

KELSEY OLSON: HELLWEG
DECEMBER 17, 2014 – FEBRUARY 8, 2015

ARTIST **EMEF**

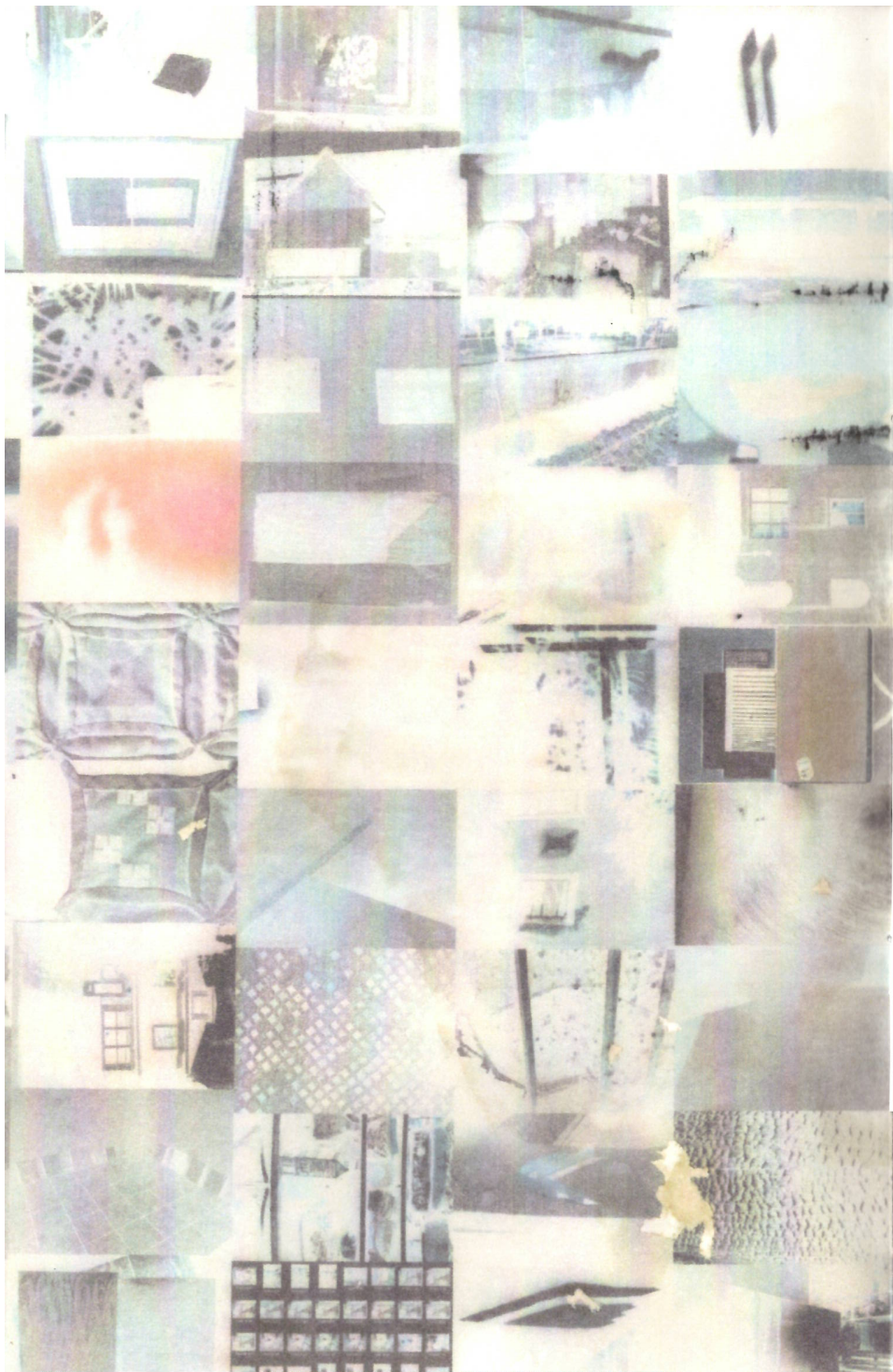
3rd Floor Emerging Artist Series

 **ROCHESTER ART CENTER**

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FOUNDATION



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**KELSEY OLSON: HELLWEG
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Since its inception, a narrative or condition that has been used to inform, explain, or characterize photography in some manner has revolved around the notion of manipulation—the manipulation of light, of chemicals, of subject, of time. More recently, varied and perhaps ineffectual debates have ensued regarding the physical process of making a photograph, with the associated disputes regarding authenticity, proficiency, and the like, let alone the end product in its various physical, metaphoric, practical, or theoretical positions. These debates will continue into the future of course, with an ever-present question of “what is photography”?, or what “constitutes a photograph”? Interestingly enough, the word “today” could also be added to the end of each question, with the implicit understanding that the medium is in a constant state of flux or shifting meaning based on changing conditions, eras, and attitudes. Nevertheless, and not unlike many other modes of expression, the answer is varied, nuanced, and certainly immensely complicated. As noted artist Walead Beshty aptly states:

