

NUEVA LUZ

photographic journal



KEVIN J. MIYAZAKI

CECIL McDONALD, JR.

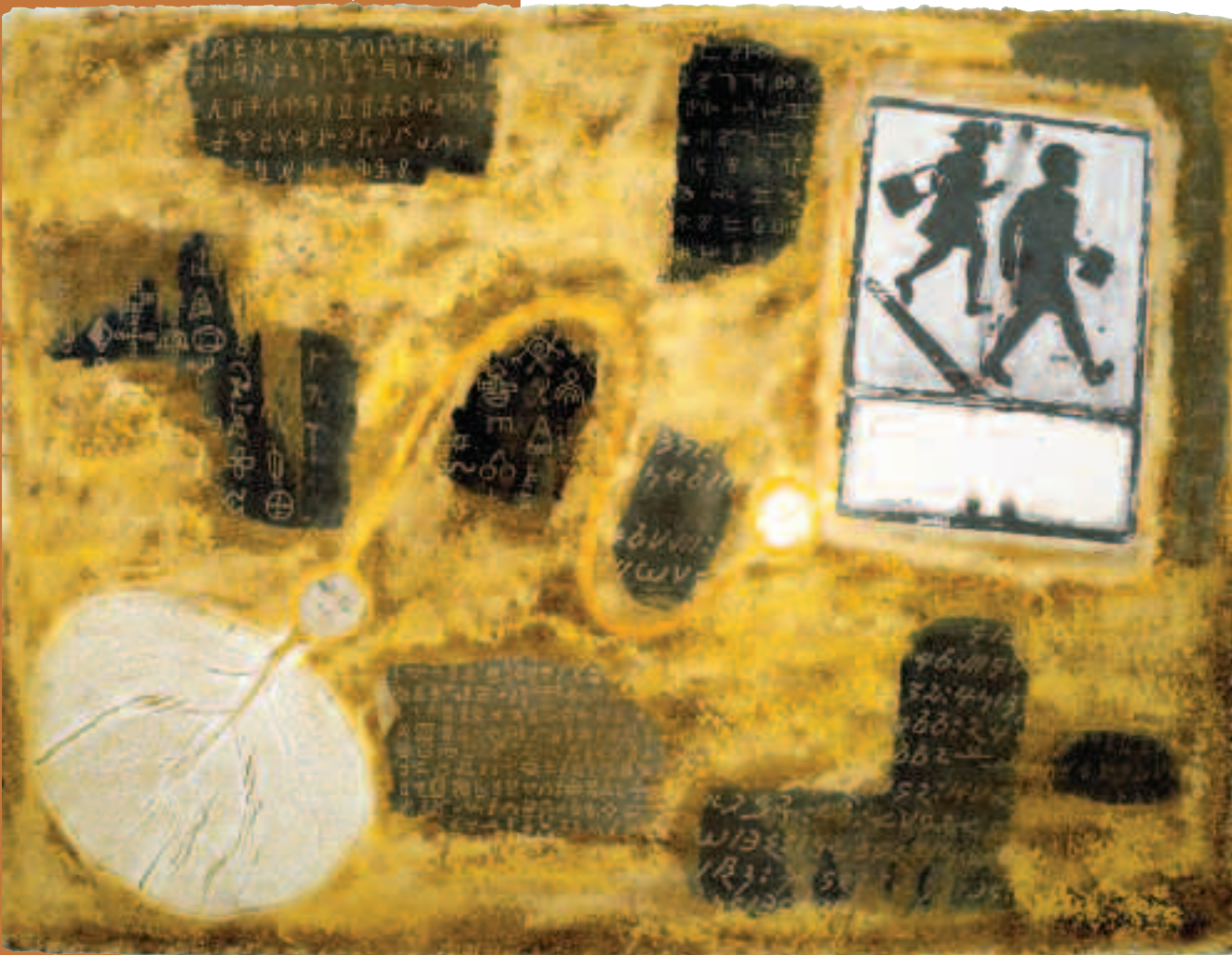
ELIZABETH MORENO

COMMENTARY BY GRACE ANEIZA ALI

NEW WORKS #15 BY MICHAEL MAZZEO

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Terry Boddie, *School Days, Residue of Memory*, series, 2000/2007.

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photoŕaphic journal volume 16:2

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Cover: Cecil McDonald, Jr. *Harmonic Portico, Imaginary Play* series, 2007. Archival pigment print, 20x24". Courtesy of Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago, IL.

Editorial



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We get a lot of submissions, and every once in a while it takes the form of a book. This one was special. I had been carrying it around for a week, waiting to have that precious time to savor the experience of reading something on real paper. I finally saw my chance on a trip to DC (to deliver our Permanent Collection exhibition to the Art Museum of the Americas). What was so unusual about this photography book, is that it didn't contain a single photograph... the absence of the very thing that drives us as visual beings and as photographic artists was striking to me.

Like I often do, rather than start from the beginning, I zing through the pages as if they are a flip-book, enjoying the sound and feeling of anticipation of what I'm about to read. I stop randomly somewhere in between start and finish, getting a flavor of what I'm about to experience. Like dipping your toe in a pool before you dive in, or as a friend proposed, like a hummingbird taking only what it needs at that particular moment in time. But *where* I stopped made me cry. I was staring at Tim Hetherington's essay in *Photographs Not Taken*.

The book, a compilation of essays by photographers about what kept them from photographing a particular experience, is a lovely and intriguing piece about something we all grapple with at one time or another. Did we forget our camera that day, or make an ethical choice to put the camera down? At what point, if at all, do we become active participants in the event that is unfolding?

