

MUSÉE



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MATTHEW BRANDT

Matthew Brandt, born in California in 1982, received his BFA from Cooper Union and his MFA from UCLA. In December 2011, Forbes named Matthew Brandt one of tomorrow's "Brightest Stars" in the article 30 under 30: Art & Design. Brandt has been exhibited both independently and collaboratively throughout his career. His work is included in the collections of the Armand Hammer Museum, Cincinnati Art Museum and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Currently, Brandt's exhibit Lakes, Trees and Honeybees is on display at Yossi Milo Gallery in New York until July 20, 2012. The photography of the American West landscapes serves as an inspiration for Brandt, as well as traditional techniques and processes of the mid-nineteenth century including handmade papermaking and gum-bichromate. Brandt creates his prints using physical elements from the subject itself, such as dipping photographs of a lake into its water. Currently, he lives and works in Los Angeles.

You went to Cooper Union in New York for undergrad and then to UCLA for grad school, how do you think the educational philosophies differ from the East coast to the West? Aside from one being undergraduate and the other graduate. How did it affect your work?

One of the main reasons I went to Cooper is they let you choose whatever you want to do. Also they had great professors. I become even more appreciative with the more I learn. New York in general is more frugal. With your ideas and material size, you end up thinking a lot more about what you are making. When I went to UCLA, they really prided themselves on being messy and free – who cares, just do it. It's very experimental. It was those parameters that really helped me out. After I left Cooper I was making tight, cookie-cutter, conceptual work. For example, I would photograph an object and then repeat it with conceptual tools. I was interested in the "dry" look of photography to replicate other photography. UCLA was the first time that I actually had a darkroom and could really play around – to just do it. However, I still had the mindset that I had gotten from Cooper in New York and the conceptual interests. As in the responsibility to not really add heaps of images, but

to make something and think about why you're making the image. All the while: being messy and experimental.

Did you pick a graduate school because you already had an idea of what you wanted to do? Was it the professors there that you wanted to learn from? How much did that influence you?

I chose UCLA because of the professors and the location too. I was a little homesick. It's funny the professors that I wanted to learn from, like Chris Burden and John Baldessari had already left (laughs) but I studied with so many other great artists that really influenced me like Jim Welling and Cathy Opie. Jim is one of my biggest influences that you can see in my work. I kept thinking, "Wow, am I really ripping Jim off?"

Does that bother you if people compare you to Vik Muniz?

No, that just means I have to separate myself in a certain way. I am a huge fan of his work. I'm still trying to work things out. I got an idea of wanting to create the world's smallest photograph, so I looked at the Guinness World Records, and he has printed images on rice or something like that. He's a genius! He has done so many fantastic things, so I had to look at his work and evolve from it, or do something else. I've gotten that comparison before.

Why did you decide to use Ebay for the houses?

I wanted to make something about the housing market. This idea is changing a little bit, the traditional house and the representation of what a house means. I wanted to show it in a more dislodged way by photographing houses that were for sale. The idea of "changing hands" too, one person lives there and someone else is living there. There are a lot of ideas wrapped up in a house for sale. When looked at through Ebay, you know that the houses are for sale, and there is a certain level of desperation of wanting to get rid of it. The solid structure in a transient space is what interests me. Also that it is shown as a bubble gum, although I don't want this to be in direct transition to the housing market bubble, but it represents the malleability of the symbol of a house.

So why did you decide to represent it with silk-screen?

Two reasons: it was the only way to get bubble gum on paper, and to translate a picture. I wouldn't want to hand render it because I love the photographic index. The image quality is bad from the listing on Ebay because usually I either do click-and-drags or screen-grabs. It's just a matter of working with that, and translating the lack of quality. Sometimes when the image isn't so good, you translate it to silkscreen, it ends up being a different quality. Sometimes the Jpeg squares are engrained differently with bigger chunks in certain areas; it gets kind of muddled anyway. I like the double take: when it's one picture from 30-feet

away and different when you're face to face with the work.

Do you think you will continue to do more camera-less photography? Do you enjoy that form of intellectual exercise? What is it like for you?

