

M+B

It's Nice That

Bold, experimental photography from American artist Hannah Whitaker

By Alex Hawkins
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Hannah Whitaker: Arctic Landscape (Pink Sky)



Hannah Whitaker: Limonene 23



At first glance you might mistake the puzzle-like, optical quality of Hannah Whitaker's photographs for the work of Photoshop, but her experimental images are surprisingly physical. A far cry from a nostalgic experiment with film, Hannah plays with ideas about the technical and the handmade as much as she confuses the conventions of photography and abstract art. Throughout her work, grids and mosaics of dots and triangles appear across wintery landscapes and still-lives.

Shooting through hand-cut paper she places inside the camera, Hannah pokes holes in the film holder or uses light leaks and multiple exposures to create geometric patterns over her subjects. These surprisingly simple methods produce layered, fragmented photographs that reference Bauhaus textiles like those of Anni Albers and remind us an image can still be a very material thing. There are always telltale signs of her in-camera techniques, as in Blue Paper (Albers) where the corner of a blank piece of paper folds back over itself and breaks with the pattern superimposed over it.

Last year the Washington native was one of 21 photographers selected for Foam Talent – one of the industry's leading international contests and platforms for young photographers – and exhibited at Amsterdam's Unseen Photo Fair. Since then she has released a book of her distinctive compositions with Mörel Books, Peer to Peer and is currently part of a group exhibition at London's Flowers Gallery 20 May – 27 June.

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Jessica Eaton. "MF 05 / Tricolour V 02: (R > R, G > G, B > B) Registered," 2014/2015. Color carbon print. 21 x 25 inches. Courtesy of the artist and M+B Gallery, Los Angeles



Jessica Eaton. "MF 05 / Tricolour V 08: (MF 04 (d/b) + MF 05 (d/b)) + (- MF05 G03) Unregistered," 2014/2015. Color carbon print. 21 x 25 inches. Courtesy of the artist and M+B Gallery, Los Angeles

Their hyperreal brightness, reminiscent of early Technicolor, is the first and lasting impression of the botanical images. This effect is not just due to the contrast between garish colors and organic forms, but also to the rarely-used process of color carbon printing, which creates extremely bright tones in an unusually wide range. These silver gelatin prints are also free of grainy effects. In short, this series seems Photoshopped, filtered to the point of impossibility, although the techniques are purely analogue.

Unlike the cfaal cubes, the flowers never fully disappear into Eaton's experiments but remain the problematic center. With this series, Eaton has grounded her own idiosyncratic act of opening the back of color photography's machine into long traditions of art history, lending the new series heft and melancholy. In the smaller gallery space that holds the ten MF variations, the images all seem incomplete—even those that have more color than could exist in nature. Some are missing the shadows that allow individual flowers to be distinguished, and border on abstraction—almost expressionist. Others appear faded, their palates just unnatural enough to appear damaged, recalling vanitas painting. It's not just the question of perception that Eaton is challenging here, but how a subject so iconic in art history as to be clichéd could be simply one more long, fascinating subject that photography can deconstruct and expose as fiction.



Jessica Eaton. "cfaal 346," 2013. Archival pigment print. 50 x 40 inches. Courtesy of the artist and M+B Gallery, Los Angeles