For me however, the impact of the book's title at that moment took on a whole new meaning in thinking about the all lives that have been taken too soon, and the abrupt end to their stories. The loss of voices like Tim Hetherington, the great poet and activist Luis Reyes Rivera and painter Elizabeth Catlett should make us take pause. Then, there's the horrific unfairness of a kid – Trayvon Martin – being executed after going to a store for skittles, reminding me of W.E.B. DuBois' words about the loss of those that "sometimes die before the world has rightly gauged their brilliance."¹

I believe we're not here to simply live out our days and be passive participants in our own lives. Our choices dictate our actions, which can create change. The artists in this issue of *Nueva Luz* feel that sense of change quite deeply. Our choice of what we value, and of what we chose to photograph or not – speaks volumes about our character. While random moments like flipping through a book can cause sorrow, it can also make us grateful to still be here to make a difference. And make a difference we must.

Miriam Romais,
Editor & Publisher

"I'm saying this to wake us up to the value of our own earthly lives, and the great creators that have walked, do walk, among us. But also to help us appreciate the grand livingness of what some of us give to each other. Though the contradiction to this is that then we will understand how much we lose when one of those long time creators disappears. Sometimes we don't even know who they are. What a tragedy, like the fog of ignorance which disconnects our heads from our hearts so that we can wander through the world and not even understand what's going on."

– Amiri Baraka, from an excerpt of his eulogy honoring the life and art of Louis Reyes Rivera.²

¹The Souls of Black Folk (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1903)

²To read the full eulogy, visit Dawoud Bey's Blog, *What's Going On*, <http://whatsgoingon-dawoudbeyblog.blogspot.com>

A RETURN TO ROOTS

by Grace Aneiza Ali

The personal is political. And perhaps there is no place that embodies both the personal and political more so than the sacred space of the home. A space whose walls often hold our secrets and our secret lives; a space where we find refuge from the chaos of the outside world, and simultaneously, where we unearth the genesis of our greatest conflicts and regrets. Home is where our stories of origin begin.

My own feelings of home – of loss and yearning for it – are what drew me to the work of these three photographers: **Elizabeth Moreno**, **Cecil McDonald, Jr.**, and **Kevin J. Miyazaki**. Home for me is in Georgetown, Guyana—a place I have yet to return. My family left seventeen years ago, seeking, like most immigrants coming to the United States, a better life than the impoverished one we were born in. We found that better life. And yet my longing for the place where I grew up has never left. To remind me of that place, I often return to the photographs of family moments taken in our small two-room flat. These images serve as documents, as evidence of a life lived in another world, in another time, as another Grace.

For Moreno, Miyazaki, and McDonald, the sierras of Baja California, the former Japanese-American internment barracks in California and Wyoming, and the family home in Chicago, are where their personal narratives are rooted. In their collections, they return to roots—the geographic place, the physical edifice and the *idea* of home. It is this attraction to home, this reverence for what is contained on its walls and within its walls, this coming and going from it, leaving and returning to it, that I find compelling. What their images reveal are places fraught with stories, told and untold; moments, simple and contradictory; and people composed and dimensional.

For **Elizabeth Moreno**, *Close to Earth* is very much a return to what she holds dear. Moreno was born and raised in La Paz, Baja California Sur, Mexico. After leaving her hometown for a few years, she returned to a land rapidly transforming to make way for a more “modern” way of life. In *Close to Earth*, she endeavors to bridge that distance between past and present. The collection, she says, was “a means to get close, listen to and portray shared moments with the families who inhabit the deserts and sierras.”

While the current overarching narrative about Baja California might be one of a place and a people in constant motion and migration, *Close to Earth* centers on the people who stay. It is about the families who remain steadfast amidst the changes swirling around them. Baja California, from Moreno’s viewpoint, is as much about lush mountains, brilliant skies, and romantic sunlit moments as it is about honoring the land, aging with dignity, and relying on machines an outside world might deem antiquated. In this mosaic of moments and portraits, Moreno reminds us that for a place marked with so much departure, there is much beauty that remains. There is much for which to stay.

In Moreno’s images, the beautiful and the troubling are often evident in the same frame. Images—for example, of a little boy, carrying a gun almost as tall as he is and illuminated by a sunlit halo—are as quietly disturbing as they are stunning. What is particularly striking in images like these is the synergy between this community’s elders and its youth. The elders of Baja California display postures of resignation and defiance. Meanwhile, for the young, there is playfulness, there is work to be done, and there are new paths to forge. We see elders often in stoic stances, while the young are often in movement. It begs the question: will these young people carry on the traditions of the community or are they too in transition? Will they stay, or will they like others, leave?

Elizabeth
Moreno



Leather tanning and dyeing process with the bark from a local tree, the Palo Blanco.

Elizabeth Moreno, *Dye and Clouds, Close to Earth* series, 2010. Archival pigment print, 20x30”

Kevin J.
Miyazaki

While Moreno focuses on those who stay, it is the long departed that drew **Kevin J. Miyazaki** to create his beautifully haunting series, *Camp Home*. The naming of the title itself, “camp – home” implies tension, reminding us that “home” can be a place of struggle as well as security, of confinement and discovery. Miyazaki’s return to the former Tule Lake and Heart Mountain Japanese internment camps is a fascinating undertaking to capture how spaces of trauma can be reused and repurposed. He is dealing with the past by looking at the present. And he does this not by focusing on the grandiose, but by letting the buildings’ subtle architectural nuances or the particular alignment of domestic objects on walls and bookcases tell their own stories. The result is an indirect but compelling narrative of how these spaces, once used for incarceration, can be reinvented to serve as homes.

Like Moreno, this project is deeply personal. It is a return to roots, one marked by war and injustice. Several of Miyazaki’s family members, including his father, spent time in the internment camps. In an interview with *Turnstyle News*, Miyazaki talked about his father’s silence regarding his childhood in Tule Lake. “Typical to many Japanese American families, my dad didn’t speak too much about his time in the camps,” recalls Miyazaki. “He didn’t avoid it, but my siblings and I only became more interested as we got older. Unfortunately, we never asked as many questions as we should have, when he was still alive to answer them.” This particular biographical node, of a father’s silence about a painful chapter in his life, of a shameful era in a nation’s history, and a son’s regret for not asking enough questions, informs Miyazaki’s framing of these spaces. There is a steely quiet, a deliberate absence, running through the images in *Camp Home*. They address and mimic the culture of silence Miyazaki references.

