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Interview transcript for Unseen Magazine/The Anthology Chapter

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## PHOTOGRAPHY IS FILM

In this section we'd like you to elaborate on your relationship with photography and the dark-room, as I feel like the two are one and the same for you! It would be great to hear how you got started with photography. Maybe you'd like to elaborate on how you started with photography, then went on to becoming a professional printer and afterwards transitioning to a fine-artist? How does working in the dark-room influence your process? I've noticed that there's been a surge of young photographers preferring analogue and dark-room techniques to digital photography, what are your thoughts on this?

The darkroom has been with me since my teenage years, when analog was the only option for photographic work. I had a busy professional darkroom practice while in college, when I assumed all of the film and print orders for a local photographic retailer. Later, as I transitioned into my own fine art practice, the experiences of being a printer on demand stayed with me and continue to influence the work I do today. From the beginning, the print as object mattered the most.

And while I follow with great interest the current and unending changes and upgrades in technology related to photography, on an artistic level I haven't wavered from my deep interest in creating unique works by hand using traditional photographic tools and materials. The difference is that now I work to constantly push, pull and reinvent these materials and processes in ways that challenge their reciprocity (the relationship between the intensity and duration of light that determines the reaction of light-sensitive materials) while giving them new purpose. The goal ultimately is to create works that are both homage and reinterpretation.

The darkroom is for me a refuge from the infiltration of technology and the fastness it represents. The slow and methodical nature of rendering work there forces me to consider time and space much differently than when I'm on the "outside." I believe that newer artists are embracing traditional processes for this same reason: the world moves too quickly now. The darkroom provides the opportunity to move slowly, with mindful intention and also gives the opportunity to explore photography's origins in a very messy, hands-on way.

## EASTERN INFLUENCES

I understand from your project statement that you studied Eastern philosophies and found that particularly the Buddhist concepts matched with your processes. I'd love to hear more about this! When and why did you decide to look more into these philosophies and how did they subsequently influence the way that you created work?

I have several close friends and family members who are practicing Buddhists. My own practice is an amalgamation of various philosophies, centered on meditation (or what I like to call "quiet sitting") and present-moment consciousness (which some call mindfulness.) My spiritual and creative practices merged a few years ago, when I began to consider what certain states of consciousness would look like if they could be rendered visually. The grid form supported this approach perfectly by visually evoking the repetition of an ongoing practice and also in its ability to evoke a shift in perspective just by looking.

There is a long tradition in various spiritual disciplines of using visual aids to deepen spiritual awareness. The Indian Yantra (a form of mystical diagram) uses shapes and patterns representing various symbols and states of consciousness to evoke a sense of focus and calmness. I use darkroom tools in non-traditional ways to create new symbols and groupings that at once wink back at traditional methods of making images, while also reconsidering what a photographic image actually is. Some say they experience a sense of optical illusion when they look at my works, which I consider a successful outcome. The more you look, the more you see, especially if you look carefully. The experience is meant to be quiet and contemplative.

I hope that these works are an extension of the senses, to be not about what is being looked at, but instead reflect the mindset of the individual viewer.

## MULTIPLES

In this section, we would love you to talk us through the work that will be presented at Unseen Amsterdam this year. What is it about? How did it come about? Have you been working on this project for a long time? There are two 'Multiples' series on your website, is there a difference between the two? In this work you use a combination of photographs and photograms, maybe you can elaborate on why you started to use photograms and what effect it has on the work?

The images of the current series of *Multiples* are made up of repetitive sequences of like images, with one image in each series being different. This specific parameter is meant to visually symbolize the flash of insight that sometimes occurs after a repetitive process is practiced on an ongoing basis. Some Buddhist practitioners call this transformation "satori." This visual shift is always in the same place on each sequence of images.

I started working with grid forms more than a decade ago, when I became dissatisfied with the process of using a single image to tell a story. I added the processes of repetitive hand-printing, cutting and mounting of analog materials, rendered in a slow and methodical way, which allows me to use the actual making of the works as a metaphor for the state of consciousness I'm looking to evoke both in doing the work myself, as well as presenting it to a viewer. The goal is to create a shared experience of looking.

The images in *Multiples* are created two ways, both with and without the camera. The first approach to create the grid elements uses a multiple-exposure layering process on film, with images made over many hours, and sometimes even days, after visiting and re-visiting certain locations, intriguing for the light they contain.

