

CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY PRESENTS

altered APPROPRIATIONS:
making strange

curated by JODY ZELLEN

SOO KIM

CURTIS MANN

ABIGAIL REYNOLDS

KIM RUGG

MICKEY SMITH

ISHMAEL RANDALL WEEKS

PETER WEGNER

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UNIVERSITY

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Class of 2012 BFA Graphic Design



G U G G E N H E I M
GALLERY

The Department of Art will present provocative exhibitions and educational programming that provide a local connection to the national and international dialogue about contemporary art and provide a framework for an active interchange between artists, scholars, students and the community at large. While the exhibitions feature contemporary art, they often address other disciplines and societal issues in general. Integrated into the curriculum, these programs contribute significantly to the Chapman education.



The mission of the Department at Chapman University is to offer a comprehensive education that develops the technical, perceptual, theoretical, historical and critical expertise needed for successful careers in visual art, graphic design and art history. The department supports artists, designers, and scholars within a rigorous liberal arts environment that enriches the human mind and spirit. We foster the artistic and academic growth necessary to encourage lifelong study and practice of the arts through a curriculum that contains strong foundational and historical components as a basis for continued innovations in contemporary practice and scholarship.

Altered Appropriations: Making Strange

“An image is not a permanent referent for those mutable complexities of life which are revealed through it, its purpose is not to make us perceive meaning, but to create a special perception of the object - it creates a vision of the object instead of serving as a means for knowing it”

– Viktor Shklovsky, *Art as Technique*, 1925

Making Strange, a term associated with Russian Formalism, refers to the idea of seeing anew. Viktor Shklovsky who coined the term defamiliarization describes it as “the technique of forcing the audience to see common things in an unfamiliar or strange way, in order to enhance perception of the familiar.” The artists in *Altered Appropriations: Making Strange* seek out new ways of visualizing and representing the familiar. While an obsessive practice and an interest in process links them, their relationship to language, architecture, and history is the thread that binds them together. They explore how the two dimensional becomes three, how the photographic surface can be manipulated, and how appropriated texts and images can combine to form surprising juxtapositions.

Abigail Reynolds (b. 1970, lives and works in London) ingeniously weaves together different versions of the same image. Usually these are reproductions of famous London monuments that have been depicted in guidebooks throughout the twentieth century—like the British Museum, The Clock Tower or Piccadilly Circus. Reynolds selects photographs culled from different sources and carefully aligns the images so specific parts visually coincide. The images are never the exact same size and are usually taken from slightly different vantage points, often decades apart. One image may be black and white and the other color. Without removing any part of the original, Reynolds cuts and then folds the images joining them by making triangular shapes that slightly rise above the surface. The shapes create a patterned surface that weaves together different eras. In her *Universal Now* Series Reynolds hopes to “resurrect the unregarded book plate and forgotten photographers that stood in the same place at different times bringing these moments into a dialogue with the present.” Reynolds’ montages often include captions and bits of text and expand out from the boundary of the rectangle. Her images collapse time while expanding space.



Abigail Reynolds, *British Museum 1965/1971, 2009*

Like Reynolds, **Kim Rugg** (b. 1963 in Canada, lives and works in London) begins with appropriated imagery. Her material is the daily newspaper, usually on a day where the news was significant. In her newspaper collages the source and the structure is recognizable but the text is unreadable, becoming a form of concrete poetry. Rugg's restructuring is clearly based on a specific system, following a rule set that creates beautiful gibberish. She obsessively cuts apart pages of the newspaper—be it *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Daily Mirror* or *USA Today*—isolating every character, then rearranging the letters alphabetically. She similarly rearranges the photographs that illustrate a news story, breaking them into small squares that are ordered from light to dark. The essence of the newspaper remains intact as she maintains the original column width and height and the placement of the stories. Yet her collages obfuscate. Rugg subverts meaning, creating “pieces that are objects and not images or representations.” She states, “I reduce the images into a palette of material, matter that forms the building blocks of the new work...when I work with printed materials I am turning them back into objects as I obliterate their meaning to reveal their texture.” Rugg's works beg to be scrutinized closely. She indulges in creating depth by building up her surfaces, piecing together tiny fragments of text and images and she delights in the obsessive qualities of her process.