Largely, Miyazaki’s work here is about what is absent and what remains. Not present are images of the actual families living in these homes. When do they appear in *Camp Home*, they are memorialized as in the image of family members’ portraits atop a bookcase that look more like ghostly reflections. With images that depict names carved into raw wood in the back room of an old barn or a single glove, worn and rugged, nailed to a wall, Miyazaki reminds us that the lives lived within these walls can be seen in the objects that remain. And yet, he shows us that from World War II to present day things are much changed. While he may lament the questions he did not ask of his father, these images unearth a myriad of other questions for the viewer about the past life of these barracks. *Camp Home* essentially reminds us that at some point, we all inhabit someone else’s home.



Kevin J. Miyazaki, 5058A-19617 (*Native Americans*), *Camp Home* series, 2010. Digital c-print, 20x16"

Cecil McDonald, Jr.

Like Moreno, Cecil McDonald, Jr. explores the closeness of people to their environment; and like Miyazaki, he focuses on the simple elements that mark those connections. In his case, however, those simple elements are not objects but moments. Devoid of any pomp or circumstance, these simple, touching moments characterize *Domestic Observations and Occurrences*.

Indoors and outdoors almost seem as one as two girls focus on the intensity of play in their chess game; a young girl, with a look of comfort on her face, gets her hair done from hands that dance atop her head in choreography; another little girl puts on a record in a moment that is both nostalgic and historic, her gesture of holding the record suggesting both motion and stillness. These are the moments McDonald freezes in time for us. They challenge any notion that private life, compared to public life, is less interesting.

And yet, this is an invented world, staged and recreated, performed and constructed by McDonald and the members of his family. “I reconstruct moments from a collected memory,” he says in the text about these images, “moments that once realized become buried and forgotten.” It’s a statement reminiscent of a passage in *Les Misérables*, where Victor Hugo writes of the yearning for moments and memories long gone and a very human desire to hold onto those memories:

“[W]hen we are distant from them we find that those things have become dear to us, a street, trees and roofs, blank walls, doors and windows; we have entered those houses without knowing it, we have left something of our heart in the very stonework. Those places we no longer see, perhaps will never see again but still remember, have acquired an aching charm; they return to us with the melancholy of ghosts...”



Cecil McDonald, Jr., *Dinner for 3*, *Domestic Observations and Occurrences* series, 2005. Archival pigment print, 20x24". Courtesy of Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago, IL.

It is this same desire, this “aching charm” that underlines the reconstructed moments in McDonald’s images.

In capturing these family moments, McDonald shows an intimate connection to the subjects within his work. And yes, his strong personal interpretation of these “domestic occurrences” within his home is heavy-handed. That’s a good thing. This is not another narrative of another broken American family. When portrayals of the black family continue to be rife with stereotypes and misrepresentations, when efforts to discredit black fathers and mothers continue to dominate the headlines, McDonald’s role as a curator of moments that reflect his family as joyful, loving, connected, and whole are needed.

More and more, we are exposed to a genre of photography that aims to shock, to incite action, to anger. These images are meant to be emotionally manipulative and for good reasons: they heighten our awareness of inhumanities and of the need for change in our backyards and our global community. It’s a beautiful thing when images motivate people to take action; it clearly demonstrates the power of the photograph.

Shock, anger, or the need to act, are not necessarily the characteristics that mark the work exhibited here by these photographers. It is important for Moreno “to value the rancheros’ way of life;” meanwhile Miyazaki is “interested in family history...[and] sharing our uniquely American stories;” and McDonald aims to refocus our attention on “those things close to home at a historical moment when we are more focused on the macro and global.”

On the surface, their return to home is not a politically motivated one, even though the places, people and ideas they explore are imbued with the politics of the time such as the human cost of modernization; the atrocities of war; and the domestic sphere as a microcosm of society. Instead, the underlying agendas in these collections emerge quietly and poignantly. And yet, Moreno, Miyazaki, and McDonald are activists, although they may not label themselves as such. They are visual reporters, documenting the stories that are not making the headlines or the front pages. Activism, as they demonstrate, can be as simple as rendering the invisible visible.



Kevin J. Miyazaki, 43C-19617 (*Writing*), *Camp Home* series, 2011. Digital c-print, 16x20".

Artist Statement

In the series *Camp Home* (2007-present), I document the reuse of buildings from the Tule Lake and Heart Mountain Japanese internment camps, where members of my father's family were incarcerated during World War II. "Camp" is the term used by most *Nisei*, or first-generation Japanese Americans, to describe both the physical place they were held, as well as the wartime incarceration experience itself.

The barracks which served as homes to internees at Tule Lake in Northern California and Heart Mountain in Northwest Wyoming, were literally dispersed throughout the neighboring landscape following the war. Returning veterans, many of whom had fought in the Pacific theater, won homesteads in a Government-sponsored lottery which granted 50' sections of the former internment camp buildings. The homesteaders paid for the transportation of the camp buildings to their new land plots, where they were adapted into homes, barns and outbuildings, all important for their new start as farmers.

The image titles are a combination of two US Government issued numbers. The first is a number identifying the parcel of homestead land where the photograph was taken. The second portion (19617 for example) is the number assigned to my family during internment. Every family and individual were issued numbers.

I'm interested in examining the changing value of these institutional architectural forms. In searching for family history – both my own and that of the current building owners who I encounter – time is often spent sharing our own uniquely American stories. Family histories intersect and are connected by the history of these buildings, and by the lives lived within their walls.

Kevin J. Miyazaki



5076A-19617 (*View*), *Camp Home* series, 2010. Digital c-print, 16x20".



Kevin J. Miyazaki

153C-19617 (*Quilt*), *Camp Home* series, 2011. Digital c-print, 20x16".



