

Proof 23

Agnes Wong
Anique J Jordan
Anyse Ducharme
Hannah Doucet
Jeneen Frei Njootli
Noah Spivak





TOP LEFT Anyse Ducharme, *que l'espace s'effondre*, inkjet print on acetate, 2015



TOP RIGHT Agnes Wong, *Fragments*, c-print, 36"x44", 2015



MIDDLE RIGHT Agnes Wong, *Fragments*, c-print, 36"x44", 2015



BOTTOM Noah Spivak, *They Know When it Rains* (detail), 2016



TOP LEFT Jeneen Frei Njootli, *He Has No Middle Name*, c-print 40"x30", 2014

TOP RIGHT Anique J Jordan, *Outside*, "Salt" Series, c-print, 2015

BOTTOM Hannah Doucet, *Untitled (Undulating Surfaces)*, inkjet print, 20"x30", 2014



Proof 23

by Shani K Parsons

"Make picture of kaleidoscope"

– William H. Fox Talbot, ms.

note dated February 18, 1839

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In the spring of 2013, *Aperture* magazine made waves with a splashy relaunch, having just marked its 60th year in print. Founded in 1952 by Minor White, Dorothea Lange, Beaumont Newhall and other artists and critics to “descry the new potentials” of the photographic medium, the storied publication opened its 210th issue with an essay titled “Nine Years, A Million Conceptual Miles”, by curator Charlotte Cotton. Gamedly attempting to descry new developments emerging within the near-decade since she wrote her influential survey, *The Photograph as Contemporary Art* (2004), Cotton states that for the first time in her professional life, she is seeing work that challenges description, and hails what she calls a “critical mass” of contemporary artists who are “opening up the subject of photography” in new and diverse ways.²

Making their individual, and yes, extraordinarily diverse marks in this ever expanding field, Hannah Doucet, Anyse Ducharme, Anique J. Jordan, Jeneen Frei Njootli, Noah Spivak, and Agnes Wong can be counted among this critical mass as they explore the “new potentials” of today. Just as William H. Fox Talbot’s perfunctory note to self, “Make picture of kaleidoscope,” speaks untold volumes on the sense of curiosity and excitement he must have felt as he helped usher in a new way of envisioning the world, these six emerging artists evince a similarly keen sense of self-reflexivity and urgency in their work, whether they are striking out into the seemingly boundless realm of the digital with its ceaseless capacity for iteration, plumbing deep into the materially focused, historically infused worlds of the medium’s analogue aspects, or registering their fascinations in a space beyond or in between.

Indeed, *between* is a concept and a place that Agnes Wong has staked out in both her life and work. Expressing a state of ground-lessness borne of cultural displacement, she pictures herself in fragmented form defining an otherwise featureless white plane. Sliced to near oblivion by the very edges of her large-scale, wall-based prints, the artist is unrecognizable and incomplete, frustrating attempts to identify. This partial existence is presented with the same matter-of-factness as the potted plant, wooden chair, and empty plastic bag that are her only other companions in this imaginary space. Like the props within the strange white room that eases astronaut Bowman’s journey to transcendence in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), these seemingly banal objects are but the thinnest of tethers to a world that, for Wong, is receding into unreality.³ On the physical terms implied by her chosen title, *Fragments*, as well as on mental/emotional terms, Wong circumscribes both her experience and cultivation of detachment, acknowledging the fruitlessness of attempts to moor herself in the shifting flux between places (Canada, Hong Kong), states (actual, virtual), and times (childhood, adulthood). Extending a path broken by Victor Burgin in his mid-1980s exposition on binaries within a socio-political context (*Between*, 1986), Wong similarly makes work “whose precise ‘location’ is uncertain”, oscillating between poles of a more personal—yet no less political—sphere.⁴ The promise of evolution and eternity, sought by so many since humanity’s earliest origins, figures prominently in Wong’s worlds of white, where nothingness is the blank slate upon which she inscribes her search for a permanent home.