Kim Rugg, *Bad Boy, 2007*

What is it about the photographic surface that some artists treat it as sacred, while others casually deface it? Many artists find it easier to obscure found images than their own. **Curtis Mann** (b. 1979, lives and works in Chicago, IL) begins by perusing the internet, searching on sites like *Flickr* for a series of images that he can download and manipulate. More often than not the images depict the disasters of war. Mann's process is to print the appropriated images he finds onto photographic paper and then uses bleach to selectively remove areas of the image creating the aura of a war zone. The erosion of the physical materials becomes a metaphor for erased knowledge, and the process of subtraction suggests the possibility of beginning again. “What I am erasing is the ability to respond too quickly to the original images. Through the work, I am trying to disrupt our notion of how to read a photograph in such a short amount of time and be able to digest all of the details a photograph so generously gives us.” Mann questions photographic veracity on all levels. Can he trust the original he selects? Is it an accurate



Curtis Mann, *Entrance*, 2008

depiction of an event? Of course, all images are subjective and Mann allows for that subjectivity to enter the work by insisting that the original is merely a jumping off point for him to insert his point of view. Mann's photographs are political and social commentaries on the landscape of war. Familiar snapshots become defamiliarized through Mann's use of chemicals—bleach as well as varnish. His images glow, becoming a dreamlike landscape of the known and the unknown simultaneously.

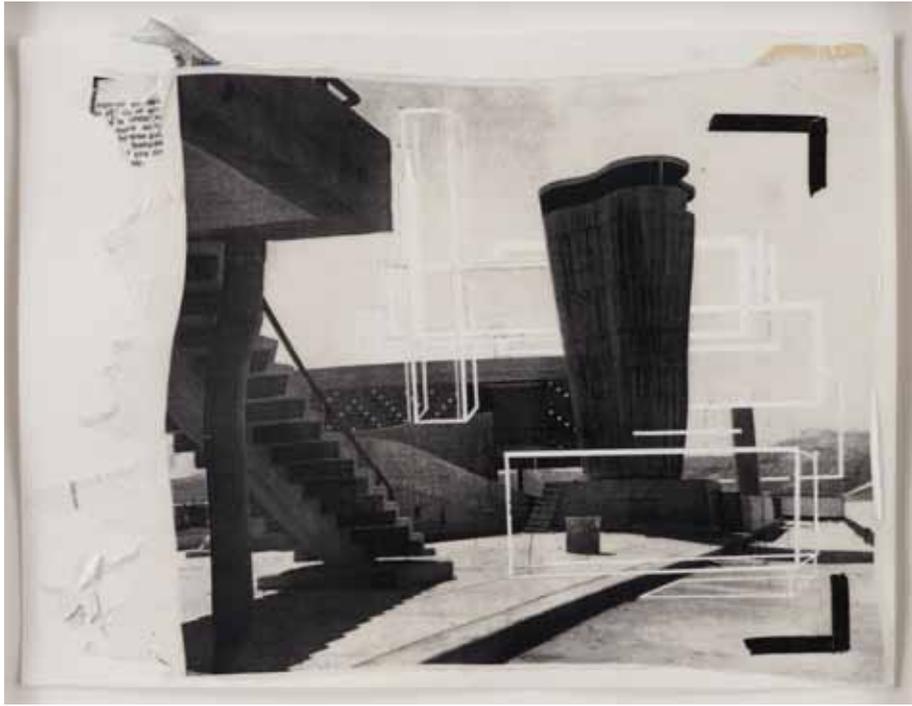
Soo Kim (b. 1969 in South Korea, lives and works in Los Angeles, CA) is also interested in where the known meets the unknown. Kim's intricate interventions into the photographic surface seamlessly fuse with the scene depicted. Her process of removal is a time consuming yet meditative one. Using an X-acto knife she cuts out specific parts of the photograph, what appears in retrospect to be superfluous information. The original images depict places she has visited and photographed knowing her compositions would become stripped of essential information. She removes shadows, skins of buildings, and rooftops leaving a transparent structure. Sometimes she fills these voids with intricate patterns. In her images, Kim combines photographs taken at different vantage points to create each image. The final object is a sandwich of two photographs. Some of the absences are filled in by the background that remains, (for example an expanse of sea), while others remain empty becoming an intricate layering of cut out shapes. This layering allows different levels of visual information to be gleaned. Kim presents her works between plexiglass so that the voids can be filled by the color and texture of the gallery wall. One looks at the surface, then through it. Kim believes "the lengthy process required to create the photographs infuses them with a slowness that finds its counterpart in the amount of time it takes viewers to read them." Inserting an appropriated design