Kevin J. Miyazaki

5032A-19617 (*Family Pictures*), *Camp Home* series, 2008. Digital c-print, 20x16".



Kevin J. Miyazaki

5062A-19617 (*Red Steps*), *Camp Home* series, 2008. Digital c-print, 16x20".



Kevin J. Miyazaki

4534D-19617 (*Balls*), *Camp Home* series, 2007. Digital c-print, 16x20".



Kevin J. Miyazaki

4541A-19617 (Glove), *Camp Home* series, 2008. Digital c-print, 20x16".



Kevin J. Miyazaki

5085F-19617 (Plates), *Camp Home* series, 2008. Digital c-print, 20x16".



Kevin J. Miyazaki

5103A-19617 (*Horse Hair*), *Camp Home* series, 2010. Digital c-print, 16x20".



Kevin J. Miyazaki

5054A-19617 (*Antlers*), *Camp Home* series, 2008. Digital c-print, 16x20".

Cecil McDonald, Jr.



Cecil McDonald, Jr., *Frances Before Dinner*, *Domestic Observations and Occurrences* series, 2006.
Archival pigment print, 20x24". Courtesy of Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago, IL.

Artist Statement

The images in *Domestic Observations and Occurrences*, represent an extended look at the moments and relationships that occur within the domestic environment. I've constructed the photographs as *tableau vivants* in order to re-examine the embodiment of the everyday moment.

By using family members and employing a directorial hand, I reconstruct moments from a collected memory, moments that once realized become buried and forgotten.

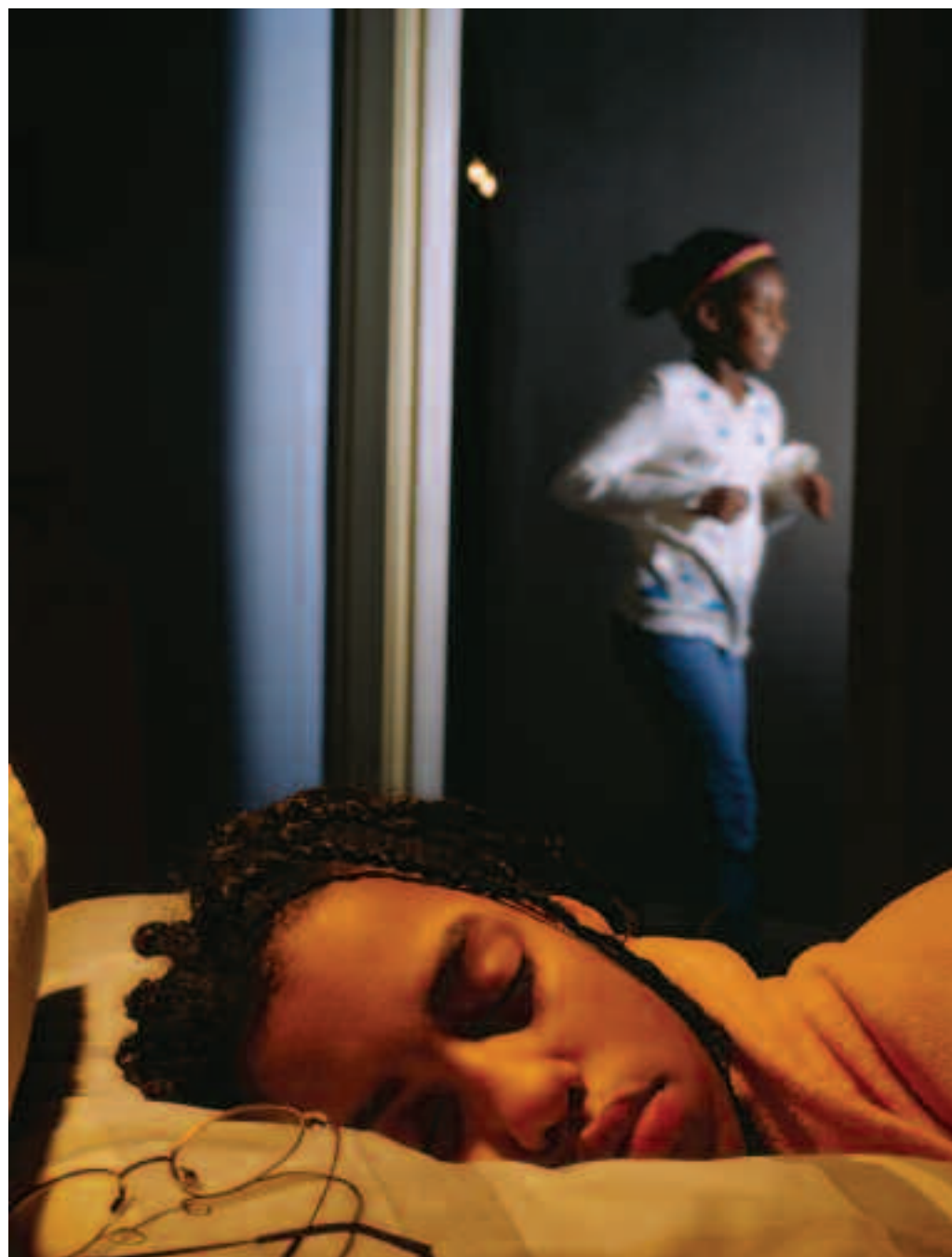
In reconstructing these moments I seek to add a layer of emotional, psychological and formal drama to the significant activities that make up our lives. This method relocates the reading of the photograph, linking a document to an autobiographically infused performance, a staged retelling, discernable by a masculine experience and mindset.

These works seek to heighten the attention to those things which are close to home at a historical moment when we are more focused on the macro and global. The function of the image is to reposition the idea of the personal, the internal and the domestic. The photograph further supports this challenge, by providing a platform where domesticity can be realized as an aesthetic object and discussed as a subjective idea. Ideas as objects... both inform and contrast the larger societal relationships and issues that ultimately concerns us all.

