear and definable separation from all which we perceive being outside this sensation occurs.

Balancing between trepidation, melancholy and forceful detachment *How We Evolved From Water* also carries a slow, tacit, wish for a chord more tranquil underneath this, something which is constantly present in each specific image (and in the series as a whole) - being itself both the reason of separation and the means for re-connection.





(Before) *Natural Selection*; (Here) *Offspring*; *Traces*

# Barry W Hughes

(b. 1980, Ireland)

## Short Days Ago

Photograph

2010



**The** book in this photograph is *Pye's Surgical Handicraft* (edited by Hamilton Bailey, 13th Ed. 1942) and is open on the title page for *Medical 'Operations'* by F. Dudley Hart, which begins with a revised method for the Venesection, a surgical technique for blood-letting. The open page describes a venesection as being necessary 'where the benefit is largely due to relief of the heart'. On the left hand side is a Poppy, an ancient symbol in Greco-Roman times for death and resurrection, and in modern times for those who lost their lives during war. The title of this piece is taken from *In Flanders' Fields*, the famous poem by Canadian surgeon and soldier, Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae.

# Catherine O'Brien

(Ireland)

## *Chacabuco*

Photographs  
2010

**This** work is the beginning of an investigation into the death of graveyards.

A reflection on the degradations of humankind's moral responsibility.





(Before) *Untitled*; (Here) *Untitled*; *Untitled*

# Gert Jochems

(b. 1969, Belgium)

## **RUS**

Photographs  
2001 - 2005

**In** the autumn of 2003 I was in Krasnoyarsk in Siberia and during my walkings in the town I saw in the morning a family preparing a burial of a family member.

I asked them if it was possible to make pictures of them. Without asking for more explanation they let me enter their flat and in the same way they took me with them to the cemetery.

When the ritual was finished the family left the place with their cars and without any conversation they left me alone in the place.

So I took the bus back to town without ever knowing who the family was.

The three images presented here are taken from the book *RUS*, published in 2005. ISBN 9066250801. See Gert's website for details.

Distributed by Agence Vu - Paris

[www.gertjochems.be](http://www.gertjochems.be)





(Before) *Untitled*; (Here) *Untitled*; *Untitled*

# Federico Padovani

(b. 1978, Italy)

## **Throats**

Photographs  
2006

**On** december 30th 2006 there are two stories rolling beside each other.

That of a family, participating to traditional date of *eid-el-adha*, the strongest and deepest symbol of submission to god in muslim religion.

In which meat and soul, sky and soil meet and fight, as the man against his victim, by cutting his throat; and that of a man, whose throat was tightened by a rope, being found guilty of crime against humanity, sentenced to death by hanging, whose name was Saddam Hussein.

A small everyday-story, and a historical leap, within the same day; and none of us can understand what happened yet or what is happening - what was all this fighting for.







(Before) Air; (Here, left to right) *Earth; Water; Fire; The Day*

# Jon Riordan

(South Africa)

## *Eastern Cape Vignettes*

Photographs

2010

**One** of the great rituals connected to death is the grave. In its simplest sense it is a method of disposal; the burial of a body in the ground, out of sight and out of mind. Yet it has always been seen as more, as a commemoration of what has past, a lamentation of what has past and sometimes even a desperate plea for what could have been. If anything it is an attempt not to dispose of but to remember.

In South Africa graves allow an alarmingly intimate view of how history and hardship has influenced the lives of many of the country's citizens.



jonriordan@gmail.com



(Before) Gravestone, Molteno; (Here) Gravestone, Molteno III; Gravestone, Molteno IV

# Eveliina Hujanen

(b. Finland. Lives Ireland and Finland)

## *Death is Light Blue*

Photographs

Ongoing

**Encountering** death can be a curiously dual experience. One feels perfectly present and at the same time incredibly distant as shock seems to distance the mind from the moment. Having to deal with death can be simultaneously one of the most physical and spiritual moments in life.