Later works use the darkroom itself as a light source for the final images. Most analog users spend time sealing their darkroom space to avoid extraneous light; here, ambient reflected light from the enlarger itself, scattered window and "under the door" light leaks from the imperfectly constructed darkroom space are encouraged onto the light sensitive paper. For these works there is no camera involved and the leaking light is embraced as a creative element. In both approaches, a period of quiet waiting, contemplation and observation is integral to the process. I am forced to slow down to consider the light around me in a new way, as well as to see my darkroom itself as a key contributor, both in technical capabilities, as well as the actual physical space, in making the final grid pieces.

By working this way, the darkroom itself becomes a place of contemplation and perhaps, enlightenment.

## GRIDS

In this section we'd like you to elaborate on your use of grids within your work(s), as this seems to be a constant not only in Multiples but in your past works as well. Are there any artists/photographers/things in particular that inspired you to create work in this way? (In your project statement I saw you name Bernd & Hilda Becher and Agnes Martin as inspirations and it would be great if you could elaborate on these!). You live in New York City which is known for its grid system(s), do you think this also influences you? (If not that's alright, it was just a thought I had as New York is the subject matter in your children books). What do you think working in grids adds to your work?

The art critic Rosalind Krauss wrote in her essay *Grids*, "Logically speaking, the grid extends, in all directions, to infinity." I love the idea that the edges of my gridded works are jumping off points for the energy that extends past them. The grid form feels very alive to me, and there is a sense of vibration, both physical and visual, when I'm working with them.

It is obviously not a new form, embraced by artists as diverse as Eadweard Muybridge, Bernd and Hilda Becher, Agnes Martin and Sol LeWitt. *Multiples* is the ongoing exploration of bringing my own voice to the form.

As mentioned in my artist statement, I am also certainly influenced by my analog printing background, when I rendered thousands of photographic contact sheets from film rolls (themselves grids) over the years, as well as my daily existence within the vast and complex gridded streets in my home city of Manhattan. At the moment, adopting this typology, I see in grids, I live in grids, I think in grids and I make them with my hands. And the repetitive nature of the form reveals both similarities and differences of the visual renderings. For these reasons, it is a complete and very satisfying form to explore.

## SEEKING IMPERFECTIONS

You mention in your project statement that an important component of 'Multiples' is imperfection. It would be great if you could elaborate on these imperfections and what these mean to you and to the work. How do you go about exploring imperfections without losing quality or its spontaneous nature? How do you hope/think that these will be received by the viewer?

One goal with these works is to retain visual evidence of the hand used in making them. Meant to be a visual study of the subtleties in imperfection, the grids of *Multiples* visually shift after repeated viewings. The grids at first appear relatively perfect in alignment, and then a closer look reveals how imperfect they actually are, with the spaces between images variable and sometimes even just a slight bit crooked. I believe that the analog process - the results of which makes the pieces more human and would be impossible using other more automated means - strengthens the viewers' consideration of imperfection. Many of the repetitive images, though printed exactly the same in the darkroom in terms of time and technique, have subtle differences, which I find so satisfying to allow into the work.

In order to explore more boundaries of this imperfection, the actual construction method of the final grids is also assimilated into a repetitive practice, with the rendering of the pieces themselves a form of meditation. The works are printed and assembled by hand and then are built out from the center, aligned by hand and eye. Each takes many days to complete and the failure rate for assembly is high, due to the challenges of cutting each image individually and mounting them by hand one-by-one. I'm constantly exploring the boundaries of what is pleasing about the uniqueness of the imperfection and what is a distraction. I could certainly use technology to help make them more perfect and I believe that by choosing not to do this, the pieces retain more authenticity and are ultimately, more pleasing.

#### NEXT STEP

If you could share with us your future plans, or ideas for future bodies of work, that would be really interesting! If mentioning future exhibitions or projects, do remember that our magazine will be published in September!

There will no doubt be additional versions of *Multiples*. I am also furthering my hand-cutting techniques and starting to draw on images printed decades ago as source material for even more intricate works. I am also continuing my studies of the historic use of visual aids to create a contemplative mindset, and all of this will certainly make its way into my next works. I also have an active interest in combining text and image via my book projects and plan to expand this practice as well.