Cecil McDonald, Jr.

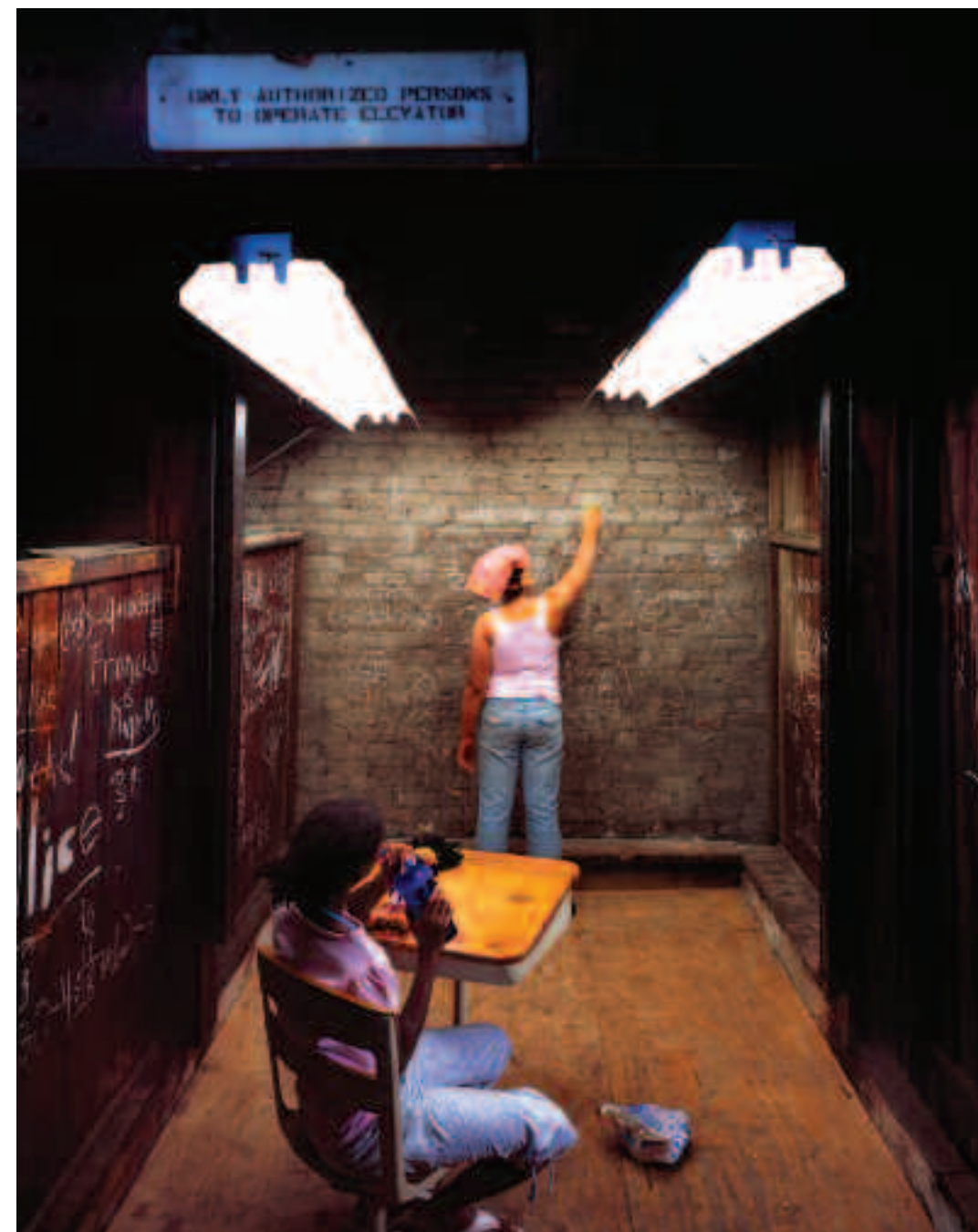


Harmonic Portico, *Imaginary Play* series, 2007. Archival pigment print, 20x24". Courtesy of Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago, IL.



Cecil McDonald, Jr.

Growth Spurt Uninterrupted, Domestic Observations and Occurrences series, 2006. Archival pigment print, 20x24".
 Courtesy of Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago, IL.



Cecil McDonald, Jr.

Concepts and Computations, Imaginary Play series, 2007. Archival pigment print, 20x24".
 Courtesy of Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago, IL.



Cecil McDonald, Jr.

Three Ways to Blackness, Domestic Observations and Occurrences series, 2006. Archival pigment print, 20x24".
 Courtesy of Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago, IL.



Cecil McDonald, Jr.

Genius at Play, Imaginary Play series, 2007. Archival pigment print, 20x24".
 Courtesy of Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago, IL.



Cecil McDonald, Jr.

Black as a Metaphor, Looking for Baldwin series, 2011. Archival pigment print, 20x24".
 Courtesy of Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago, IL.



Cecil McDonald, Jr.

Hot Comb Lullaby's, Domestic Observations and Occurrences series, 2005. Archival pigment print, 20x24".
 Courtesy of Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago, IL.



Cecil McDonald, Jr.

Why Scales Matter, Domestic Observations and Occurrences series, 2007. Archival pigment print, 20x24".
 Courtesy of Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago, IL.



Cecil McDonald, Jr.

1200 Meditations, Things my Mother Gave Me, Domestic Observations and Occurrences series, 2005. Archival pigment print, 20x24".
 Courtesy of Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago, IL.

Elizabeth Moreno



Isabel resting on the way home after helping her grandfather gathering pasture (quelite) for their goats during drought time.

Elizabeth Moreno, *Isabel and her Grandfather*, *Close to Earth* series, 2007. Archival pigment print, 20x30"

Artist Statement

A constant in our modern-day society is economic-driven change. Nothing escapes it. The industrial revolution spurred a non-stop migration to the cities, transforming rural areas and finally making its way to the peninsula of Baja California. Due to its geographical and cultural isolation – even within its own country – change is now present even in the remotest areas of the peninsula.