During the last year, my dad has been through surgery three times, my mother once, and my younger brother has been under a scalpel too. So, the pictures are also parts of my family and myself. The text titles correspond with the feeling of being both present and absent at the same time when encountering the mortality of yourself and others: even the most mundane words seem to absorb deeper meanings in them.

The images are a result of a process, which started in a workshop held in Finland in autumn 2009, facilitated by artists Jyrki Parantainen and Minna Havukainen.



k.ehuja@gmail.com



(Before) *Today, Here;* (Here) *Time Passes; Into the Wild*

# Peter Riesett

(United States)

## *Testament*

Photographs

2003 - 2004

**Testament** is a photographic series that documents the packing up of a life after death. After both grandfathers passing, one in 2003 and the other in 2007, I routinely returned to these spaces to capture what I could before this dwelling disappeared. Much like an archeological dig, souvenirs, texts, and objects filled the space, allowing me to have wordless conversations with the objects of disuse. With every visit the void and absence of life became greater within these walls. Through the wandering process of investigation, compositions were revealed, often transcending into metaphor.

Personality traits become unveiled by how and what is accumulated, stockpiled, and often cherished. These attachments and idiosyncrasies, portrayed through the collision, placement, and relationship of everyday objects intrigue me. The action of photography becomes a way to integrate myself into any given situation. Using an unflinching documentary approach and working with available light, I strive to engage viewers in a dialogue that is both physical and emotional. This is a call to witness.

[www.peterriesett.com](http://www.peterriesett.com)





(Before) *Bag of Fur*; (Here) *Stain*; *WWII*

# Yvonne O'Sullivan

(b. 1972, Ireland)

## *As I Lay Me Down To Sleep*

Photographs  
2001 - 2003

**This** is part of a documentary study of religious life in Ireland today, focusing on the private space of nuns' bedrooms.

By exploring their worlds, I uncovered the personal elements of their normally public presentation. I wanted to go beyond the unquestioned perceptions and stereotypical views we have of them as an amorphous group where in the past individual identity was foregrounded.

Over the course of the project, I developed a level of trust with them, which I had not expected and they began to reveal themselves to me at a more private level. By photographing their bedrooms, I began to access their private worlds. The bedroom is a symbol of individuality and privacy of both mind and body. Their personal objects acted as symbols and metaphors revealing their individuality, humanity and spirituality.







(Before) *Untitled*; (Here) *Untitled*; *Untitled*

# Sarah Sudhoff

(United States)

## ***At the Hour of Our Death***

Photographs (archival pigment prints, 40 x 30 inches)  
2010

**Death**, like birth, is part of a process. However, the processes of death are often shielded from view. Traditional mourning practices, which allowed for the creation of Victorian hair jewelry or other memento mori items, have fallen out of fashion.

These large-scale color photographs capture and fully illuminate swatches of bedding, carpet and upholstery marked with the signs of the passing of human life. The images are my attempt to slow the moments before and after death to a single frame, to allow what is generally invisible to become visible, and to engage with a process from which we have become disconnected.





(Before) *Illness, Female, 60 years old*; (Here) *Suicide with Gun, Female, 60 years old*; *Suicide with Gun, Male, 40years old*

# Julie Badin

(b. 1981, France)

## *Monster*

Photograph  
2007



**This** image comes from a series called *Monster* in which I mixed two different stories; the first one is about a young lady, alone in a living room and wearing the pink dress of the dead old woman who used to live there. The second one is about a bullfight's show where a bullfighter is gradually killing a bull in an arena, in front of a crowd. These two stories show the intimacy of a lonely person with the setting of the death of a lonely animal. They are like monsters; between death and ritual, the girl and the bull are experiencing two faces of death, one in the past and one in the future. In the present, the ritual is like a game in which we can maintain life or provoke death. The show must go on.