Soo Kim, *Among Themselves*, 2010

element on or in an image of architecture conflates the two and redirects the reading of the original. The patterns created on the surface of Soo Kim's photographs not only flatten pictorial space, but also reference the history of pattern design.

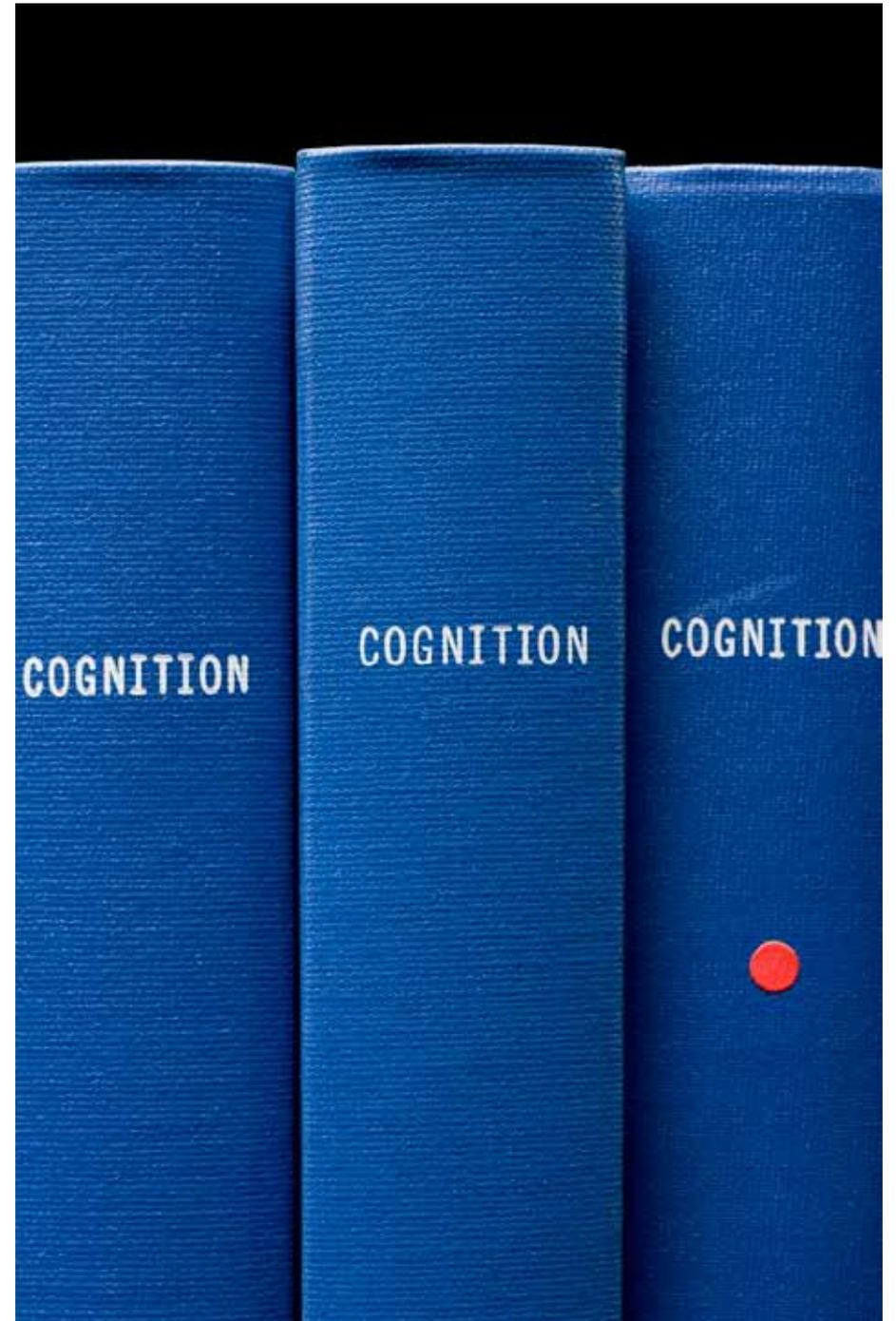
Like Kim, **Ishmael Randall Weeks** (b. 1976 in Peru, lives and works in Lima and Brooklyn, NY) is interested in "issues of place, transformation, escape, collapse, and nomadic existence." Randall Weeks begins by making photographic transfers of images of buildings taken from books of architecture, for example those that depict Le Corbusier's renowned structures. The crisp book image becomes distorted and torn, as the transfer process is never seamless and Randall Weeks does not clean up the rough edges that occur. He even retains fragments of the descriptive text and caption. These transfer drawings (as he calls them) purposely distort the elegance of the original reproduction. The image of the building is further disrupted by the addition of linear elements that are cut into the surface. Weeks speaks about the cuts as subjective drawings on top of loaded symbolic images, and that his structural incisions on the surface add a layer of fragility. By collaging disparate architectural sources and references (Le Corbusier, Gordon Matta-Clark, Buckminster Fuller), Randall Weeks transforms the recognizable into something poetically elusive. These intimate works have a dreamlike quality that support Randall Weeks' desire to create images about a sense of place.