Growing up during a time when these changes started to occur, I began to wonder about the social ramifications, trying to make sense of them through photography. It has been a means to get close, listen, and portray shared moments with the families who inhabit the deserts and sierras of Baja California Sur, México. These families have decided to stay in the countryside despite the economic hardship they face because they are hardworking people who have preferred the simple life of the countryside: the silence, the tranquility; the things we are unable to treasure in the city.

Unfortunately, their three-century long traditions and sense of identity are quickly disappearing in the face of “development” and climate change. A high percentage of the younger generations are selling their land at a very low price and migrating to the cities. Most recently, those who have stayed have been struggling with a two-year long drought.

Through this project, I attempt to get close to the rancheros at this crucial moment, with as intimate and personal a view that my experience and relationship can allow. Being born and raised in Baja California, it is important for me to value and portray the rancheros’ way of life, culture, struggles, with emphasis on their deep knowledge of their surrounding environment.

Elizabeth Moreno



Ranch house at the Kakiwi Valleys, home of four goat-keeper families. After a good rainy season they fill up with water offering good pasture, but at times they have gone up to six years without rain, pushing the rancheros to migrate to other areas of the sierra.

Los Llanos de Kakiwi, *Close to Earth* series, 2010. Archival pigment print, 20x30"



Elizabeth Moreno

Dove Hunting Afternoon, Close to Earth series, 2010. Archival pigment print, 20x30"



Deer Hunting was very common among the rancheros, who make full use of the meat and hide. In the last few years deer populations decreased dramatically, mainly because they are hunted recreationally by those who sometimes only take the antlers.

Elizabeth Moreno

Deer Hunting, Close to Earth series, 2010. Archival pigment print, 16x24"



Elizabeth Moreno

Silvestre at Home, Rancho los Arbolitos, Close to Earth series, 2010. Archival pigment print, 20x30"



Local songs are about past happenings, life experiences, and memories of people they know.

Elizabeth Moreno

Father and Son Playing Local Songs, Close to Earth series, 2010. Archival pigment print, 20x30"



Elizabeth Moreno

Daríá and her Childhood Home, Rancho San Juanito, Close to Earth series, 2010. Archival pigment print, 36x48"



Elizabeth Moreno

Don Raymundo, Rancho la Fortuna, Close to Earth series, 2010. Archival pigment print, 36x48"



Modesta Lara fabricates cueras, a traditional outfit that protects rancheros while horseback riding through the desert thorns.

Elizabeth Moreno

Modesta Lara, Local Seamstress, Close to Earth series, 2010. Archival pigment print, 24x16"



Elizabeth Moreno

Chickpea Rain After the Summer Harvest, Close to Earth series, 2010. Archival pigment print, 20x30"



KEVIN J. MIYAZAKI

Kevin J. Miyazaki earned a B.A. from Drake University in 1990. His work has been exhibited at many venues, including the Union Gallery and the Milwaukee Art Museum in Milwaukee, WI; Photo Center Northwest and SOIL Art Gallery in Seattle, WA; RayKo Photo Center in San Francisco, CA. He is a recipient of the Mary L. Nohl Fellowship for Individual Artists, and has been featured in various publications including *Time Magazine's Lightbox*, and *Photo District News*. Miyazaki is the founder of collect.give (collectdotgive.org), a website which offers limited edition photographs by artists who pledge all proceeds to charities of their choosing. He lives in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and is adjunct faculty at the Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design.

www.kevinmiyazaki.com



CECIL JR. MCDONALD

Cecil Jr. McDonald received a MFA from Columbia College Chicago, where he currently serves as an adjunct professor and a teaching artist at the Center for Community Arts Partnership. His work has been exhibited both nationally and internationally, with works in the permanent collection of The Cleveland Museum of Art, Chicago Bank of America LaSalle Collection and the Harris Bank Collection. He was awarded the Joyce Foundation Midwest Voices & Visions Award, the Artadia Award, and the 3Arts Teaching Artist Award. He lives and works in Chicago and is represented by the Catherine Edelman Gallery.

www.edelmangallery.com/mcdonald-main.htm



ELIZABETH MORENO

Elizabeth Moreno was born and raised in La Paz, Baja California Sur, Mexico, and earned an A.A.S. in Photography at Colorado Mountain College in 2005. While in Colorado, she worked at Anderson Ranch Arts Center until returning to La Paz in 2008. Moreno's exhibitions include: Centro de la Imagen, México, DF; Museo de los Pintores Oaxaqueños, in Oaxaca, México; Galería Carlos Olachea Bouciguez, in La Paz, México; and the Center for Documentary Studies in Durham, NC, among others. She is the recipient of a Daylight/CDS Photo Award, and a grant from the National Council for Arts and Culture in Mexico. Represented by VISO Photo, Moreno also works with various NGO's and publications, along with pursuing her personal projects.

www.emorenophoto.com



GRACE ANEIZA ALI

Grace Aneiza Ali is the Founder and Editorial Director for *Of Note* magazine, and a contributing writer for *The Huffington Post*, *Turnstyle News* and *The Defenders Online*. A Fulbright Scholar, she received her M.A. in Africana Studies from NYU, where she was also the recipient of the Henry McCracken Graduate Fellowship. Most recently, she was honored with the World Economic Forum's Global Shapers award. She currently lives in New York City and is an adjunct Professor of Literature for the City University of New York.

www.ofnotemagazine.org



Top: **Priya Kambli**, *Dadi Aaji and Mama*, Color Falls Down series, 2011. Archival pigment print, 8 x 20"

Bottom: **Priya Kambli**, *Muma and Me (Gold Earrings)*, Color Falls Down series, 2011. Archival pigment print, 7 x 20"

NEW WORKS #15

by Michael Paris Mazzeo

At a time when financial crises threaten the world and our political system has devolved into a dysfunctional game of ruthless, bipartisan vitriol, the En Foco community has responded with socially conscious statements far removed from common rhetorical chatter. The work delivers us to a meditative state in which we are asked to open our minds and seek not answers, but possibilities. Their art is our refuge, built on a foundation of common cause.

