Dissertations and Theses @ UNI   Student Work

1994

Camera Images: Preserving, Editing, and Mitigating the Past

Larry Beck

CAMERA IMAGES: PRESERVING,

EDITING, AND MITIGATING THE PAST

An Abstract of a Thesis

Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

Larry Beck

University of Northern Iowa

May 1994

This Study by: Larry Beck

Entitled: Camera Images: Preserving, Editing, and Mitigating the Past

Has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the

Degree of Master of Arts

May 9-94
Date   Jeffery Byrd, Thesis Committee Chair

May 9 94
Date   Richard Colburn, Thesis Committee Member

May 9, 1994
Date   JoAnn Schnabel, Thesis Committee Member

May 13, 1994
Date   Dr. John W. Somervill, Dean, Graduate School

Abstract

This thesis is a multiple unit photographic installation. The images presented are translighted display transparencies and projected transparencies. All of the images are photographs of video images (video stills). The video images and the resulting stills depict the destruction of a series of photographic images and art objects; therefore, all of the images refer to past works of art and are pictures of pictures.

It is my intent in this thesis to examine and comment on our perception of camera images, the great credibility we give them, and the comfortable deception they provide. The images demonstrate that camera images offer a comfortable, selected and nonthreatening past. Cameras create a past that must be evaluated, aesthetically and formally, because all that remains is an image made of lines, shapes, color, space, value, and texture. It contains no life, danger, fear, flames, screams, stench, no threat of pain, death, or injury. Modern imaging systems are the magic creators of the instant, comfortable past.

Certain qualities are significant to camera images and are central to this thesis. Images recorded by cameras become metaphoric, visual artifacts of the past the instant the shutter or electronic button is pushed. They contain only anecdotal selected information and are not an explicit

representation of the past. The images are preservative but preserve only a brief portion of the past taken out of context. Images are illusions that can be, and often are, manipulated to appear much more desirable than reality. Images we view are selected (edited) by the photographer, and/or others, and each of them represent only a fraction of a second of the past. It may be well to remind ourselves of the obvious; photographic and electronic images are flat, two-dimensional, and are neither live, nor alive. Because of these qualities, camera images confuse, as well as preserve the past.

Our fascination with, and the value we give to, the instant image-past is illustrated by our enthusiasm for looking at the instant-photographs and videos we have taken only minutes before. In our society it seems more valid to look at pictures of our children graduating, playing, and celebrating the many rights of passage than to observe them in the threatening, objective present. There is no danger of failure, misbehavior, or disaster in the visual, instant, past. It is only a pleasant simulation of the past, selected to show the most desired moment. One might wonder if we are losing the desire and ability to recreate, in our mind, images of the past without the assistance of photography, film, television, and computers.

The value and credibility given to camera images by our society are exploited for propaganda and sales. We buy, not the highest quality hamburger, but the hamburger most beautifully photographed. The photograph is manipulated to appear larger, fresher, tastier, and more beautiful than the real product. The manipulated illusion, often a translighted display transparency, is then placed only inches from the substandard product. We buy the illusion, and eat what we are handed, something that bares little, if any, resemblance to the photograph. We seldom complain.

In the thesis, as in popular-culture, light boxes and color photographs, and the television matrix, scan-lines, and mask provide familiar and comfortable signs. These friendly signs are the tools of recognition, enabling the viewer to evaluate the images.

In that, I had a relatively long and diversified life before coming to art and academia; I believe my work is more influenced by Zeitgeist and my life experience than by any specific artist. Having spent many years as a commercial photographer, editing, glamorizing, and manipulating images to give my clients the perfect, beautiful past they demanded, I believe I bring to this work some understanding of the workings of camera images in our society.

In this thesis, I have attempted to use my understanding of the workings of camera images to create a

work of art that examines the behavior of the medium and our responses to it. The qualities of images, which deceive and seduce us, are used here, not only to create an engaging illusion, but to reveal and examine the process.

CAMERA IMAGES: PRESERVING,

EDITING, AND MITIGATING THE PAST

A Thesis

Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

Larry Beck

University of Northern Iowa

May 1994

LIST OF SLIDES

1. <u>Display Units #1 and #2</u>, 1994, photographic display transparency, metal, and wood, unit #1, 12" x 76" x 24", unit #2, 12" x 70" x 24".

2. <u>Display Units #3 and #4</u>, 1994, photographic display transparency, metal, and wood, unit #3, 12" x 76" x 24", unit #4, 12" x 70" x 24".

3. <u>Display Units #5 and #6</u>, 1994, photographic display transparency, metal, and wood, unit #5, 12" x 76" x 24", unit #6, 12" x 70" x 24".

4. <u>Display Units #7 and #8</u>, 1994, photographic display transparency, metal, and wood, unit #7, 12" x 70" x 24", unit #8, 12" x 64" x 24".

5. <u>Display Units #9 and #10</u>, 1994, photographic display transparency, metal, and wood, unit #9, 12" x 70" x 24", unit #10, 12" x 64" x 24".

6. <u>Display Units #11 and #12</u>, 1994, photographic display transparency, metal, and wood, unit #11, 12" x 64" x 24", unit #12, 12" x 70" x 24".

7. <u>Display Unit #13</u>, 1994, photographic display transparency, metal, and wood, 12" x 64" x 24".

8. <u>Display Unit #1</u> (detail), 1994, photographic display transparency, metal, and wood, 12", x 76" x 24".

9. <u>Display Unit #2</u> (detail), 1994, photographic display transparency, metal, and wood, 12", x 70" x 24".

10. <u>Display Unit #3</u> (detail), 1994, photographic display transparency, metal, and wood, 12", x 76" x 24".

11. <u>Display Unit #4</u> (detail), 1994, photographic display transparency, metal, and wood, 12", x 70" x 24".

12. <u>Display Unit #5</u> (detail), 1994, photographic display transparency, metal, and wood, 12", x 76" x 24".

13. <u>Display Unit #6</u> (detail), 1994, photographic display transparency, metal, and wood, 12", x 70" x 24".

14. <u>Display Unit #7</u> (detail), 1994, photographic display transparency, metal, and wood, 12", x 70" x 24".

15.   <u>Display Unit #8</u> (detail), 1994, photographic display transparency, metal, and wood, 12", x 64" x 24".

16.   <u>Display Unit #9</u> (detail), 1994, photographic display transparency, metal, and wood, 12", x 70" x 24".

17.   <u>Display Unit #10</u> (detail), 1994, photographic display transparency, metal, and wood, 12", x 64" x 24".

18.   <u>Display Unit #11</u> (detail), 1994, photographic display transparency, metal, and wood, 12", x 64" x 24".

19.   <u>Display Unit #12</u> (detail), 1994, photographic display transparency, metal, and wood, 12", x 70" x 24".

20.   <u>Display Unit #13</u> (detail), 1994, photographic display transparency, metal, and wood, 12", x 64" x 24".

21.   <u>Projected Transparency #1</u>, 1994, photographic color positive, variable size.

22.   <u>Projected Transparency #2</u>, 1994, photographic color positive, variable size.

23.   <u>Projected Transparency #3</u>, 1994, photographic color positive, variable size.

24.   <u>Projected Transparency #4</u>, 1994, photographic color positive, variable size.

25.   <u>Projected Transparency #5</u>, 1994, photographic color positive, variable size.