# Kimberly Witham

(United States)

## *Transcendence*

Photographs (digital c-prints, 24 x 24 inches)

2008 - 2009

**The** images in the Transcendence series were inspired by Victorian post-mortem photographs. During the Victorian era, victims of an early death were often photographed post mortem. The subjects were carefully posed and then photographed in radiant natural light. The resulting images are eerily beautiful. In these photographs the deceased appear to be sleeping peacefully. I recreate this approach. I remove each creature from the site of its demise and photograph it on a neutral surface. Like the Victorians before me I do not dwell on gruesome details.

As I photographed these animals and birds I began to notice intricate details of which I was never aware: the texture of a possum's tail, the elaborate patterns of birds feathers, etc. Photographs taken with a close-up lens allow for a level of specificity not available to the unassisted human eye. The creatures in these photographs are so common in suburbia that they often go unnoticed. For the most part, they are considered neither beautiful nor precious. Their deaths by the roadside are unremarkable. By photographing these creatures, I have allowed them to inhabit a liminal space. They appear neither alive nor dead; instead they float and drift in indeterminate blackness.





(Before) *Cormorant*, 2009; (Here) *Fox Portrait*, 2008; *Possum Paw*, 2008

# Emma Powell

(United States)

## ***A Life Reviewed: George Eastman Through the Viewfinder***

Photographs  
2010

**When** examining the history of photography, specifically the life of Kodak's founder George Eastman and the city he lived in, Rochester, New York. I wanted to be able to combine lived time with historical time in a series of images. In order to do this, I needed to find a way to look back in time, through a window into the past, to visualize temporal distance. I needed a turn-of-the-century device that could speak to the technological advancements of the industrial revolution. I needed a time machine.

Instead, I used cameras. To take these images, my modern camera and I peered down into the glass and mirrors of the viewfinders of old Kodak cameras. *A Life Reviewed: George Eastman through the Viewfinder* is a photographic biography of the 'father of modern photography', told through the cameras that remain a part of his legacy. I have researched his life, and photographed locations and objects related to Eastman's story. This process enabled my work to combine both the non-fiction research of the historian and the romantic re-imagining of the artist.

[www.emmapowellphotography.com](http://www.emmapowellphotography.com)





(Before) *Eastman's First Lion*; (Here) *Eastman's Globe*; *Eastman's Terrace Stairs*





# FOCUS

**Ken Gonzales-Day** lives and works in Los Angeles. He received an MFA from UC Irvine, and an MA in Art History from Hunter College (C.U.N.Y). His interdisciplinary and conceptually driven projects often consider representational systems, the history of race and racial violence, the construction of difference, and early use of photography by scientists, criminologists, and anthropologists.

He is the author of *Lynching in the West: 1850-1935* (Duke, 2006). Fellowships include: Getty Research Institute, The Smithsonian Institution, Rockefeller Foundation, and the Whitney Independent Study Program. Gonzales-Day is a professor, and chair of the Art Department at Scripps College.

# Ken Gonzales-Day

(United States)

## *Searching for California's Hang Trees*

Photographs  
2002 - 2010

**Also** known as the Hang Tree Series, this was part of Ken Gonzales-Day's eight year project to search for, and photograph, possible, probably, and verifiable lynching sites in California. Perhaps most significantly, his project included the discovery and documentation of over 350 cases of lynching in the state of California between 1850 and 1935. Contrary to the popular image of 'cowboy justice' and Wild West vigilantism as being an exclusively white-on-white crime, Gonzales-Day was able to document, that in California, the majority (nearly two thirds) of cases of vigilantism involved the lynching of African Americans, Native Americans, Chinese, and Latinos of Mexican and Latin American descent, but Gonzales-Day documented more than the sites themselves. He was able to prove that Mexicans and Mexican Americans were the victims of racial violence, a fact which may help to shed some light on the contemporary debates around citizenship, immigration, and the migration of persons between Mexico and the United States.

The photographs are silent reminders that lynchings and other acts of racial violence were not simply part of some distant past but continue to influence California born Latinos, their families and loved ones, today as one hundred and sixty years ago.

