

M+B

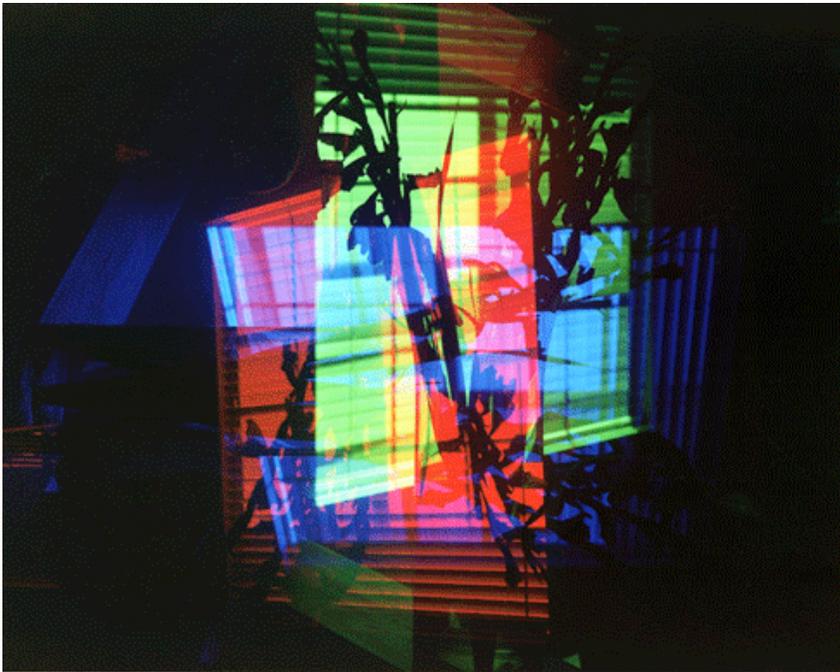
The New York Times

The Moment

ART June 5, 2009, 12:06 PM

Photography Wow

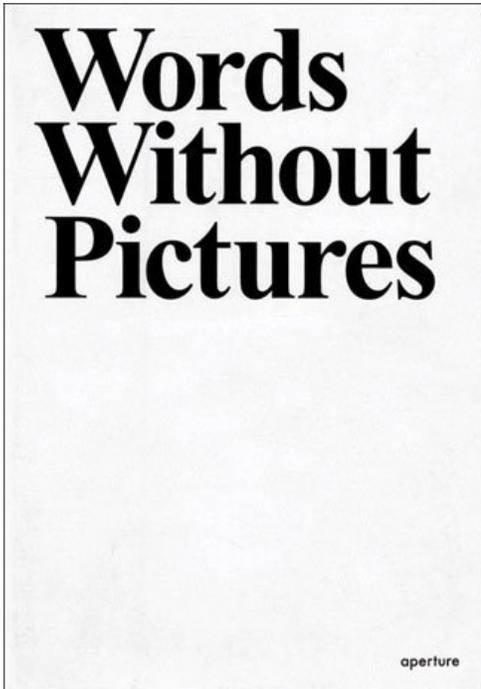
by AIMEE WALLESTON



Images courtesy of Marvelli Gallery, New York.
"Gladiola Window RGB 1" (2007), by Mariah Robertson

There's a strange summer tradition in New York City of waxing conceptual about photography. In the summer of 2007, Luhring Augustine gallery's "Strange Magic" show celebrated artists intent on dragging traditional photography into the far realms of abstraction. Last summer, the Metropolitan Museum of Art played host to "Photography On Photography: Reflections of the Medium Since 1960," a large-scale survey that helped group together what is now considered the conceptual photography rat pack:

M + B



“A plain, matter-of-fact enumeration of the specific photographic elements—will be enough to enable us to divine the power latent in them, and prognosticate to what they lead.”—László Moholy-Nagy, from his essay “A New Instrument of Vision” (extract from “From Pigment to Light”, in *Telebar* Vol. 1/2, 1936) as printed in *Bananas for Moholy-Nagy* by Patterson Beckwith, with an essay by Alex Klein (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Museum of Art, 2010), p. 11.

In the forthcoming *Bananas for Moholy-Nagy*, Patterson Beckwith quite literally, but with slight tongue-in-cheek, interprets “The eight varieties of photographic vision” as put forth by László Moholy-Nagy in “A New Instrument of Vision,” from 1936, by photographing bananas in eleven different ways—x-ray, filters, photograms, prolonged exposure, etc.

“The only type of corruption of transmitted data that has been discussed is the error. An error actually represents two unknown quantities in general: location and symbol value,” referred to via asterisk on page 239: “Wiggert, Djimitri. CODES FOR ERROR CONTROL AND SYNCHRONIZATION. Massachusetts: Artech House, Inc., 1988.”—from *The Sun as Error*, by Shannon Ebner, coordinated by Dexter Sinister (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2009), edition notice page text; p. 239.

Shannon Ebner, in *The Sun as Error*, includes diagrams and illustrations from practical-photography textbooks and Ansel Adams’ *The Print and The Camera* interspersed with her own work, which spans tableau text-based setups and quixotic moments of close-up landscape and living-scape captured on film. Citations for the anachronistic elements similar to the caption above provide for some entertaining reading at the end.

“One of the most important facets of the digital era is that it created both the markets and desires to revisit the past...”—Charlotte Cotton, in her essay “Process, Content, and Dissemination: Photography and Music,” from *Words Without Pictures*, conceived by Cotton and edited by Alex Klein, Aperture edition (New York: Aperture, 2010), p. 228.

Words Without Pictures, in title alone, says it all. The book is a record of what went down when a series of online essays, discussion forums, and live-for-the-audience conversations created “spaces where thoughtful and urgent discourse around very current issues for photography could happen.” *Words Without Pictures* includes essays with titles like, “Photography as Art,” “Online Photographic Thinking,” “Remembering and Forgetting Conceptual Art,” “Abstracting Photography,” all born by c-section from the mother of all questions about photography. And this mother—this urgency—is the digital. If not the mother, then, at least, a very nosy neighbor.

The Photography Department is celebrating the publication of these four books with a reception this Sunday at 4 pm at Art Catalogues at LACMA, including a conversation moderated by Britt Salvesen, curator, Wallis Annenberg Photography Department, with artists Patterson Beckwith and Phil Chang, and light refreshments.