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# *Object = Subject*

*Sarah J. Leslie*

## *Make picture of kaleidoscope*

From William H. Fox Talbot's  
notes 18 Feb 1839

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*Object = Subject* explores the disjuncture of how photography is understood through the sum of its scientific parts, and its positioning as a representative medium. This exhibition aims to push this theoretical discourse through exploring both the subject of the photographic gaze and the photograph as object unto itself.

*Object = Subject* is an exhibition of five large-scale black and white works, illustrative of Leslie's ongoing enquiry into experimental photographic practice, firmly rooted in the counter-argument to the medium's posture as a representative and mimetic tool.

The works are produced using a combination of lo-fi analogue photographic techniques and digital manipulation. Each image is subtly manipulated to reduce it to a chiaroscuro base of light and dark. The resultant images – though still recognizable as subjects situated within space – are now formally ambiguous. This ambiguity is not a common attribute of the photographic arts, and reduces the photograph to its physical (scientific) qualities of a light reactive material.

Each image is designed through scale and contrast to purposely overwhelm the viewer. The exhibition design is immersive and dominates the space, with the hope being to encourage audience discussion (as simple as: 'what is it' / 'this reminds me of...') and promote the questioning of how they position the mimetic function of photography.

### *Sarah Leslie*

(b.1981) Originally from Melbourne, Australia Sarah is a photomedia artist concentrating in alternate and antique process, 'plastic' photography, and image re-appropriation. Sarah is also a curator with a specialisation in film, animation, and the moving image. Sarah also has a background in Art History and critical theory, with interests concerning aesthetic theory in relation to the role and function of ugliness in art, and representations of the Renaissance body.

[www.sarableslie.co.uk](http://www.sarableslie.co.uk)

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### *Adam Kammerling*

Adam will be performing a complimentary programme of spoken word, on Thursday 3rd October at 7pm. Adam incorporates elements of poetry, rap, theatre and comedy to create immersive, engaging works that push the boundaries of performance poetry. Adam is the UK Slam Champion 2012.

As a collaborative artist he has worked with the London Sound Painting Orchestra at Shunt, and members of the band, Animal Circus. He has performed at Glastonbury, Latitude, and Big Chill.

Adam delivers workshops in schools, promoting spoken word and rap as positive and healthy forms of self-expression.

[www.adamkammerling.co.uk](http://www.adamkammerling.co.uk)

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## Manipulating the Moment

A response to Sarah Leslie's Photographs  
in *Object = Subject*. By Samantha  
Mogelonsky, August 2013

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Sarah Leslie's works emerge from a deft and intuitive manipulation of light and shadow, space and time. Like a sculptor, she carves light from the deep blackness of her images and plays with the forms, creating something instantly recognizable, yet subtly removed from and more engaging than the original subject. In examining Leslie's photographs, I am struck with the fleetingness of each moment: light shines through windows, carousels turn, and chandeliers flicker. These are recognizable things. But, with Leslie's careful manipulation, the ordinary moment and everyday illumination become something entirely otherworldly – by playing on the moment of image capture and turning it into something stranger. The moments she captures are fleeting and ordinary, but the images she makes are not.

It is in Leslie's unique ability to capture and transform these almost everyday encounters into something out of the ordinary that her hand as a craftsman emerges. In his book, *The Craftsman*, Richard Sennett writes that:

— The sublime suggests a limitless horizon. Yet, a concrete account can be given of how intuitive leaps happen... Intuition begins with the sense that what isn't yet could be...

In technical craftsmanship, the sense of possibility is grounded in feeling frustrated by a tool's limits or provoked by its untested possibilities... How does then using a tool organize these possibilities? The first stage occurs when we break the mold of it fit-for-purpose. That break occupies a different part of the imaginative realm than retrospection.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman*  
(New Haven & London: Yale  
University Press, 2008), 209-210.

The five large-scale photographs in *Object = Subject* are examples of the artist's combination of intuition, imagination, and the ability to push her medium beyond its limits. It is only in the hands of a skilled craftsman that such play can occur. Here we see the depth of Leslie's imagination come to life as she creates impossibilities from these fleeting moments by freezing time and playing with the assumptions of the innate possibilities of recognizable objects.