Ishmael Randall Weeks, *Untitled*, 2009

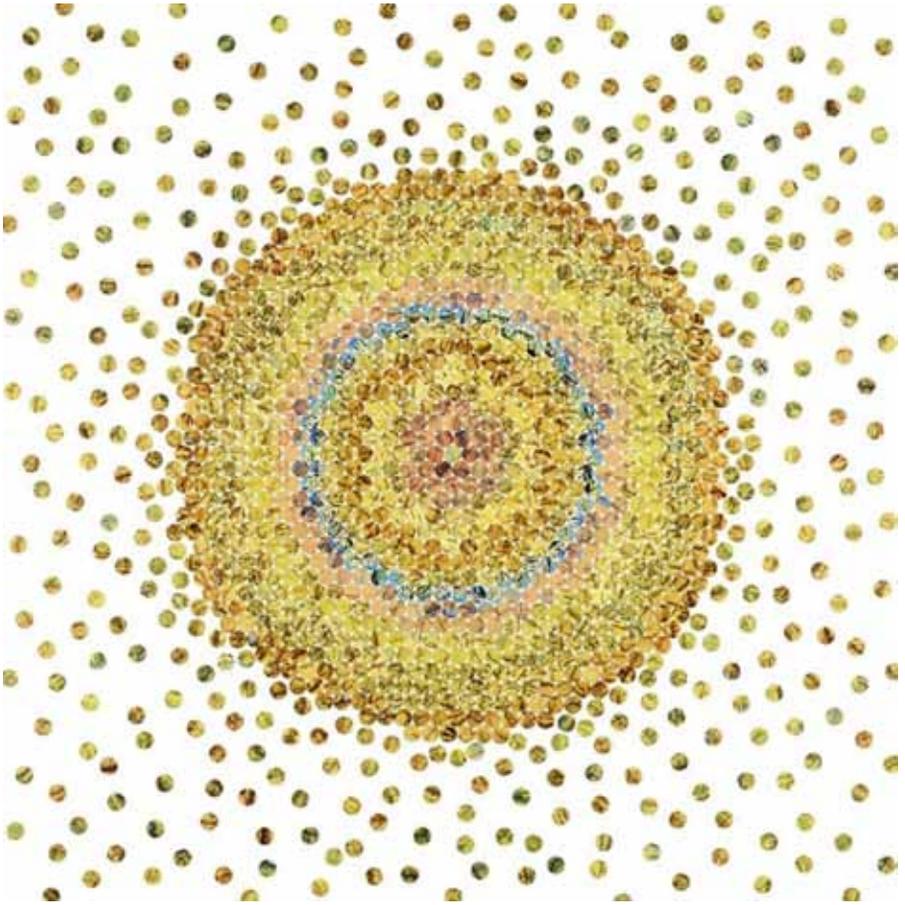
Language, be it visual or textual, is paramount to the artists in *Altered Appropriations*. **Mickey Smith's** (b. 1969 in Duluth, MN, lives and works in New York, NY) work redirects the meaning of the words printed on the spines of bound books found on reference shelves. Smith makes images in libraries— a place where the construction and presentation of language is the dominant ideology. Rather than appropriate other's images, she creates her own by photographing systems of organization. In an extended series entitled *Volume* she isolates small groups of books, noting how the titles repeat themselves, suggesting that "identity and culture have always been a matter not of neat categories but of vague associations." Because bound periodicals are being replaced by their online counterparts, Smith can be seen as a cultural archeologist. She is interested in language and what meaning can be evoked through the repetition of words. She memorializes the titles of these bound volumes and the memories associated within, documenting them before they become silenced and obsolete.

The formal beauty in Smith's photographs is echoed in **Peter Wegner's** works. Wegner (b. 1963 in South Dakota, lives and works in Berkeley, CA) is also interested in the power of found language. For many years he collected and later transcribed the text at the bottom of paint chips found in hardware stores making poetry from the combination of words and colors. He states, "A color is one thing. A name is another. The problem of naming colors is the problem of poetry: how to describe one thing in terms of another." Wegner's work is about translation, seeing one thing or system in relation to another. Whether he is using paint chips, photography, stacked paper or maps, Wegner subverts the objects original purpose to recognize "the profound strangeness of ordinary things." He begins with an organizing