[www.kengonzalesday.com](http://www.kengonzalesday.com)





(Before) *Nightfall*; (Here) *Untitled*



*Into eternity; Old road*



Two men were hanged to a tree



Untitled



*Dancing in the air*





Golden chain





*Now he swings from a tree, two doors down from where I write*





# Talk

Essay

***Nobuyoshi Araki's Skyscapes***

# Nobuyoshi Araki: Skyscapes

Foreward by Akihito Yasumi, translated by Shihoko Ora and Walter Vogl (Japanese/German) and Fiona Elliott (English). Codax Publisher, Zurich, Germany, 1999.  
ISBN 3-9521227-3-4 www.arakinobuyoshi.com

S. Marks



**Human** beings have always been sky-worshippers in one form or another, from our megalith building earliest memories to the Hubble telescope present day, being human comes with an innate wonder of the heavens. The sky brings life in glorious sunlight and rain and yet it can bring death in the violence of storms. In these things we find joy and sustenance, fear and desolation; we find old friends and old foes that we have had to continuously exploit or overcome to survive as a species. There is no denying both our reliance on and victimhood to the sky.

Is it any wonder then, that our beliefs and religions have been shaped by our relationship with the sky – the domain of Ba'al, Horus, Jupiter and Zeus, the gods that we look to for favours. Like the Maya of ancient times we have studied the skies, at night and day, looking for signs that somehow make our lives here on terra firma all the more sensible, all the more organised. Here on the earth we are mere mortals, we live and we die. Our bodies, whether buried or not, return to the earth, yet we believe our immortal souls do not. We associate our souls not with the earth, with the cluttered land, but with the weightless, boundless freedom of the sky. The sky is intrinsically linked to death. It mirrors our freedom from earthly pain and emptiness we feel inside when we lose someone close.

Humans have learned to abstract the sky, to associate it with more than flight, more than rain or day and night. It is true we say 'up there' when we speak of a God or the Heavens, and we associate the sky with our loved ones in the afterlife. But it is also equally true we

do not actually mean the sky itself – what we know to be the space between the Earth’s crust and atmosphere. As creatures bound to the land the sky represents infinity, a physical representation of endlessness.

The sky is not just an image of infinity though, it is our way of making the incomprehensible comprehensible. This of course is also how we deal with death, particularly with the loss of someone close to us like a family member. The closer we are to the deceased, the more meaning we look for, and of course the more we try to understand the reason behind it all. In times of grief we console ourselves by attaching order to the disorder bereavement brings. It seems incomprehensible, just like the idea of infinity, so we try to do what human beings always do and that is to reason with it somehow. We recognise the infinity (that which exists for all time) of the sky as being something altogether more spiritual, more personal, so it becomes eternity (that which exists outside time).

This subtle difference between infinity and eternity is where Nobuyoshi Araki’s beautifully produced photobook *Skyscapes* (Codax Publisher, 1999) can be best understood. A work of delicate beauty and poetic peace, *Skyscapes* couldn’t be further from his (in)famous better known work *Tokyo Lucky Hole* (Taschen, 1997). *Skyscapes* is an elegant book, with hardback cover and super glossy pages. The photographs themselves are all in monochrome, the whites reproduced in natural tones and not the same acidic white of the paper, which gives each image a rather authentic feel. It is longer than A4 but no wider so it opens to display each image



more or less folded in half. The images themselves are printed right to the edge but for one side, which again makes the reader feel like they are holding something more like a photographic print as opposed to an image printed on a page. An earlier version of this book was first published in 1991 as *Laments: Skyscapes/From Close Range* (Shinchosha). The inclusion of the word ‘Laments’ in this earlier title gives a hint as to the series original meaning.