Conversely, it is the specificity and physicality of home that defines Anique J. Jordan’s photo-based work. Exhibiting a particularity that is the visual inverse of Wong’s representations of placelessness, Jordan’s photographs from San Fernando, Trinidad, situate a spectral representation of her self within a set of

vernacular spaces considered to be sacred to her family’s history. Wearing a typical Caribbean housecoat and a deadpan expression on her face, she stands framed within domestic spaces (a well-used kitchen, a well-worn porch), or barricaded behind displays of the fruits and material of her family’s labour (hand-raised vegetables in a market stall, an offering of fish and eels at oceanside, massive cut oil drums piled high in a pan yard). Ready to be fashioned into the steel pans that have become emblematic of Trinidad’s hard-won musical traditions, this metal in turn speaks to the intertwined cultural and industrial histories of a country which has survived centuries of slavery and indentureship to achieve remarkable economic prosperity in contemporary times (Trinidad and Tobago is the third richest country by GDP (PPP) per capita in the Americas after the US and Canada, largely from oil).⁵

In writing about her work Jordan speaks similarly of survival, but on more personal terms, recognizing that her very life is a testament to resilience and the ability to succeed against great odds.

Part of a three-part series titled *Possessed*, her work references the legacy of slavery with which she still contends as an African Caribbean woman. Honouring her ancestors who were possessed as property not so long ago, Jordan pursues a state of self-possession in her own life and work, channelling the ghosts of collective memory to gain strength and challenging current colonial histories in a search for alternative outcomes.

Rendering her images in velvety greys, the soft contrast and richness of which confers upon them an otherworldly air, she shines forth in her white frilled gown, as if possessed by a ghostly emanation. Or perhaps not a ghost but an angel, whose very presence serves to “assemble, testify, preserve” difficult memories and realities that are ordinarily unseen, so that humanity may come to recognize and perhaps exorcise its collective demons in the hope of achieving some future state of grace.⁶

Thus reframing difference on her own terms, Jordan transforms her lifelong experience of otherness into a transcendent state of otherworldliness. In so doing she constructs a personal mythology that is powerfully redemptive of her social history. Vuntut Gwitchin artist Jeneen Frei Njootli, on the other hand, taps into socially constructed mythologies of hip hop culture to inform her moving image work, *CHUGLIFE*, made in collaboration with Haida artist, Corey Bulpitt.⁷ Playing like a slowed-down, lo-fi snippet of a mid-1990s “gangster” rap video, *CHUGLIFE* functions as a durational image in which a woman’s hands, adorned with acrylic nails, caresses a man’s abdomen upon which the word “CHUGLIFE” is written, while a clear liquid (presumed to be alcohol) is liberally poured over his chest. Referencing the infamous rapper Tupac Shakur’s iconic “thug life” stomach tattoo, Frei Njootli and Bulpitt conflate Shakur’s supposed promulgation of gangster living with persistent negative stereotypes of Indigenous

people in Canada, stating that the video “may seem lavish or impressive, particularly to our young people”, even as it “echoes the violence and objectification that is aestheticized and perpetuated in hip hop culture.”⁸ Employing similar tools of appropriation seen in rap music videos, Frei Njootli and Bulpitt’s work addresses how Indigenous people have not had control over their own representation by constructing self-representations that not only resist, but seek to subvert and even reverse dominant cultural norms and attitudes.⁹ A more direct examination of the disconnect between assumed and assigned identities is *He Has No Middle Name*, a family photograph out of which the artist has cut the word *Loucheux*, a derogatory name for Gwich’in people which roughly translates to “tilted in the head”. Part of Frei Njootli’s text-based series *Dinjii Zhuh: Productive Disruptions*, the work is a concrete expression of the power of words and labels over image and identity, and how a group’s control over both is a reflection of their relative power—or lack thereof—in society.¹⁰ In a further act of control over her own self-representation, Frei Njootli changes the display of this work for each successive exhibition. Here the cut photograph, of the artist and her family returning from a hunt, is laid upon a hide from a caribou that she herself has harvested and skinned. Thus staking out physical space upon which she grounds her inscribed image in both the labour and land that defines her Gwich’in experience, Frei Njootli establishes a conceptual territory that supersedes the gallery, where she is able to represent her place in society according to boundaries of her own making.

If Frei Njootli utilizes a literal skin to invoke ownership and control of one’s own identity, Hannah Doucet creates proxies and proliferations of skins and surfaces that evoke the wholesale erasure of female individuality in mass media. Photographing parts of a pale young woman’s body—arms, hair, hands, swaths of skin—Doucet prints them onto a slippery white fabric which is then hung, draped, stretched, or wrapped around structural supports and re-photographed, multiplying distortions. The fabric bulges and folds, creating a cognitive dissonance between the smooth, svelte limbs pictured and the long, deep shadows that interrupt the idealized imagery—beauty and youth marred by the sagging and wrinkles usually associated with age, decadence, or the trauma of childbirth. Draping the printed material in ways which provoke such readings, then re-photographing it to fix and flatten the resulting distortions, Doucet subsumes the texture of the fabric within the surface of the paper, moving the disembodied subject yet further away from identity and reality.