... one would need a serviceable definition of what “photography” (and here, its hypothetical exemplar, a “photograph”) is. Without veering into convoluted ontology, this “photography,” regardless of what might be argued to fall within its boundaries, seems best described as a type of “medium,” or “an agency or means of doing something,” and in its specific case, “the intervening substance through which impressions are conveyed to the senses or a force acts on objects at a distance.” Defined in this way, a medium is constituted by a dialectic of applied use and technological development, and is further defined by the conventionalization of the relationship between the two, a process that occurs over time and is in a state of constant revision... This is the unending “crisis” of all media, the struggle between adherence to convention, and new relations between technology and use.



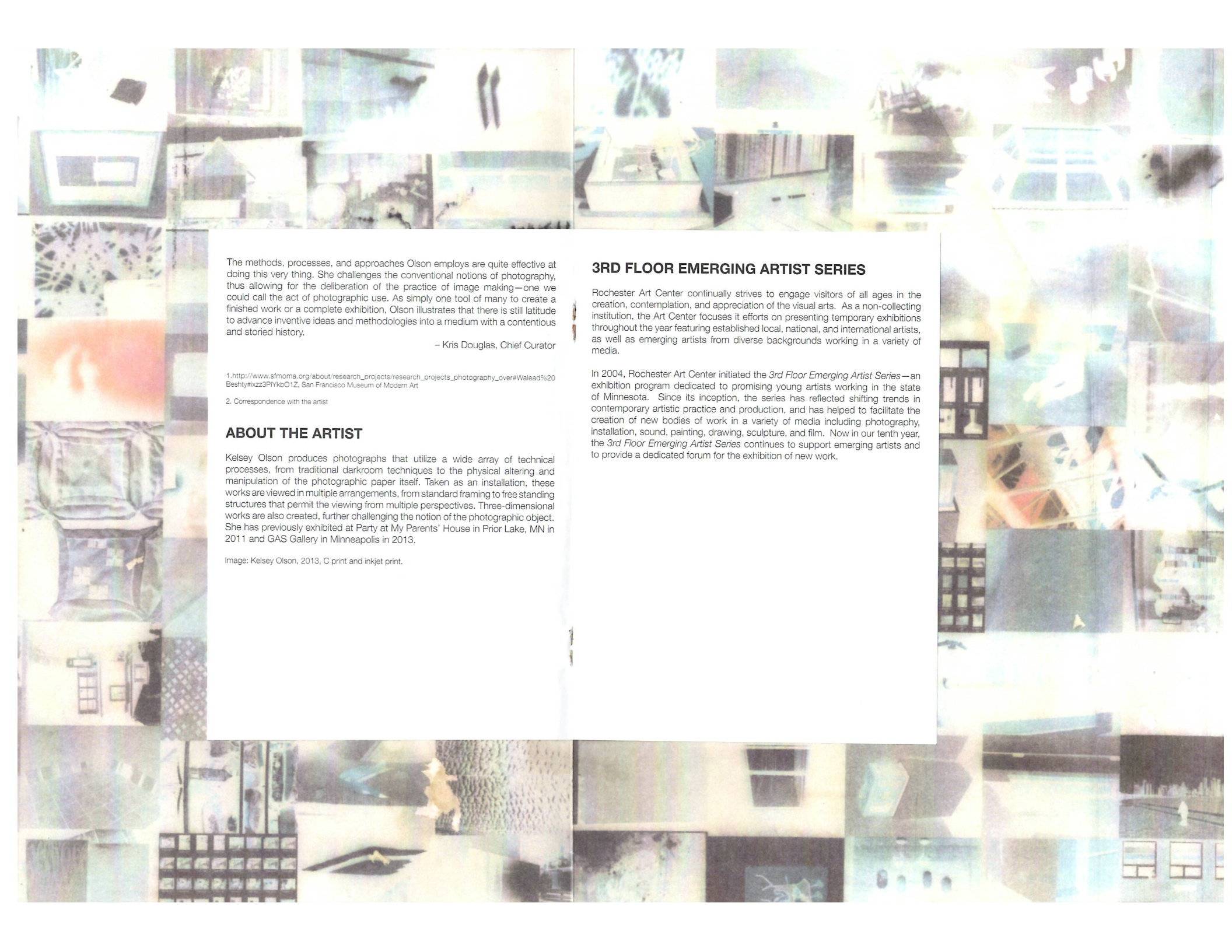


Taking up this aesthetic and conceptual problem in its many forms, Kelsey Olson's exhibition *Hellweg* presents a challenge to the conventionally understood procedures of photography—she does so not only by way of production and material, but also in the act of definition and presentation. As such, we have the opportunity to look more closely at a medium and material that at times seems as open in classification as it does closed.

In a broad or practical sense, Kelsey Olson produces photographs that utilize a wide array of technical and material processes, from traditional darkroom techniques to the physical altering and manipulation of the photographic paper itself. In this sense, if we look at photography on a process-based continuum, we may consider or define these as "traditional" manipulation techniques in that they are grounded in what we could call the physical. That is, she is engaged in various processes that one could understand as conventional or established, that occur in the dark room with the modification, manipulation, and experimentation with chemicals, papers, and light. In addition to this, the process can become physically reductive as well—the back of the photographic paper may be removed entirely or altered, exposures may be doubled, and light may be controlled to create desired effects. In some instances, the backing paper may not be removed entirely, but cut out in organic shapes, leaving the paper with a varied texture and shape, as well as open slits that allow light to pass through. Other non-traditional liquids and materials may also be utilized at this time, again, to achieve specific aesthetic outcomes. It is after this process, where one may consider the work to be complete, that Olson continues down a path of alteration and modification. In many instances, the prints that have gone through the aforementioned processes now find themselves being printed on again, in this case on what we would originally consider the "back" of the print. With the use of ink jet printers, other images are made and it joins the first in a double-sided dialog that we may see, or never see at all. This act of printing, printing again, doubling, and re-doubling provides images that at once seem rationally representational as well as wholly abstract. One may believe we are looking at something that we could describe as the original or source image, only to question this notion nearly immediately. In this way, no hierarchy is established, no image is privileged over the other. Often, the work feels organic, directly or indirectly appearing as leaves or biological forms one associates with the natural world. Others represent an architectural space, not entirely different in outward appearance but with doorways, windows, staircases, and museum or gallery spaces.

