

THE **RPS**

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Special Edition



Contemporary Photography

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**Contemporary Group ethos - Photography that conveys ideas, stimulates thought
and encourages interpretation; photographs 'about' rather than 'of'.**

Editorial

"What is that feeling when you're driving away from people and they recede on the plain till you see their specks dispersing? - it's the too-huge world vaulting us, and it's good-bye. But we lean forward to the next crazy venture beneath the skies."

Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*

This Special Edition commemorates my six years as Journal Editor. So it's goodbye from me, my last one. It's been not only a fulfilling job for me, but a rewarding journey as well, presenting the many genres of contemporary photography, while having the opportunity to meet and work with over a hundred photographers in the process of bringing the Journal to you. Of course, the job would've been impossible without the team, Brian Steptoe and Anne Crabbe. And, years ago I was assisted by Chris Morris who did the layout for a couple of issues.

When browsing through the twenty-three issues that I've prepared, I notice my recurring preoccupation with process. It's curious, for example, that in my first Journal (Spring No. 43), I reported on a conversation that I had with Joy Gregory. She used the cyanotype process and made salt prints from calotype negatives in her photographic projects, believing that "different periods of time can be relevant to contemporary photography."

I was also concerned with process in an Editorial (Spring No. 55) when inspired by a talk that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick gave on her photography. She proclaimed that "The act of making art is like a mantra." She explained that her thoughts were mostly about process and when she began a project she often didn't know what the outcome would be, sometimes allowing the materials to do what they wanted to do.

Now this my last Journal (yet again Spring - a time of renewal) finishes with a conversation I had with Hania Farrell. Contemporary photography has no boundaries, no rules. It's the result that counts as she demonstrates with her use of the many different processes and media needed to say what she wants to say. History appears in her work as well. The use of photographic animation harks back to the early days of motion pictures.

What comes before the making of an image? Now that I will have time to devote to my own photographic practice, I plan to explore what was contemporary in the past in order to create my own twenty first-century view of the world. I subscribe to a pick'n mix approach to making pictures. Perhaps I can call it 'historical contemporary' as I take from history and modify its historical processes to develop my vision. We have almost two centuries of ideas, theories, processes to borrow from/mix up/adapt to say something new for the now. I like the idea of mixing technologies from different centuries. For example, the computer has made digital negatives much easier to produce, and with them there is a multitude of processes that can be tried. Original capture can be from anything, whether a pinhole camera or mobile phone, and everything in between. Experimenting can lead to new practices, new ways of seeing.

Making art has many different moments which I relate to when I consider that the finished image for me isn't the important end result. There's joy in the making, as I [...] "lean forward to the next crazy venture beneath the skies."

Patricia Ann Ruddie MA ARPS
Editor



Free Will (from the series: *Boys Will Be Boys*, 2011/13
C-type print, 144 cm x 338 cm

This approach explains her two rather different variations of *Suspension of Reality* (Swimming Pool). In the Edwardian house "the pool, white and pristine, was integrated with the space's own features and in keeping with the emotional rhythm of the exhibition." The second version was created as part of her exhibition for the Beirut Art Fair. "[...] for a very different mood and architecture." Hania described how she had to construct a temporary structure to contain the installation. "I opted for rusted metal panels. Such choice allowed me to add a further layer of meaning to the piece that was specific to current affairs in Beirut." She went on to say that the sanitised pool environment could be seen as a respite from the world outside, while the rust tarnishing served as a comment on the ongoing rubbish crisis in the city. "It was also technically functional in terms of isolating and controlling lighting and sound, overall conveying the experience I wanted the public to take away from their visit."

We discussed why she used still photography, multimedia and mixed media. "I see myself as a visual artist mainly working within photography, yet I find sometimes that the medium has its own limitations, so I explore ways to stretch it. Even the mounting and the framing of some of my works are studied to expand and conceptually complete my photographs. With certain projects, I find it essential to go beyond the traditional boundaries of the bi-dimensional image, and introduce other elements. Sound, light, smell, moving image – either in the forms of photographic animation or non-narrative film – sculpture, and so forth. I also keep in mind how visitors might interact with the pieces, relate to them and navigate the space."

According to Hania, she uses photography "as a visual diary, a way of framing, understanding and recollecting the world around me. As if it was a sketchbook. I then cyclically go back and forth within my photographic archives, pulling out images that are relevant to what I am thinking about and researching at that moment in time, and mixing them up with new materials and ideas."

Hania continued that she can work through single images or series, of various sizes and scope, large or small projects.

"The process", she elaborated, "can either start as a response to a commission, the brief of an open call, or an exhibition opportunity. Or it can be a more 'internal' mode, following a strong desire to research a particular concept or theme. The final choice of media often comes as a second step. First I would work on still images, and if I feel a limitation of some sort, or that the piece is not effectively resolved in terms of concept and effect on the viewer, I would expand the imagery to create a photographic animation, or a projection, and then slowly bring in other elements as necessary, perhaps having in mind a real or hypothetical exhibition space."

To illustrate some of her process choices in *Teal*, Hania told me that the photograph *Free Will* from the series *Boys Will Be Boys* is a C-print that she displayed at the bottom of the staircase as wallpaper while *Tree of Life* (see her *Suspension of Reality* (Swimming Pool, 2013-14) was a lightbox created for the existing circular



Suspension of Reality III (from the series: *Suspension of Reality*), 2013

C-Print on Diasec, 150 cm x 100 cm



Playful Reflection, 2013-2014
Mixed Media Installation (1 Channel HD Projection, vegetation, rocks, plexiglas, lighting)
(installation view, Singapore Art Fair 2014)

skylight at the top of the staircase. The mixed media installation *N33° 54' - E35°* immerses the viewer in the winter waters of the Corniche in Beirut. Her use of projections and mirrors creates a mesmerising experience, enhanced by the soundscape of the waves. Note also the placement of pipes and taps - another example of how Hania creates and curates her work, clearly influenced by her background in interior design.

Whether we see boys displaying their carefree and natural instincts, the lushness of waterfalls, swimmers bubbling in a swimming pool or the "cogs" of the Lebanese water industry, in Hania's photography, water becomes a symbol, "the refuge from the chaos of everyday life in a country in unrest."

Ed. Note: For more information about Hania, a member of the Contemporary Group, her water photographs and installations, along with other award-winning projects, her website is <http://www.haniafarrell.com/>

N33° 54' - E35° 28', 2013

Mixed Media Installation (soundscape, 2-channel HD video projection - 14'45", mirrors, pipes, taps)
(installation view, *Teal*, London, 2013)





Suspension of Reality (Swimming Pool, 2013)
Mixed Media Installation (Lightbox,
fluorescent lights, wooden poles, sailing
rope, diving board)
414.3 cm x 292.8 cm
(installation view, Teal, London, 2013)



Suspension of Reality (Swimming Pool, 2013-2014)
Mixed Media Installation (lightbox, LED
lights, glass, oxidised metal panels)
414.3 cm x 292.8 cm
(installation view, Beirut Art Fair, 2014)