In January of 1990, at the age of 42, Yoko Araki died following a serious illness. As her husband tried to come to terms with the loss of his wife and model, indeed his muse, and found himself sitting on his balcony ‘...it seemed to me as though my feelings were being reflected back to me and exposed in all-penetrating light...Although I pointed my camera at various different things and activated the

shutter, I somehow inexplicably felt as though time and space had ceased to exist.’ (Nobuyoshi Araki, *Collected Works*, vol. 11, *In Ruins*, 1996).

Araki had lost someone close, someone precious, someone who had somehow grounded him in the real world – to the here and now. Without his love, he seemed to be floating above the earth that once held him firmly in place. Remarking on the *Skyscapes* exhibition, Araki explained ‘My wife had died, and I, all I could do was photograph the sky.’ His artistic eye not wanting to revisit that old territory where pain and memory collide, he chose another subject that offered him solace and something of an escape – the sky. As his most precious model, Yoko had been involved with the process of his photographic practice as well as being his wife, so it would be perfectly reasonable to expect this practice to be affected in such a manner.

One of the reasons for Araki’s success both at home in Japan and internationally is his fearless ability to get straight to the point, to neither over-elaborate nor over-simplify. It is this unique quality in all of his work, where we viewers find the thing that makes us appreciate his vision whether humorous, dark or poetic. In *Skyscapes* we find such qualities all over again; his loneliness is present in each slow-moving cloud that wanders through his skies, his desolation in the flat grey skies that look like nothing at all, his stoicism in the sunlight that shines through the fractured forboding clouds.

Of course one other thing stands out in these photographs, and it





is also another reason for Araki's success; emotionally charged as they may be, and for all their poeticism in bringing the idea of eternity to bare on his artistic vision, Araki has deliberately prevented these images from being completely abstracted, from being completely expressionist. He could have easily pointed his camera straight into the sky and given us nothing but expansive fields of infinity – but no, he remains true to his authentic vision, and he does this by including a little of this grotty reality as it were; he includes the tree tops, the telegraph wires, the TV masts and aerials, his neighbours roofs and in one instance he even includes a large, almost overbearing parasol – looming like the shadow of death itself.

These man-made inclusions act as signifiers reminding us that we remain here on the earth, in our place; that no matter how we literally or metaphorically view the sky, it is there and we are here – a reality check. On the other hand they may act to remind us of something else, of optimism, that no matter how big or bad our problems here on earth seem, life will always go on and we should do well to remember that we are indeed not alone and left to the winds, but among others, among friends even, at home.

The connection between the ethereal and reality is reflected in the series' Japanese title itself. It was in fact Araki's first exhibition after his wife's death, six months earlier, and he chose *Kukēi* – *Skyscapes*. The word 'Ku-kēi' actually refers to 'heavenly landscapes' obviously suggesting the subject matter of the exhibition, but the word 'Ku' itself means hollow, without substance or foundation – nothingness. Again the notion of that which exists both for all time and beyond time is directly associated with the sky motif. Somewhat poignantly however is the parallel between Araki's *Kukēi* and the *Kukēi* which sounds and looks the same, and can also mean 'empty marriage-bed'.

So time and again Araki's photographs here in this book play on both the subjective and the objective, on the negative and the positive, on the real and the unreal. His skyscapes offer that which the sky itself offers in real terms as both something to wonder at and something to fear, but above all it offers the viewer a symbol of life and death – of not just the simple expanse of infinity but the complexity of eternity ●



# Project

**Jeremy Millar**

*A Firework for WG Sebald*

**Karl Grimes**

*Still Life*

# Jeremy Millar

(United Kingdom)

## ***A Firework for WG Sebald***

Documented intervention (Artist's Project for *Searching for Sebald* publication)  
2005

*One of Smut's more extraordinary rituals is to mark each death that he encounters with the lighting of a firework*

