

JEROME
FELLOWSHIP
EXHIBITION
2016/17

NIKKI J. McCOMB



KELSEY OLSON



EDIE OVERTURE



JOVAN C. SPELLER



AMANDA WIRIG



ARTIST

KELSEY
OLSON



Kiwano, 2017
Inkjet print on vinyl backing paper
17 x 22 in.
Photo: Rik Sferra

**What I am trying to convey to you is more mysterious;
it is entwined in the very roots of being, in the impalpable
source of sensations.**

—Joachim Gasquet, *Cezanne: A Memoir with Conversations*

**“Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?”
“That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,” said the Cat.
“I don’t know where—” said Alice.
“Then it doesn’t matter which way you go,” said the Cat.**

—Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

The beginning, so they say, was an epic chemistry experiment, at once born from nowhere and everywhere—a big bang comprised of countless minute blips, accidental sparks, and primordial bubbles. And, then, behold: matter, material, (life) form. Peering into the hardened gelatin of Kelsey Olson’s photographs, one can’t help but think of the logics (and the limits of the logics) behind how a thing is made, comes into being, morphs, and, then, decomposes, falls out of existence, stops all its matter-ing. The eyes move to the cracking, brittle edges of Olson’s three-dimensional photographs, now hybrid things—part photo, print, painting, proto-sculpture—and the viewer’s eye begins to ask ever more questions of the work, of the mortality of photographic material, and, eventually, of itself.

Olson is an alchemist in her studio—mixing and remixing technical processes, experimenting with form as content and with what wider possibilities might rest in that space between representation and ambiguity. She makes, makes, and makes. Before the gelatin on one transfer has set, she is at work experimenting with something else and pushing the boundaries of her work even more. They are all “tests in a way,” she says as she considers melting

down one print to make something altogether new. The results surprise Olson herself when her mix of processes produce unexpected lines, shapes, and textures. She embraces the “happy by-product accidents” her process creates. Much of her photographic work is “camera-less,” approximating what it might be like to “see” through other senses beyond the optics of the eye, which always assumes itself to be the objective authority. The object is nothing more than the photographic material itself, turned and folded into itself.

There is a sense of boundless play evident in her process as her technique poses and enacts questions upon itself with each new step. Olson finds more connections to printmaking than standard photography or painting. Printmaking and its litany of steps reflect her own process, as does the way printmaking encourages the use of all the parts and materials present. And while the chemistry requires precision and technique, Olson is simultaneously in control and relinquishing control: first to the process, then to the resulting piece, and, finally, to the viewer. The images transform, often leaving their original components and all it took to make them wholly untraceable. That, of course, is the magic of any art

ESSAY

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form—obscuring the strings, the mechanics, the whole clockwork by which it ticks. Olson’s work asks us to look beyond the filter of representation and a navel-gazing search for meaning. It is as much an existential exercise as it is an aesthetic one. Her work as a whole is working its way toward something as she seeks to create work that is as interesting to see and experience as it is to make. Her photos disrupt our eye and its very basic desire to look and to derive pleasure or satisfaction from what it sees. Her work appears by turns organic and otherworldly. But the images are very much of this world and of Olson’s own everyday world: a dresser, a piece of fruit, a backpack. While she may reject the conventions of photographic representation, the work maintains a certain kind of strange beauty. Further still, she is not behind the curtain pulling the strings, directing us on the what and how and where. Instead, she invites the viewer into the process she has begun and set into motion through her series of experiments.

Like some forms of matter, Olson’s photographs are unstable. Olson labors over work that may not exist in a few months, let alone years. Some works will begin to change with more exposure to light, air,

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and time. Once “done,” some are fragile, some flexible, deteriorating and transforming over time, thus continuing in a process the artist does not—cannot—control. Olson describes one piece that broke clean in half and how it “healed itself” back into one as she worked to put it back together.

In recent decades, anthropologists have explored photographs as material objects and material culture. It seems, on the surface, an obvious association. Photography, after all, has its own modes of production, consumption, and circulation. The materiality of Olson’s work and its impermanence raise questions about how such work will be displayed, consumed, sold. Their impermanence rejects their commodification in a world where photography has become a mass media for consumption and celebrity. Olson is unperturbed by the mortality of her work and the riskiness of the whole endeavor to make and make without a straightforward end goal. All that said, there is a concreteness about Olson’s work that has little to do with any effort on her part to delve into so-called abstraction but rather reflects our own growing incapacity to really “look” and pay attention to what we are seeing right in front of us. —NNH



Untitled, 2017
Cyanotype in gelatin, plastic
beads, paper
15 x 10 in.
Photo: Rik Sferra

ARTWORK

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Untitled, 2017
Gelatin, vinegar, inkjet transfer,
adhesive labels, silver gelatin
photo paper, electrical tape
35 x 23 in.
Photo: Rik Sferra

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Above: Untitled, 2017
Agar-agar, gelatin, vinegar, inkjet transfer, adhesive labels, metal shavings, drywall screw
26 x 20 in.
Photo: Rik Sferra

ARTWORK

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Next page: Untitled, 2017
Gelatin, cornstarch, vinegar, inkjet transfer, inkjet print and acrylic on paper, rubber gloves, PVC cable sleeve
22 x 12 in.
Photo: Rik Sferra

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