I love when I don't have to take the picture (laughs). There are so many good photos out there. Every time I look at the New York Times, I think to myself "wow, that picture is amazing!" I could never do that. Even with Instagram's simple Photoshop filters, I think that the photographs look really great. I feel like technology makes it easy to take a "good" picture, and since there are so many good pictures out there, why not utilize it? It's not about my subjectivity in taking pictures anymore; it's about working with the pictures too.

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—Matthew Brandt

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Image appropriation is sort of a way to talk about image making.

Have your gallerists thought that your images should be priced like a painting? Each one is unique; you can't really duplicate the same image.

I think that they do think of it that way. All of the work is pretty unique and I would like to keep it that way.

So how do you use bubble gum in your processes?

I get the biggest, mesh, silk-screen and shove the bubble gum through while heating it up. It's a complicated process. These are one of kind as well because once you shove it through the screen, it's ruined.

What is the one word that describes you?

Vessel? I guess?

How about one word that describes your work?

Labor.

What advice do you have for emerging photographers?

Work hard and follow your instincts — hone in on what those instincts are. Maybe even investigate why those instincts exist. Everyone has their own subjectivity and it's a matter of honing in on that: figuring out why that is, because that is essentially who you are. It takes a lot of work to fully understand that. The journey of finding that out is interesting.

How important is graduate school to all of that?

For me it was very helpful. As an artist it is nice to have the time to focus, work, and figure out what you want to do. It's great for networking advantages too. You meet professors that are going to help you, you find people that you can relate to, and you create a community. I think it's nice to balance ideas off of other people and embrace what others have to say in order to get an idea for when you present work. I think it's good, and important.

Who has helped you most in your career?

My dad. He was an advertising photographer. I sort of just grew up into photography. I grew up around photo shoots and knew what F-stop was. Even now, my dad is very encouraging. He had a studio space, which I took over, after I got out of grad school.



From the series, *Taste Tests in Color*, *Frosting 2*, 2012, Silkscreen on paper, with frosting, Unique, © Matthew Brandt, Courtesy Yossi Milo Gallery, New York.



From the series, *Taste Tests in Color*, *Gummy Bears 3*, 2012, Silkscreen on paper, with frosting, Unique, © Matthew Brandt, Courtesy Yossi Milo Gallery, New York.

How much Photoshop do you use in your work?

I use Photoshop a lot. With the houses, I have to straighten the images to make it look like a proper architectural composition because it's usually crooked on the side. I tweak a lot of stuff in Photoshop and play around with a lot of things. That is how I made a living after graduating UCLA. Working with Robert Polidori too, I learned a lot of tricks.

You said: "There is something in the air to rekindle the notion of the photograph as a unique object, would you say this is the extended future of photography?"

Not necessarily, I think that there are so many avenues. That's what is great about photography; it's going in so many directions and has so many uses. At least with the relation to the art world, it is helpful to bring back painting traditions, and the idea of someone wanting something special or unique within the world to own.

Do you always shoot with an 8x10 camera or do you shoot with other formats also?

Now I actually shoot mostly with my digital camera. I'm using a Canon 5D Mark II. I do a lot of Photoshop stitching if I want a larger picture because I find it to be much easier and I get a much better quality by doing that. You have to end up going through the digital pass anyway so it's just easier to make it altogether.

Do you do your own printing?

The images shown at the Yossi Milo Gallery, which were 30"x 40", I had printed in a lab in Burbank, California. Any other size I print at UCLA on color paper, just analog prints.

Are there any collections that you are dying to be in?

Oh yea, MoMA.

Are aesthetics more important than content?

Content definitely comes first. The aesthetics are a way to grab someone's attention and make them look a bit further into the work. In the end, it's like "yeah this is pretty", but then you ask yourself why it's pretty.

What's one word that describes you?