The artists selected for the 15th En Foco *New Works Photography Fellowship Awards*—**Priya Kambli**, **Alejandro Durán**, **Brenda Perry**, **Adam Amengual**, and **Christine Nguyen**—each employ contemporary strategies to further their ideas and concerns. Their methodologies include repurposed imagery, commercially inspired studio techniques, and site-specific installations constructed solely for the camera.

Alluring and thought-provoking, their images beckon us with pure visual appeal, then seductively engage us in sober conversation concerning issues of identity, rehabilitation, environmental awareness, and ruthless assassination. Their projects come from introspection and empathy, from practices steeped in life experience and a keen appreciation of the human condition. In them, we recognize universal themes and familiar stories, invigorated and informed with new faces, new vocabularies and new histories.



Left: **Alejandro Durán**, *Amanecer*, *Washed Up* series, 2011. Archival pigment print, 52 x 39"

Right: **Alejandro Durán**, *Charco*, *Washed Up* series, 2010. Archival pigment print, 16 x 24"

Priya Kambli left her home in India at the age of 18 shortly after the death of her parents. With all her belongings in a single suitcase, she arrived in the United States in 1993, eventually settling in Missouri where she lives today. While she quickly adapted to her new environment, the birth of her son signaled yet another chapter in her life as she became uncomfortably aware that his childhood would be vastly different than that of her own. She would become the link between the between the customs of her parents and those of a thoroughly modern world, grafting a new branch onto the family tree.

Color Falls Down is Priya Kambli's effort to reconcile the cultural dualities that helped form her identity. It is a conversation with her ancestors and a history more accessible though genealogical remains than the power of recollection. In this work, she mines the past and present for artifacts denoting momentous occasions and occasional moments in her life and the lives of her forebears. At the foundation lie the vintage family photographs and precious belongings which she combines with self-portraits and pictures from everyday life in Missouri. With this curious amalgam of imagery she reinvents the family album as if to re-direct her destiny.

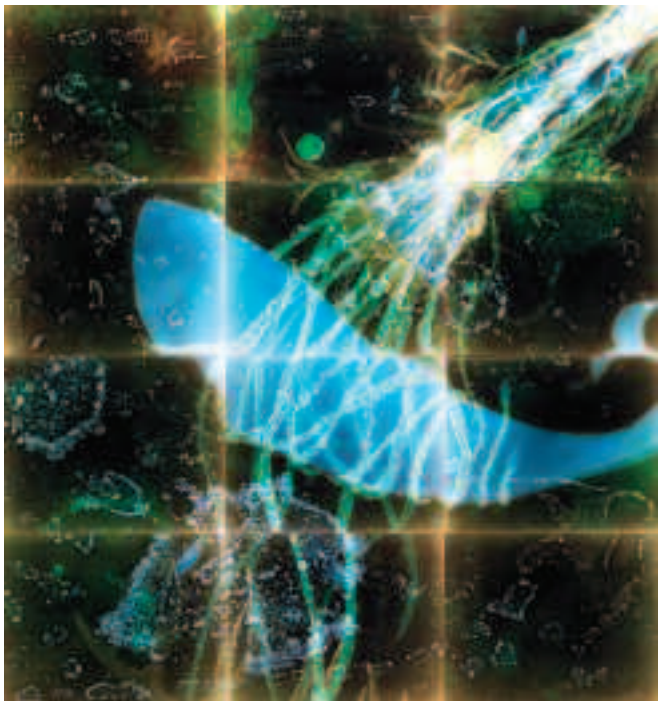
Kambli's assemblages are not easily forgotten. Like memories emerging from the subconscious, they whisper and tease with fragmented images and uncertain references. Photographs are selected with care and reverence and organized intuitively, while new ones are created with specific intent. Self-portraits of various degrees of recognition suggest an unresolved identity and a disconnection from her lineage, while simple domestic objects are lovingly proposed as contemporary equivalents to traditional heirlooms.

Borrowing from Rangoli, a traditional Indian art, Kambli often adds intricate designs of stenciled flour. These decorative elements selectively obscure or fetishize characters in her story, emphasizing the role of the woman as a figure of authority. Similar patterns are seen in the ornate textiles brought from India. They appear repeatedly, resonating like a mantra, adding coherence and enriching the emotional timbre of the project. The artist's mother left a physical imprint, as well. In at least two family portraits, her face has been removed, cut out as Kambli recalls from childhood, by Muma herself.

Within Kambli's assemblages, individual pictures share common elements, offering clues to oblique references. In one formal portrait, a circular cake of turmeric placed precisely over the face of her mother masks her identity. It could easily be read as a portrait of the artist. Immediately



"I don't knock the next man if they want to participate in that [the gang life]...it's not for me anymore; it never was...I can't judge the next man. I got my own issues...I can't judge them." Carlos Nieto



Left: **Adam Amengual**, *Carlos Nieto*, *Homies* series, 2011. Archival pigment print, 16 x 20"

Right: **Christine Nguyen**, *Embracing the Invisible*, 2008. C-prints, 64 x 60"

to the right is photograph of concentric circles formed by an elliptical arrangement of saffron-colored toy train tracks. Together the images suggest the eternal female and the continuous circle of life and rebirth.

Kambli shows us that history is pliable - a medium to be worked and shaped to conform to current realities. Her enchanting opus is a tale of self-examination and transcendence. In brilliant fashion, she has woven a sublime narrative while creating a new mythology spanning generations and crossing cultural boundaries. Through it she honors family, mourns loss and absence, and ordains her children as rightful heirs to her fable.