### **Bio**

**Jeremy** Millar is an artist living in Whitstable, Kent. Recent solo exhibitions include *Given*, National Maritime Museum, London (2009–10); *As Witkiewicz*, Ethnographic Museum, Krakow; and *Amongst Others*, Plymouth Arts Centre, with exhibitions following at CCA, Glasgow, and Focal Point Gallery, Southend, in 2011. His work has also been included in *The Dark Monarch*, Tate St Ives (2009) and *Never The Same River Twice*, Camden Art Centre, London, (2010). Millar has curated numerous international exhibitions, and recently conceived the exhibition *Every Day is a Good Day*, the largest exhibition thus far of the visual art of John Cage. In addition to the accompanying catalogue, Millar has contributed to numerous international publications, and his most recent book is *Fischli and Weiss: The Way Things Go* (Afterall Books, 2007). He is currently tutor in art criticism at the Royal College of Art, London.







**Chapter** four of W.G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn* opens with a photograph of the lighthouse in Southwold, a town on the Suffolk coast to which the author walked from Lowestoft, further along the coast, in August 1992. One can also find the same lighthouse in the opening scene of Peter Greenaway's 1988 film, *Drowning by Numbers*, which was made in the town and its environs.

A meditation upon death, also, the film concerns the amorous entangling of a local coroner, Madgett, with three women — a mother and her two daughters — whose husbands all drown in quick succession, and in mysterious circumstances.



Sharing Madgett's inquisitive nature, and his delight in arcane information and games of bewildering complexity, is his son Smut, who accompanies the coroner on the increasingly compromised investigation.

One of Smut's more extraordinary rituals — of which there are many — is to mark each death that he encounters with the lighting of a firework, whether it is a drowned husband or an animal in a hedgerow; even his own eventual suicide.

In memory — and celebration — of the extraordinary life and work of W.G. Sebald, a firework was lit by the side of the A146 in Framingham Pigot, the place in which he was killed in a car crash on 14 December 2001 ●



# Karl Grimes

(Ireland)

## **Still Life**

Photographs (Ektacolor prints, 6ft x 4ft (183 x 122cm).  
Editions of 1. Collection of the artist and Nikolai Fine Art)  
1998 - 2004

*Such collections of specimens, classified as monsters, were used for research in universities and teaching hospitals*

## **Bio**

**Born** in Dublin, Ireland. Studied Photography and Media at New York University and the International Center Of Photography, New York. His work is exhibited and published in the United States and Europe and is represented in a number of leading international public and private collections. His recent projects include imaging, text and video collaborations with: American Museum of Natural History, New York; Mütter Museum, Philadelphia; La Specola Museum & Caregi Hospital, Florence, Italy; Hubrecht Laboratory, Netherlands; Tornblad Institute, Sweden and the National Museum of Ireland (Natural History). He is a research Fellow at the Mütter Museum and the College of Physicians of Philadelphia. The artist lives and works in Dublin and New York.

[www.karlgrimes.net](http://www.karlgrimes.net)



**The** unexpected presence of the anomalous human body is at once familiar and alien. As spectators, the sight of strange corporeal figurations inspires contradictory responses: recognition and denial, fascination and fear, identification and rejection. When a form departs from our preferences and desired fantasies, we gaze with unrest and suspicion. Comforting distinctions between what is human and is not become confused.

The images in *Still Life* document congenital malformations from international medical collections. Such collections of specimens, classified as monsters, were used for research in universities and teaching hospitals from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Stored in sealed glass jars and preserved in formaldehyde, these tender beings became rationalised within the laboratory and the textbook. What was once the prodigious monster, the curiosity of nature, the ominous marvel or the divine foreboding, became the pathologised other, the abnormal.

In the discourse of Teratology, the science of monsters, we each occupy our own solitary site of discrimination. We rely on acquired vocabularies from science and superstition and inconsistent definitions of an elusive ideal. We enter a realm of troubled fascination. Our disquiet lies in the recognition that nature's fearful asymmetry is at the heart of our own identity. Images of what we have denied turn towards us ●

(Before) *Still Life* # 1 (Here) *Still Life* # 2 (After) *Still Life* # 3; *Still Life* # 4;  
*Still Life* # 6; *Still Life* # 7









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