

REAL
ART WAYS

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Step Up 2011 is a series of six solo exhibitions open to emerging artists living in New York, New Jersey or New England. The *Step Up* exhibition series seeks to provide emerging artists in our region an exhibition and publication opportunity at a critical moment in their careers. The *Step Up 2011* jurors were Yona Backer (Director/Curator, Third Streaming Gallery); Xaviera Simmons (Artist); and Susan Talbott (Director and CEO, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art).

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Real Art Ways is an alternative multidisciplinary arts organization that presents and supports contemporary artists and their work, facilitates the creation of new work and creatively engages, builds and informs audiences and communities. As Real Art Ways grows, our commitment to supporting young and emerging artists remains a touchstone of the organization.



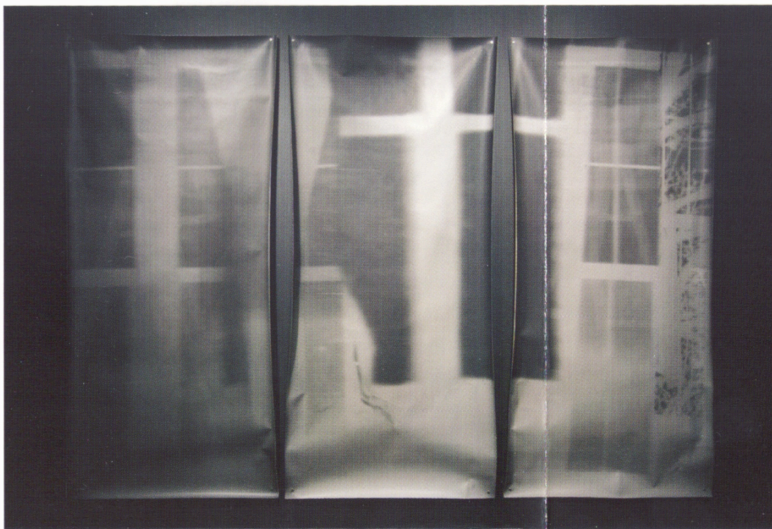
Amy Theiss Giese



On the cover: 041911.5302.06106, 2011, 93" x 127.5" unique silver gelatin skiagram (detail).

All images courtesy of Real Art Ways. Staff photographer John Groo.

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041911.s302.06106, 2011, 93" x 127.5" unique silver gelatin skiagram

Light in Sound: Concealed at first at last I appear

By Arthur Ou

In quantum physics there is a simple experiment involving the casting of shadows that demonstrates the existence of parallel universes. According to this theory, every light photon is accompanied by a shadow photon. Though undetectable in our universe—that is, the physical reality in which you and I exist—these shadow photons are there, interfering with the visible light photons, causing them to bend, creating patterns unexplainable through classical physics. There are no other explanations for this phenomenon, except that there are, unquestionably, unseen and unseeable parallel forces at play within every physical entity.

Photography is a medium of light. Like the accompanying shadows (or the absence of light), it can be systematically explained through the physics of optics, and chemistry (or digital sensors and bits). More than other mediums perhaps, it is a set of processes both scientific and technological: A photograph is a record of light reflected or illuminated from the physical world. There is a fettered relationship between the photograph and the world around us. Yet, in photographs, there seem to be the existence of other forces exerting interference over the image, beyond the precise controls of the photographer, and beyond facile explanation. It can be said that this is what photographers are really after—the controlled accident, or, the decisive but

Amy Theiss Giese completed her MFA in Photography with honors at Parsons in New York in 2009, and is now teaching part-time at the New England School of Photography in Boston, Massachusetts. Always present in her work is a questioning of how we see and how the camera “sees.” She has effectively used overlapping images, in-camera distortion and photograms to question subtly what a photograph is, how photographs relate to reality and how we respond to photographic images today given the history of the medium and its current role in society.

Her work has been included in numerous exhibitions both nationally and internationally including the Photographic Resource Center in Boston, the Danforth Museum in Massachusetts, the Visual Arts Center of New Jersey, Arnold & Sheila Aronson Gallery in New York, and the Sydney College of the Arts galleries.

unexpected moment. Perhaps the well-known dictum by Gary Winogrand, "I photograph to find out what something looks like photographed," comes closest in describing the element of the unknown in photography, despite it being a process replete with a spectrum of controls.