Alejandro Durán's installations alternately cast the artist as environmental activist and compulsive prankster. By populating pristine coastal environments with color-coordinated plastic detritus, he undermines the genre of landscape photography to expose our careless consumption of synthetic products and the fossil fuels from which they are derived. His chosen materials are the hoards of discarded bottles, containers, and other plastic objects that have found their way into rivers and oceans around the world, eventually, and quite remarkably, washing up on the shores of Sian Ka'an, Mexico's largest federally-protected reserve. Situated on the eastern side of the Yucatan Peninsula in the state of Quintana Roo, it is one of only 211 natural properties on the UNESCO World Heritage List noted for its "outstanding universal value." The reserve is home countless species of flora and fauna, one of the world's largest barrier reefs, and is one of 23 Mayan sites.

Washed Up is Durán's epic attempt to bring attention to the ever increasing amount of waste produced around the world. In the tradition of Andy Goldsworthy and Robert Smithson, he is both interventionist and advocate. In taking inventory of his harvest of refuse, the artist groups items by size, shape, and color before transporting them to his chosen locations. When possible, Durán notes the country of origin and now claims that he has thus far documented waste from 45 countries on 6 continents. With his carefully sorted and precisely arranged flotsam and jetsam, he creates beguiling, site-specific sculptures, in which the foreign objects appear as an evolutionary outgrowth in a new world order. As an accompaniment to these grand, conceptual works, there are individual cans and bottles from distant countries, which the artist photographs straightforwardly in situ.



Brenda Perry, *Murder 4*, *Postmortem Juarez* series, 2010. Tintype, 4 x 5"

Rather than assuming a didactic stance, Durán has taken a more covert approach to raise awareness of the impending deluge. His photographs amuse and entertain while pragmatically attending to the larger issues: our stewardship of the planet and the consequences of convenience.

Brenda Perry uses appropriated photographs, obtained surreptitiously, to address the gruesome killings in Juárez, Mexico, her place of birth and home to the infamous Juárez drug cartel. In *Postmortem Juárez*, she rephotographs explicit crime scene photos of murder victims and prints them as historic tintypes. The process renders the images obscure and ominous, far removed from their original context of documentary evidence. Dark and seductive, Perry’s small, metal plates encourage examination and speculation. Still, there remains little doubt as to the content of these frightful pictures. While her tintypes may reference Victorian era post-mortem portraiture, their cold, unbiased depiction of slain men place them closer in relation to earlier Civil War battlefield photographs and to Weegee’s 1940s photos of execution-style gangland murders.

Though we have become increasingly desensitized by pervasive images of human suffering, Perry’s adoption of an antiquarian process imbues the work with romanticism and nostalgia, leaving the viewer unguarded and allowing space for unexpected emotional responses. By recontextualizing these images, she hopes to bring a renewed scrutiny to a horrific situation and inspire urgently needed change to a disadvantaged society.

Adam Amengual has always been fascinated by the lure of gangs, cults and other organizations of like-minded members—but he is also interested people’s potential for change. By working with an intervention organization called Homeboy Industries, he was given the opportunity to explore these topics and share his images.

Homies might seem to be a collection of mugshots were it not for the inclusion of hands, hats, and sunglasses, but these commercially influenced portraits would be better suited to the magazine page than the wanted poster. Photographed against a clean white background with studio lighting often seen in celebrity portraiture, Amengual’s subjects, dressed in casual attire, could very well be actors, musicians, athletes, or artists.

Upon close inspection however, their finely detailed tattoos display gang symbolism, territorial claims, and respectful tributes to lost friends and family. They are imposing characters, equally tough-looking men and women with a similitude of confidence and attitude. Sitting close to the camera, and often gazing out of the frame, their poses and gestures suggest pride and heroism, and in a way, they are deserving of that status. All former gang members, they have made the decision to change their lives through intervention and rehabilitation. They are surely role models for countless others from similar backgrounds dreaming of a better future.

Christine Nguyen creates otherworldly ecosystems of her own evolutionary design. In them, marine life extends to the heavens, matter transcends physical form, and organisms generate visible energy to shape a vast network of interconnectedness. Borrowing from scientific imagery, she re-invents intricate systems to build a framework for a new cosmology.

In a fusion of processes, Nguyen uses cyanotypes, photograms, chromogenic and digital prints—some from hand-painted negatives, others overgrown with salt crystals. Most of the work consists of combined prints, with the largest assemblage containing more than one hundred images and measuring twenty-one by fifty feet. Her imaginative environments do not represent life as we know it. Though favoring the blues and greens suggestive of earthly oceans, Nguyen’s phantasmagorical imagery places us clearly in an alternate reality. Envisioned from both molecular and empyrean vantage points, her amorphous entities and volatile synapses combine to form a plethora of possibilities.

At a time of increasing skepticism, and even denial, of science, Nguyen’s metaphysical imagery gives us reason to carefully consider the causes and effects of environmental change and ultimately, the fate of our world.

Michael Paris Mazzeo is a gallerist, educator and photographer based in New York City. He serves on the faculties of the *School of Visual Arts*, the *International Center of Photography*, *New Jersey City University*, and has been a guest lecturer at other prestigious institutions. He has been a featured portfolio reviewer at *FotoFest*, *Review Santa Fe*, *Photolucida*, *Critical Mass*, *FotoWeek DC*, *The Center of Photography at Woodstock*, *ICP*, *ASMP*, *SPE*, *powerHouse Books*, and *Atlanta Celebrates Photography*.
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EN FOCO | IN FOCUS

Selected works from the En Foco permanent collection

March 14, 2012 - May 16, 2012



ABOUT THE EXHIBIT

En Foco / In Focus, an exhibit of selected works from the En Foco collection, showcases works by photographers of Latin American, African, Asian, and Native American heritage.

The exhibition's multicultural discourse on race, gender, personal identity, and human rights are presented as a critical component of the Organization of American States' ongoing work to protect human and civil rights in the Hemisphere.

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