The image becomes unstable, as in a reflection or mirage, through which representation itself, particularly with regard to norms of beauty and desirability in women, is revealed to be as illusory as a trick of light.



Anise Ducharme, que l'espace s'effondre, inkjet print on acetate, 2015



TOP Jeneen Frei Njootli made in collaboration with Corey Bulpitt, video still from CHUGLIFE, 2015
 BOTTOM Anique J Jordan, Fish Market, "Salt" Series, c-print, 2015

Hannah Doucet, *Untitled (Undulating Surfaces)*, inkjet print, 20"x30", 2014

Extending this iterative process into three dimensions, Doucet integrates the same printed fabric into an instal-lation comprising mirrored plexiglass and plinths. Bent, twisted, curled, and piled over the hard-edged supports, the images are again distorted, but in an almost violent manner this time—fragmented, exposed, and amplified for our viewing pleasure in a way that is powerfully suggestive of connections between fashion, pornography, and violence against women that pervade our all-too complacent contemporary society.

Anyse Ducharme evinces a similar interest in fragmentation and the interface between the image and its material support, but focused within the digital realms of data and image translation and processing rather than the physical world of the body and its (mis) representations. Often sourcing her raw materials from the web, Ducharme translates her chosen images and texts into code, splicing variant syntaxes (digital, textual) and generating out of this now glitch-ridden linguistic hybrid a new entity which is neither—and both—visual, textual, virtual, actual, and/or representative of anything real except the process of its own making. And yet it is in the artifacts and effects of the process—what gets lost and found in translation between sources and products—that meaning resides. For instance, in creating *l'espace s'effronde* (of collapsing space), Ducharme traces light’s pathway between multiple layers of reality. Working from digital images containing screen-based reflections, she isolates the erratic forms, which themselves are based in continuously shifting conditions specific to the source and site of image and screen, and processes them in preparation for printing at monumental scale onto sheets of crystal clear polyester. The resulting image therefore originates in the emission of photons from the photographed object to its entry into and capture by the camera, to their translation into pixels and representation on a backlit screen, to their interaction and combination with reflections on the screen’s surface, to their selection and translation into ink on a clear substrate, to their interaction and combination with reflections from lighting in the gallery space, and finally to their entry into and capture by the viewer’s eye. Borne of so many degrees of separation, the recombinant

Celebrates “Thug”: Legendary Tupac Shakur Looked at as Cultural Artifact, Force,” *Harvard Gazette*, April 24, 2003, retrieved April 2016, <http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/2003/04.24/11-hiphop.html>

8 Jeneen Frei Njootli, Proof submission artist statement, 2015.

9 Claudia Bianchi, “Slurs and Appropriation: An Echoic Account,” *Journal of Pragmatics* (2014), 9, retrieved April 2016, https://www.academia.edu/6270976/Slurs_and_Appropriation_An_Echoic_Account_Journal_of_Pragmatics_2014


 Hannah Doucet, *Untitled (Undulating Surfaces)*, inkjet print, 20"x30", 2014

Anyse Ducharme, *que l'espace s'effondre*, inkjet print on acetate, 2015

images embody multiple dimensions—chimeras made real, casting indexical shadows even as they embody a state of evanescence. When spontaneous errors in genetic transcription yield mutations that don’t end up as fatal dead ends, they have the potential to advance whole species. Similarly, Ducharme’s intentional interruptions, corruptions, and extensions of existing codes engender new and unexpected forms and functions for photo-based image making apropos to the age of the “migratory pixel”.¹¹

