

E x p o s u r e



The Society for Photographic Education

SPE is a nonprofit membership organization that provides and fosters an understanding of photography as a means of diverse creative expression, cultural insight, and experimental practice. Through its interdisciplinary programs, services, and publications, the Society seeks to promote a broader understanding of the medium in all its forms through teaching and learning, scholarship, and criticism.

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Tiina Itkonen, *Siku 2*, 2007, pigment print, 40 x 60 cm, edition of 7. Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Taik Persons, Berlin

See more of Tiina Itkonen's Arctic landscapes beginning on page 36.

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Slow Still Lives: Brad Carlile's *Tempus Incognitus* and Teresa Christiansen's *Real Artifice*

Todd J. Tubutis



Since its earliest days, Blue Sky, the Oregon Center for the Photographic Arts, has established itself as a recognized venue for presenting the best in photography as it is practiced around the globe. In 2007, Blue Sky—firmly rooted in its fourth decade—took occupancy of its current home, a 3,500-square-foot facility located in Portland's historic DeSoto Building. This move also allowed the organization to establish a brand new program for its audiences and strengthen its commitment to photographers in the region. The Pacific Northwest Photography Viewing Drawers—affectionately referred to as simply “the Drawers”—are as much a concept as they are a thing.

As a thing, the Drawers are composed of eighty visitor-accessible flat file drawers, each featuring ten original prints by a different artist living in Alaska, British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, or Montana. As a concept, they together represent a slice of some of the most compelling and innovative photographic work being made in the region during a given year. While the aim of the Drawers program is to offer an opportunity to expose great photography



Brad Carlile, *Toywin*, 2011, archival inkjet print, 30 x 40 inches, edition of 15. From *Tempus Incognitus*. Courtesy of the artist

Above left: *Tricia Hoffman*, *View of Blue Sky's Pacific Northwest Photography Viewing Drawers*, 2012. Courtesy of Blue Sky

to a broader audience, it is hardly intended to define a regional style, method, or school. Two new jurors are asked to fill the Drawers annually with the best work they find among the many submissions to a free call for entries. Portland-based artists Brad Carlile and Teresa Christiansen were both juried into the 2013 cohort by Ed Marquand of Marquand Books, Seattle, and Diana Millar of Lúz Gallery, Victoria, B.C.

One might readily guess that the spaces pictured in Brad Carlile's *Tempus Incognitus* are staged film sets, stylistically lit and ready for actors to take their places in a neon world. They are, in fact, ordinary hotel rooms. It would also be easy to assume that his prints are the result of expert digital manipulation or filtering. Again, not so. Carlile creates each vivid image in-camera, on film through a series of exposures from a fixed position over a period of time. Sometimes making a single photograph over two days or more, with exposure times ranging upwards of ninety seconds, Carlile not only captures exterior light bathing individual rooms at different hours, he also records it mingling with artificial illumination from internal sources such as television sets and light bulbs. What we are seeing in his prints is all kinds of light, all at once.

Traces of human intervention are occasionally documented in his process—like a bed simultaneously made and unmade or a television left on—but largely the rooms Carlile presents to us seem untouched, ready for check-in. Though certain images of empty or abandoned spaces can easily evoke loneliness, melancholy, or even despair, Carlile's rather emit a particular strength. He favors chromatic abstraction over cultural critique. The conscious choice to photograph places of transience is less a comment on twenty-first-century ennui and dislocation and more about fixing our complicated relationship with time's passage to a place we know very well: the universal hotel room.

One of the unexpected pleasures for Blue Sky visitors perusing the Drawers is discovering surprising visual and conceptual affinities between unrelated



Teresa Christiansen, *Floral Still*, 2012, archival pigment print, 20 x 16 inches, edition of 10. From *Real Artifice*. Courtesy of the artist

bodies of work. In this instance, two drawers down alphabetically from *Tempus Incognitus*, several of Teresa Christiansen's still life compositions exhibit a similarly intense palette as Carlile's and are also made by way of a time-based approach. For her studio series *Real Artifice*, Christiansen constructs tableaux wherein at least one object is represented as a photographic print of some kind. Some appear in their original context—like an album cover or jigsaw puzzle—while others are things she has photographed herself, then printed, cut out, and carefully arranged, like flower blooms posing among their real counterparts. Just as with Carlile's work, each resultant image is a straight photograph: nothing has been digitally altered. As such, every print offers the viewer a disorienting composition designed to question one's preconceptions of authenticity. They make you ask simply, "what am I really looking at?"