Leslie describes her process as "a combination of lo-fi analogue photographic techniques and digital manipulation." Her combining of photographic practices represents an interesting combination, and calls into question the degree to which time and immediacy play a role in her practice. The photographic object has always represented a single moment in time that will never be again. The photographer's urge is to capture this fixed point with as much clarity as possible. Leslie's decision here to begin with analogue methods show not only her degree of competency in the medium, but her dedication to the traditions of the craft. After the moment has been captured Leslie's technical digital ability and sensitivity to the original subject take over by freezing the moment and then taking it beyond the reaches of reality with her manipulations, referencing painting techniques, all the while turning an analogue image into a digital one.

As Sennett describes, Leslie has "broken the mold" by choosing to combine the both forms of photography and, in doing so, has allowed the imagination to break through. Leslie's photographs are long moments. They hold your gaze and you feel lost in their shadows. This extended moment is sometimes in stark contrast to the images we are seeing in her photographs – carousels move quickly, candles flicker, in fact light has the fastest speed on earth – and yet the moments these five images seem to last much longer. That isn't to say they drag on... much the opposite. By using her distinct methods, Leslie has managed to perform a singularity in our over-imaged world.

<sup>2</sup> A Holga camera is a plastic, Lo-fi Chinese camera originally from the 1980s, made so that working class Chinese could take affordable photos. It uses 120 medium-format film, and its simple construction is responsible for various effects – such as vignetting, blur and distortion.

Leslie is interested in the similarities of formatting and framing the subject, while at the same time, has manipulated the contextual differences of inherent scale allowing for emphasis on the moment rather than the object itself. To do so, she uses a Holga camera and applies much of the square-format cropping "in camera" as she shoots.<sup>2</sup> The symmetrical format immediately removes the subject out of the perceived reality of the everyday. Whilst our information is widely mediated through a oblong formats (35mm, Film, TV, tablet, iPhone, computer screens, etc) Sarah's use of the square causes us to impart a nostalgic

sensibility to these objects – questioning what is left absent as much as what is present in each moment.

In her work *On Longing*, Susan Stewart discusses the difference between the souvenir and the collection. She states: “the souvenir involves the displacement of attention into the past” and that “the magic of the souvenir is a kind of failed magic.”<sup>3</sup> In the case of Leslie’s works, each photograph operates as a souvenir of a singular moment in time. They are nostalgic in their attempts to preserve these lost moments and celebrate them in print. This desire to replace memory with a simultaneity that disrupts time, and changes the collector’s relationship to the objects in the collection is a crucial part of Stewart’s argument, which is reflected by Leslie’s decision to catch and manipulate these disparate events in time and link together as a collection through careful manipulation and compositing.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984) 151.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 151.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 151.

Stewart goes on to describe collection as offering “example rather than sample, and metaphor rather than metonymy.”<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, “in the collection, time is not something to be restored to an origin; rather, all time is made simultaneous or synchronous within the collection’s world.”<sup>5</sup> In the collection of images in *Object = Subject*, Leslie has frozen still five flashes of light, bringing them together into one still moment, causing us to question each still in relation to the time of the next.

<sup>6</sup> Email correspondence between Sarah Leslie and Sam Mogelonsky, February 26, 2013.

Leslie has described how the scale of these photographs will have a dramatic impact, and will be an important moment for her practice<sup>6</sup>. Once printed at an impressive 1.5m x 1.5m, these photographs will have an almost human-like scale, imposing in an object-like relationship to the viewer. In doing so, Leslie’s photographs occupy an almost sculptural quality and relate more directly to the human body, giving these objects life-like qualities and attributes. By printing each photograph at the same size, the image is given equal space and representation within the gallery, and no unique emphasis is granted to an individual flash. Instead, they read as a collective moment, even though the locations and times of the subjects vary.

*With thanks to Ruth Jones for her additional edits*

Sam Mogelonsky is an emerging Toronto-based artist. She holds a BFAH from Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario, and an MFA from Central Saint Martin’s College of Art, London, UK. She has exhibited in Canada, the UK, France, Ireland, and Portugal. Her studio practice focuses on the manipulation of light-hearted, playful and naïve elements to uncover narratives which are often more serious than the materials reveal, by exploring the adornment of forms and the handmade.