Given the nature of her work and the exhibition itself, the method of presentation and installation is also thoroughly considered. A number of images remain unframed, attached directly to the wall. Some of these may be contact prints, many with multiple exposures as previously described. If additional images are present on the reverse, as a viewer we will never know. In other work, another method of presentation is employed giving the exhibition a thoroughly sculptural feel. In these works, Olson has created a simple framework of thin aluminum, acting as a support and framing mechanism for the photographs to be suspended from. These structures play a dual role in that both present individual works, but also act as a singular sculpture in and of themselves, meant to be taken in totality and not just as the sum of the component parts. These works hang from nearly invisible thread, allowing the viewer to walk around the structures, viewing the prints from both sides. This method of presentation is also supported by the act of cutting a rectangle through an existing wall in the gallery, allowing for work to be visibly floating in this space in the same manner. This approach is akin to her darkroom work, as the cutting of an aperture in the wall can be initially visually confusing, appearing as if a mirror or other device is in use—another instance of conceptual and physical doubling. Also included in the exhibition are works that have been modified to a greater extent—works that function and appear as sculpture. Sitting on a bubble-wrapped table, photographs have been folded and formed into what may best be described as rock forms—I say this as many have lines and striations that provide a distinct geologic appearance and completely eliminate any flatness or two dimensionality that we associate with the photograph. This work, and how they are displayed challenge our understanding of the medium. As Olson states:

Although the work upsets or destabilizes the conventional procedures of photography, it is not a programmatic or a wholly medium specific approach. It is more simply an exploration of how an image can be made, a mining of the cracks of photographic practices and openness to contradictory combinations. The resulting images feel as varied as the ways in which they are produced, and the connection between the complexities of the "how" and the "what" are not always evident. A highly layered piece may appear effortless and quiet, while a simple contact print is convoluted and unsettling. However, the physical layers and multiple processes happening in the work are hidden as the paper's surface retains its pearly unbroken smoothness. Its skin belies the time and stages of production and presents the viewer with a complex and unidentifiable image.²



The methods, processes, and approaches Olson employs are quite effective at doing this very thing. She challenges the conventional notions of photography, thus allowing for the deliberation of the practice of image making—one we could call the act of photographic use. As simply one tool of many to create a finished work or a complete exhibition, Olson illustrates that there is still latitude to advance inventive ideas and methodologies into a medium with a contentious and storied history.