Mickey Smith, *Cognition*, 2008

system and then breaks it down and reconstitutes it. "A map collapses the world— collapses three dimensions into two, miles into inches, cities into dots." Wegner reduces maps to dots while creating patterns that reference place yet whose coherence never materializes. In his *Reverse Atlas Studies*, holes punched from a map are reconstituted to allude to but not complete that which the original depicted. What would otherwise be discarded becomes the material for Wegner's creations. Wegner has an uncanny ability to create something beautiful while simultaneously injecting it with an intellectual context. In Wegner's work nothing is arbitrary, each element serves a specific purpose which culminates in a dismantling of the world as we know it in order to see it in a new way.



Peter Wegner, *Study I for Reverse Atlas*, 2007

To find, to manipulate, to alter, and finally to represent. But to represent what? This is the question these artists ask. With the advent of digital technologies, appropriation has become commonplace. Anyone can download images, sounds and videos, create mash-ups and post them on *YouTube*, *Flickr* and *Facebook*. But this is not Art. The artists in *Altered Appropriations* may use the computer, but they are still wedded to an analogue process. They collect, cut, collage, destroy, fold, and frame in order to see the world anew. Returning to Shklovsky's desire to enhance perception of the familiar, it becomes evident that because we are bombarded with images, we take them for granted. To link the past to the present, to make connections and to invest in a new way of interpreting the world around us is articulated in the works of these artists. In making strange, they make sense of the world we live in in order to appreciate it aesthetically, conceptually and critically.

Jody Zellen