Just as Ducharme makes images that are the result of tracking photons through space, Noah Spivak makes objects that track molecules—and their decay—through time. Initiating an unpredictable process through which both conventional (fibre-based light-sensitive papers) and unconventional photographic materials (sensitized concrete) are brought together and made to interact, Spivak leverages the proprietary chemical combinations that constitute each paper’s unique response to treatment, the mercurial capacities of concrete with regard to both the material’s composition and curing process, and conditions specific to the sites of making and viewing (light, temperature, humidity, human error and engagement), to craft a visual and experiential index of entropy. Arranged as a grid of pages upon which each identically sized and positioned concrete circle enacts its own peculiar transformations, the work is classically typological, fixing and fascinating the eye with its variations on a theme like Bernd and Hilla Bechers’ industrial assemblies. However for Spivak, the “industrial” is not a thing that is pictured, but rather embodied or implied in his chosen materials; industry as means, rather than ends. This conscious refusal of the image-making function of photography recalls Minimalist imperatives toward the elemental, but with a performative twist. Bringing the photographic medium back to its historical essence, as “a technique of inscribing, in an emulsion of silver salts, a [more or less] stable image generated by a ray of light”—a definition which art historian Hubert Damisch notes “neither assumes the use of a camera, nor [implies] that the image obtained is that of an object or scene from the external world,” Spivak shifts the attention onto the viewer’s embodied state and perception, “soliciting in us the producer rather than the consumer of images.”¹²


 Anyse Ducharme, *que l'espace s'effondre*, inkjet print on acetate, 2015

Hannah Doucet, *Untitled (Undulating Surfaces)*, inkjet print, 20"x30", 2014

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In thinking about the multifaceted ways in which contemporary artists are advancing photo-based inquiry and practice, Talbot’s reference to picturing kalei-doscopes keeps returning to mind.

Catching and bending light in their beautifully simple way, these optical instruments, invented just one year before the first partially fixed photographic image would be made by Niépce in 1816, continue to fascinate with their infinitely shifting patterns and images. The six artists in this exhibition not only channel Talbot’s spirit of curiosity and discovery, they encompass the kaleidoscopic variety and range of practices at play in photo-based art-making today. Encompassing no fewer than sixteen separate disciplines between them, Agnes Wong, Anique J. Jordan, Jeneen Frei Njootli, Hannah Doucet, Anyse Ducharme, and Noah Spivak engage photography from input to outcome, critically selecting and/or capturing, processing and/or fabricating, contextualizing and/or disseminating their findings as they actively map territories beyond Cotton’s “million conceptual miles”. Within the context of this exhibition, it is they who create the brilliant, complex, and fleeting picture of this contemporary moment within the revolving chamber of the gallery space.

1964-1977, ed. Matthew S. Witkovsky. (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 2011), 16.

12 Hubert Damisch, “Five Notes for a Phenomenology of the Photographic Image”, in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (Stony Creek, Ct: Leete’s Island Books, Inc., 1980), 287-290.

^[1] This is the final in Susan Sontag’s “Brief Anthology of Quotations”, which closes her classic 1973 book, On Photography. Susan Sontag, On Photography (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc. 1977 edition), 207.

^[2] Charlotte Cotton, “Nine Years, A Million Conceptual Miles.” Aperture, Spring 2013 (Issue 210), 35-39.

^[3] 2001: A Space Odyssey. Dir. Stanley Kubrick. By Stanley Kubrick, Arthur C. Clarke, Geoffrey Unsworth, and Ray Lovejoy. Perf. Keir Dullea, Gary Lockwood, and William Sylvester. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1968. Videocassette.

^[4] Victor Burgin, Between (New York: Basil Blackwell, Inc., 1986).

^[5] “Trinidad and Tobago.” Wikipedia, retrieved April 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trinidad_and_Tobago#Trinidad.

^[6] These words are spoken by Cassiel, one of the angels in Wim Wenders’ 1987 film, Wings of Desire. Der Himmel über Berlin (Wings of Desire). Dir. Wim Wenders. Perf. Bruno Ganz, Solveig Dommartin, Otto Sander. Road Movies Filmproduktion, Argos Films, 1987. Videocassette.

^[7] For a scholarly assessment of Tupac Shakur’s intentions, strategies, and legacy with regard to “gangster” rap and contemporary culture, see: Mark Anthony Neal, “Tupac’s Book Shelf: All Eyes on Me: Tupac Shakur and the Search for a Modern Folk Hero,” Journal of Popular Music Studies Volume 15, Issue 2 (2003): 208-212, retrieved April 2016, https://www.academia.edu/1829614/Tupac_s_Book_Shelf_All_Eyes_on_Me_Tupac_Shakur_and_the_Search_for_a_Modern_Folk_Hero_; and Ken Gewertz, “Symposium Analyzes,

^[8] Julie M. Stankiewicz and Francine Rosselli, “Women as Sex Objects and Victims in Print Advertisements,” Sex Roles: A Journal of Research, Springer Science and Business Media (2008), retrieved April 2016, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Francine_Rosselli/publication/226745588_Women_as_Sex_Objects_and_Victims_in_Print_Advertisements/links/5584453d08ae71f6ba8c4090.pdf