— Kris Douglas, Chief Curator

1. http://www.sfmoma.org/about/research_projects/research_projects_photography_over#Walead%20Beshty#ixzz3PIYKbO1Z, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

2. Correspondence with the artist

ABOUT THE ARTIST

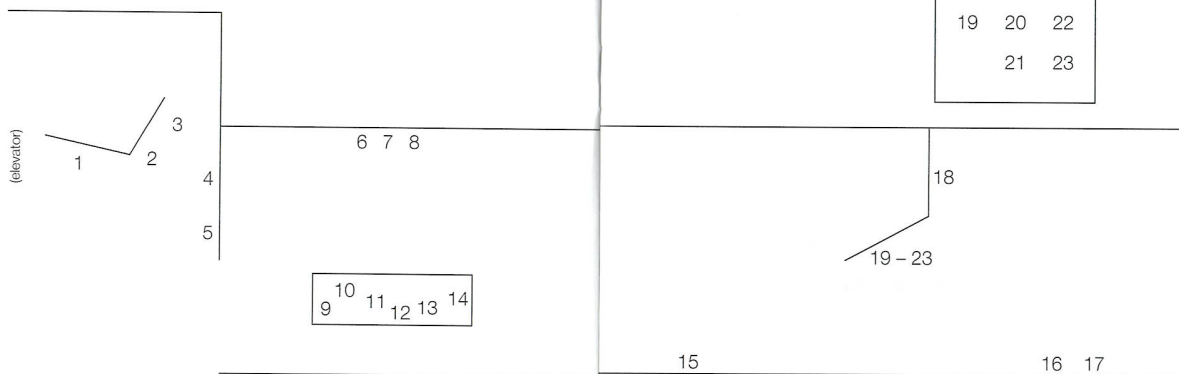
Kelsey Olson produces photographs that utilize a wide array of technical processes, from traditional darkroom techniques to the physical altering and manipulation of the photographic paper itself. Taken as an installation, these works are viewed in multiple arrangements, from standard framing to free standing structures that permit the viewing from multiple perspectives. Three-dimensional works are also created, further challenging the notion of the photographic object. She has previously exhibited at Party at My Parents' House in Prior Lake, MN in 2011 and GAS Gallery in Minneapolis in 2013.

Image: Kelsey Olson, 2013, C print and inkjet print.

3RD FLOOR EMERGING ARTIST SERIES

Rochester Art Center continually strives to engage visitors of all ages in the creation, contemplation, and appreciation of the visual arts. As a non-collecting institution, the Art Center focuses its efforts on presenting temporary exhibitions throughout the year featuring established local, national, and international artists, as well as emerging artists from diverse backgrounds working in a variety of media.

In 2004, Rochester Art Center initiated the *3rd Floor Emerging Artist Series*—an exhibition program dedicated to promising young artists working in the state of Minnesota. Since its inception, the series has reflected shifting trends in contemporary artistic practice and production, and has helped to facilitate the creation of new bodies of work in a variety of media including photography, installation, sound, painting, drawing, sculpture, and film. Now in our tenth year, the *3rd Floor Emerging Artist Series* continues to support emerging artists and to provide a dedicated forum for the exhibition of new work.



1. 2013, C print and inkjet print
2. *five pinkies*, 2013, C print and inkjet print
3. 2013, C print and inkjet print
4. *desk still life*, 2013, C print and inkjet print
5. 2014, silver gelatin paper, inkjet print, rubber cement
6. 2012, C print
7. 2012, C print
8. 2012, C print
9. 2013, batteries, latex paint
10. *hematome*, 2014, silver gelatin paper, laser print, metal tape, packaging tape
11. 2014, inkjet, digital photo paper
12. 2014, inkjet, digital photo paper

13. 2014, inkjet, ceramic
14. 2014, silver gelatin paper, laser print, inkjet prints, wax, spray paint, metal tape, packaging tape
15. *Hellweg*, 2014, packaging paper
16. 2013, C print and inkjet print
17. *window tans*, 2013, C print
18. *cut dia doorway*, 2013, C print and inkjet print
19. *minuteman press dumpster coagulation*, 2013
20. 2013, C print and inkjet print
21. 2014, inkjet print, backing paper
22. 2013, C print and inkjet print
23. 2014, silver gelatin paper, inkjet print, laser print



 **ROCHESTERARTCENTER**

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