Christiansen's project explores how we negotiate our way through an image-saturated world, learning to recognize certain clues that tell us what is real and what isn't. That's a tricky distinction these days, where simulacra of people, places, and things deceive us quite easily and all-too regularly. And it is exactly that dilemma that makes Christiansen's work—as well as Carlile's—a reward to look at. Each series presents us with complex, layered images that immediately signal to our twenty-first-century eyes, "must be Photoshopped." But as we resolve this dilemma and come to recognize that what we are seeing is the product of good, "old-fashioned" camerawork, there comes a calming satisfaction in spending time with each of their inviting vignettes. With both of these bodies of work we find ourselves slowed in our looking by the artists' own deliberate processes of making thought-provoking photographs with a camera.

Brad Carlile earned a BA from Northwestern University. Currently living in both Portland, Oregon, and New York City, Carlile has seen his work exhibited widely in solo and group exhibitions at national and international venues, including the Center for Fine Art Photography, the 2009 Hearst 8X10 Photography Biennial, and the



Brad Carlile, Newbar, 2012, archival inkjet print, 30 x 40 inches, edition of 15. From Tempus Incognitus. Courtesy of the artist

Museum of Modern Art, Rio de Janeiro. He was a 2014 winner in the PDN Photo Annual “Personal” category and was the recipient of a Regional Arts & Culture Council professional development grant. His work was featured in a solo exhibition at the XVIII Encuentros Abiertos—Festival de la Luz Biennial in Argentina in 2014. www.bradcarlile.com

Teresa Christiansen was born and raised in New York City. After studying at Bates College, Maine, she worked as assistant photographer in the photography studio of The Metropolitan Museum of Art for nine years, during which time she completed her MFA at ICP–Bard in 2008 and went on to teach at the International Center of Photography. Currently based in Portland, Oregon, Christiansen is an assistant professor at Pacific Northwest College of Art. She has widely exhibited her work, including in recent shows at Newspace Center for Photography and in the Philadelphia Photo Art Center’s Annual Member Exhibition. In 2007, she was selected as a winner of the PDN Photo Annual, and in 2013 she received an individual artist grant from the Regional Arts & Culture Council for an exhibition and self-published monograph of her series *Portland Porches*. www.teresachristiansen.com

Todd J. Tubutis became executive director of Blue Sky in October 2009. He joined the organization from his position as exhibition project director at The Field Museum, Chicago, for which he oversaw the museum’s temporary exhibition calendar and project management staff. Prior to joining The Field in 2001, Tubutis was responsible for the development and administration of an adult-education seminars program at the Newberry Library, Chicago. He has taught and conducted research in cultural and visual anthropology in the United States, Canada, and Hungary, and has contributed articles and reviews to *Wisconsin Academy Review*, *Visual Anthropology*, *Time Out Chicago*, and *The Encyclopedia of Chicago* (University of Chicago Press, 2004). He holds an MA in anthropology from the University of British Columbia, for which he examined Native American participation in Jim Jarmusch’s 1996 feature film *Dead Man* for his thesis, and a BA in anthropology and museum studies from Beloit College, Wisconsin. www.blueskygallery.org



Teresa Christiansen, *Pears Paired*, 2012, archival pigment print, 20 x 16 inches, edition of 10. From *Real Artifice*. Courtesy of the artist



Brad Carlile, Nobi, 2012, archival inkjet print, 30 x 40 inches, edition of 15. From Tempus Incognitus. Courtesy of the artist

Teresa Christiansen, Fake Fire Place, 2011, archival pigment print, 20 x 16 inches, edition of 10. From Real Artifice. Courtesy of the artist



Brad Carlile, Jodo, 2012, archival inkjet print, 30 x 40 inches, edition of 15. From Tempus Incognitus. Courtesy of the artist

Teresa Christiansen, Still Life with Violin, 2012, archival pigment print, 20 x 16 inches, edition of 10. From Real Artifice. Courtesy of the artist