^[9] Matthew S. Wiktkovsky, “The Unfixed Photograph,” in Light Years: Conceptual Art and the Photograph:

Gallery 44 Centre for Contemporary Photography is a non-profit artist-run centre committed to photography as a multi-faceted and ever-changing art form. Founded in 1979 to establish a supportive environment for the development of photography, Gallery 44's mandate is to provide a context for reflection and dialogue on contemporary photography and its related practices. Gallery 44 offers exhibition and publication opportunities to national and international artists, award-winning education programs, and affordable production facilities for artists. Through its programs Gallery 44 is engaged in changing conceptions of the photographic image and its modes of production.

Agnes Wong is a multidisciplinary artist, designer, photographer, and filmmaker based in Toronto. She is currently attending the Design Academy Eindhoven, the Netherlands.

Anique J Jordan employs photography, performance, poetry and installation to draw attention to the black body as a sight of futuristic imagining. Her current auto-biographical work looks at family history, survival of black women and the use of cultural production in gravely intimate, yet global journeys. She has worked in South Africa, Barbados and Ecuador as a creative and has been recognized locally and internationally for her work through awards, residencies and fellowships including representing Canada at the first World Afro-descendent Youth Summit. Her recent photography exhibitions include the Art Gallery of Ontario, Crossroads Art Space and the Watah Gallery.

In her work, **Anyse Ducharme** is interested in the computer, the Internet and the circulation of digital imagery. She has obtained an MFA in Studio Arts from the University of British Columbia and a BFA in Visual Arts from the University of Ottawa. She also has college diploma in 3D Animation from la Cité collégiale. She has exhibited both in group and solo, including (Arti)fiction at la Galerie du Nouvel-Ontario in Sudbury, Digital Alterities at InterAccess Electronic Media Arts Centre in Toronto, and as part of the Flash Forward festival for emergent photography in Boston.

Hannah Doucet is a photo-based artist from Winnipeg, Canada. Her practice is rooted within the medium of photography, with material explorations also extending to video, textile, sculptural, and installation based processes. Her work explores the body, representation, materiality and failure within the medium of photography. She received her BFA Honours from the University of Manitoba in 2015. Doucet has exhibited in alternative spaces and artist-run centres throughout Winnipeg, most recently with a solo exhibition at C Space in 2015. She has an upcoming solo exhibition at The New Gallery in Calgary in 2016. She is a co-founder of SCAN, a contemporary art publication based in Winnipeg as well as a committee member for Flux Gallery, a newly initiated gallery project for early-stage emerging artists.

Jeneen Frei Njootli is a Gwich'in artist and a founding member of the ReMatriate collective currently based on unceded Coast Salish Territory in Vancouver. In 2012, she graduated from Emily Carr University with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree and went on to hold a Visual Art Studio Work Study position at The Banff Centre. Frei Njootli's practice concerns itself with Indigeneity-in-politics, community engagement and productive

disruptions. She has worked as a performance artist, workshop facilitator, crime prevention youth coordinator, hunter/trapper and has exhibited across Canada. Her works are in the Yukon Permanent Art Collection and the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada Permanent Art Collection.

Noah Spivak is a recent graduate of Emily Carr University for Art & Design, who majored in photography and sculpture but retains heavy interests in installation and curatorial practices. Born and raised in Vancouver, Spivak's works offer no personal autobiography. They do not reference photography's most commercially embraced and socially trusted function: to preserve moments, to invest in memories. Noah's current processes isolate, break and reconstitute the materials that compose photographs, producing versions of the photographic that present audiences with the distance that can exist between a physical object and a study of visual re-presentation. Spivak has exhibited both nationally and internationally.

Since the mid-90s, **Shani K Parsons** has pursued a multi-disciplinary practice focused initially through the lenses of architecture and urban planning, then installation and graphic design, and most recently through research, writing, curation, and collaboration. In the process she has produced an eclectic body of work ranging from intimate artist's books to immersive exhibitions for venues including the American Museum of Natural History, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), the Rhode Island School of Design, the Museum of Chinese in America (MoCA NY), and Mixed Greens, a contemporary art gallery in Chelsea. After moving to Toronto, she established TYPOLOGY Projects as a way to provide opportunities for curators and artists to mount fully realized exhibitions within a critical framework.

Cover image

Noah Spivak, *They Know When it Rains*, 2016

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