In Amy Theiss Giese's *skiagram* photographs, this similar sense of the unknown is evinced. "*Skiagram*" can be translated from Greek as "shadows written," which also brings to mind the Chinese characters for photography; a literal translation is "the recording of shadows." These works are made in situ—they are large silver-based prints made by the nocturnal shadows cast at night through windows and doors, essentially, the ambient external light creeping into interiors. That they must be resolutely made in the architectural

03242511.5205.06106, 2011, 79.5" x 255" unique silver gelatin skiagram (detail)

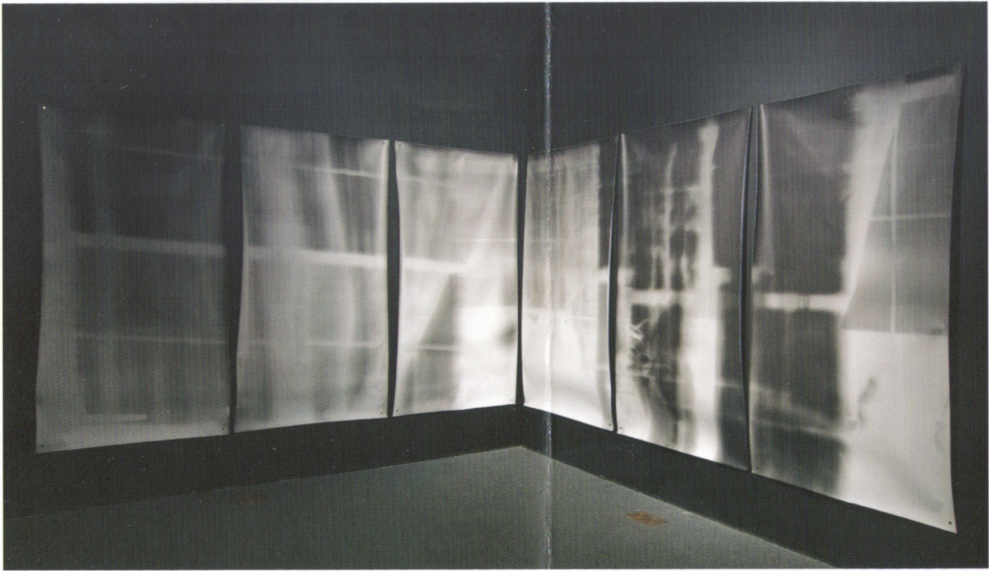


spaces that they depict is an apparent detail, but this is the essential structure of the process, and it is a necessary consideration, for the bare photographic paper takes an unmediated presence in the space for a prolonged duration.

The photographic papers are put in place to absorb light, in order to reveal shadows. It is consequential to point out that the title of this work underscores the absence of light rather than the presence of it, as in the word "photography." The camera-less process deployed in this work yields resulting prints that are negative images, rather than positives. Because of this, one senses the presences of shadows much more so than their opposite. The faintest light cannot be without its attendant, parallel shadows—or so the work poetically suggests.

Encountering Giese's large-scale skiagram prints, which are often installed in the spaces where they were made—their length almost the height of the walls, their formation almost wrapping around the room—is like seeing or experiencing the space in a parallel version, in a shadow universe. Photographs are often likened to windows, but these scroll-like prints appear more as portals. The soft, unfocused space depicted behind the skin-like photographic surface feels physically present. To call these photographs hauntingly beautiful would be an obvious observation. But this haunting quality emerges less from their spectral monochromatic appearance than from the uncanny sense that one encounters with one's own physical body being able to take presence in them. They seem to envelope, palpably, a mental and perceptual space. Experiences such as this belong to that ineffable realm of photography that cannot be explained by mere technological or mechanical means, but can only be felt or observed, or understood in the mind.

Likewise, sound is an entity that can only be felt and experienced and is difficult to duplicate through explanation. In addition to the skiagram photographs, the element of sound takes ancillary presence in Giese's installation. The sound recording looping faintly in the installation is a MIDI (a standard digital music protocol) translation of the photographs being displayed. Procedurally, the analog information of the photographs is digitized, transformed instead into



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fields of pixels, each individual pixel containing specific tonal and chromatic values, becoming a set of binary information that are then transposed as digital audio signals, edited and composed for playback in the installation space.

In this installation, one experiences a stark contrast between the MIDI sounds and the photographs, the two elements seeming almost incongruous to one another, literally taking presence in entirely different dimensions. However, the two constituent parts share a common origin—that of the light, and shadows, cast on various surfaces throughout the physical space. All of this hints at the potentialities of other or all physical surfaces, what they may be able to reveal or bright to light, as it were, in this or other dimensions.

Giese's skiagram work belongs to a lineage that started at the very beginnings of photography. For those earliest of photographs, the photographers—or more accurately, inventors, scientists, and physicists—such as Henry Fox Talbot and Nicéphore Niépce had no way of knowing on certain terms

what the subjects and the selections of the world placed in front of their prototypical cameras were going to look like. Prior to their discoveries, the transformed universe in the photographic realm could only have existed in their imaginations. They had a great compulsion to transform vision into a permanent record. And what was revealed through their experiments baffled and astonished them, and of course the countless number of photographers thereafter. Giese's photographs, and by extension, the sound works, continue this impulse, to reveal what cannot be seen, and to expose the other universes within this one.

Arthur Ou is an artist and writer based in New York. His work has been featured in publications including Blind Spot, Art On Paper, North Drive Press, Art in America, and The Photograph as Contemporary Art, new edition (Thames and Hudson). His writings have been published in Aperture, Artforum.com, Afterall.org, X-Tra, Bidoun, Fantom, and Words Without Pictures.