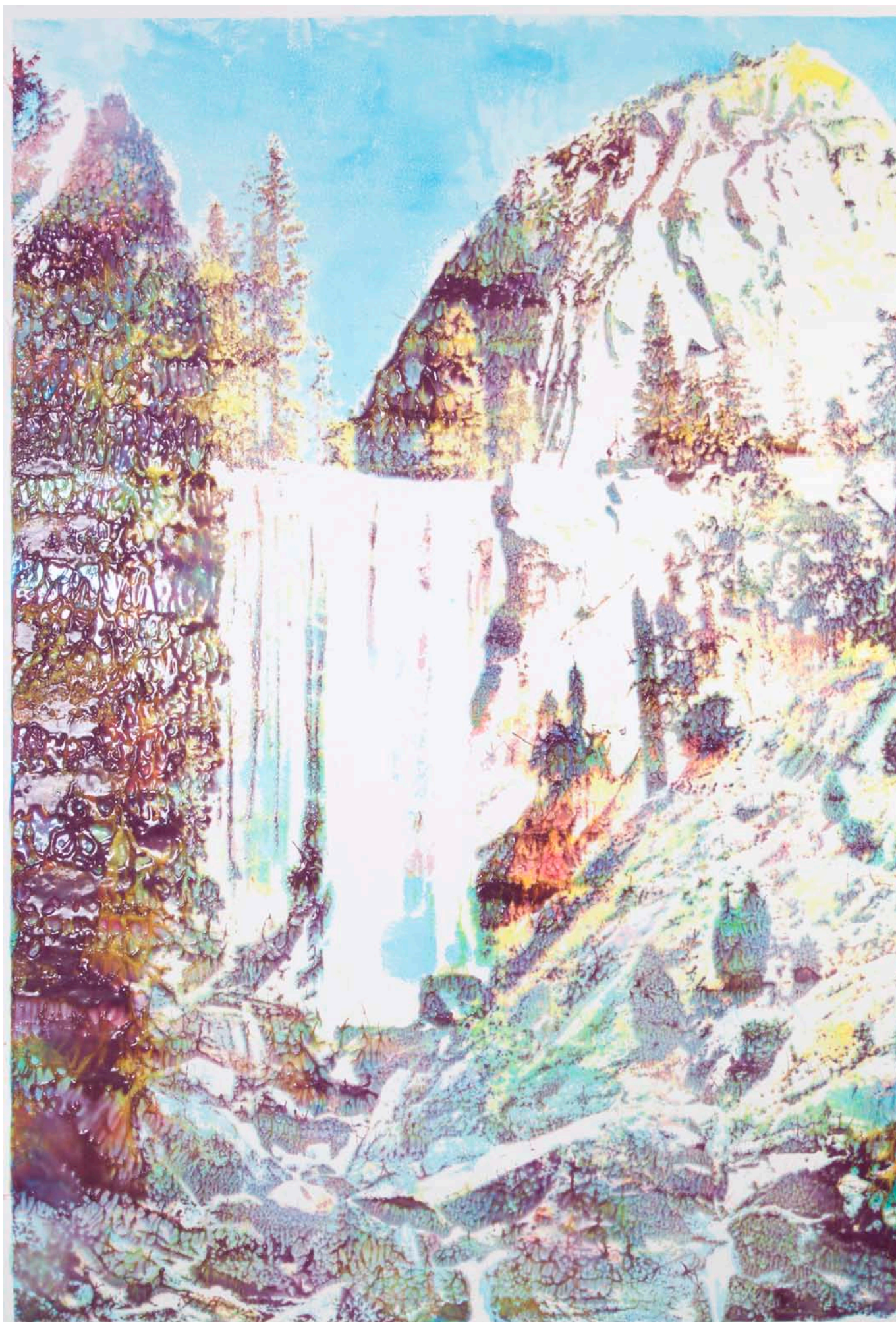
Curious. ■

Interview by Andrea Blanch

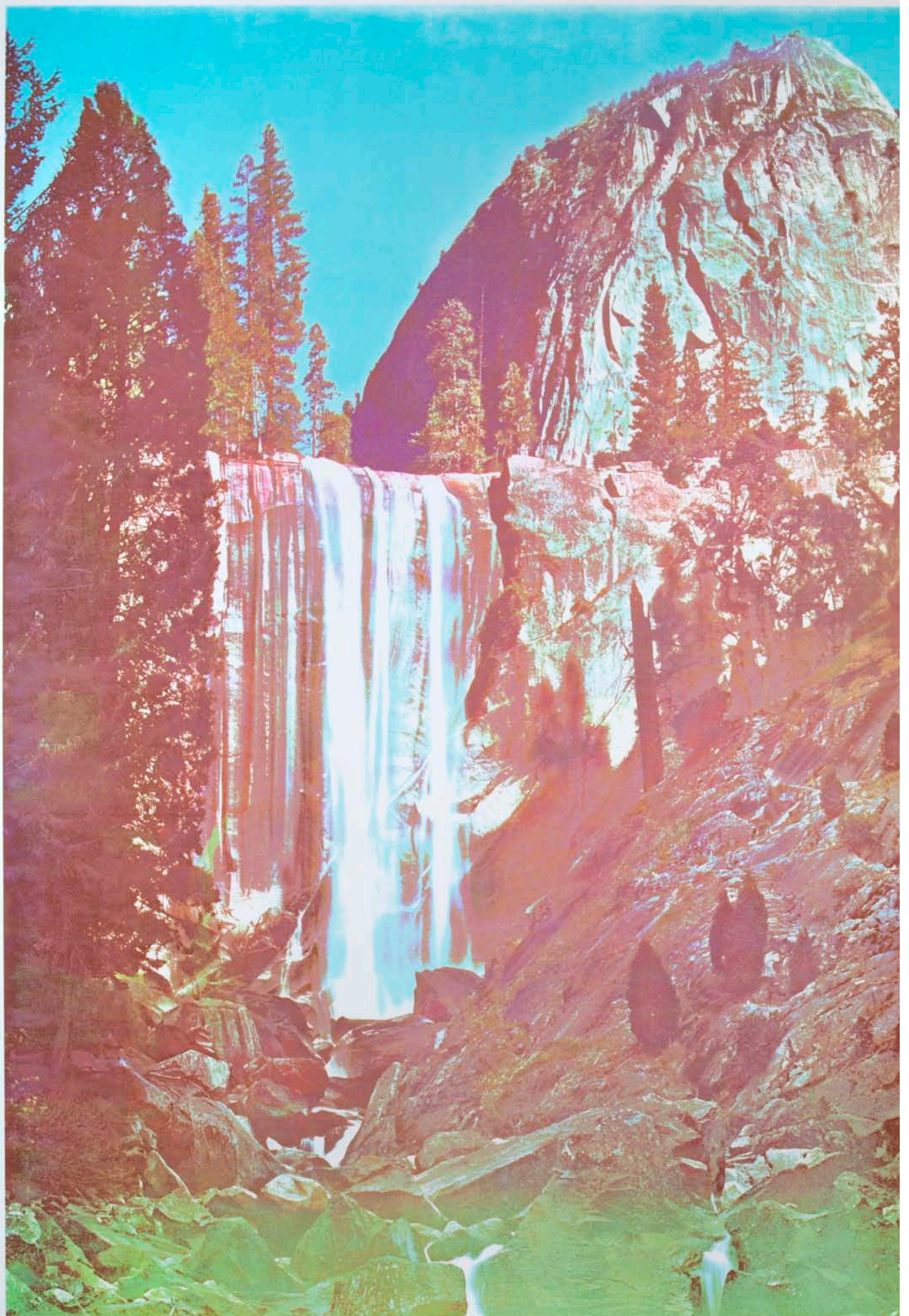
Photograph of Matthew Brandt by Andrea Blanch

All other photographs Courtesy of Yossi Milo Gallery and M+B Gallery

Brandt's solo exhibits include Chocolate, bees, dust, sperm, and sprinkles at Cardwell Jimmerson Gallery and Two Ships Passing at M+B Gallery. He has appeared in many more group exhibitions, such as Capitalism In Question (Because It Is) at Pitzer Art Galleries, Some Young LA Artists at Cardwell Jimmerson Gallery, and Of Memory and Time at Hendershot Gallery.



From the series, *Taste Tests in Color*, *Laffy Taffy 1*, 2012, Silkscreen on paper, with frosting, Unique, © Matthew Brandt, Courtesy Yossi Milo Gallery, New York.



From the series, *Taste Tests in Color*, *Cake Icing 1*, 2012, Silkscreen on paper, with frosting, Unique, © Matthew Brandt, Courtesy Yossi Milo Gallery, New York.



From the series, *Houses*, 110756276740, 2011, Orbit Spearmint on paper, Unique, © Matthew Brandt, Courtesy M+B Gallery, Los Angeles.





From the series, *Houses*, 160692138060, 2011, Winterfresh on paper, Unique, © Matthew Brandt, Courtesy M+B Gallery, Los Angeles.

