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Indifferent attitude: The readymade, the tableau, and the photographic medium

A exegesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at
Massey University Wellington, New Zealand.

Shaun Waugh

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Abstract

This thesis considers the notion of the 'pictorial'. This sits in opposition to conceptual art's more deliberate, rationalised, and theoretical working methods. My aim is to explore a balance through the combination of both 'pictorial' and 'conceptual' strategies.

The studio submission *Indifferent Attitude* uses subtle shifts in production techniques to present a fractured suite of photographic works. In so doing, it plays with the convention of photographic practice and resists any requirement to provide a clear sense of limits.

Indifferent attitude: The readymade, the tableau, and the photographic medium

'The readymade can later be looked for.'[1] Marcel Duchamp's instruction is significant to this exegesis. The statement conjures the moment that a readymade is selected and, as I will argue, validates how a photographic image can be taken. It highlights concerns around artistic selection, whether based on chance or highly orchestrated, and the relationship between the readymade and photographic traditions in 20th century art which underpin the conceptual turn of the 1960s.

If photography is close to the condition of the readymade, it is because the medium also looks for a moment, capturing fragments from everyday life. Of relevance to my work and this exegesis is a will towards stripping photography of its 'artistic pretentions' and the principle of indifferent selection.[2] The central tenet of this exegesis traces the legacies of the readymade inscribed upon the photographic medium through a selection of critical writings and conceptual artists' use of photography in relation to Duchamp's legacy. A key text is Margaret Iversen's 2004 essay *Readymade, Found Object, Photograph* alongside Nancy Foote's *The Anti-Photographers*, originally published in *Art Forum* September 1976. Iversen explores the distinction between art and photography. Foote describes Alfred Steiglitz's 'photography for photography's sake' as an attempt towards self-referentiality, and how his positioning of photography within the climate of modernism was overturned, decades later, by the Conceptual artists' reliance on the photograph as documentation tool and their preference for 'snapshot-like amateurism'.[3]

This exegesis will show how the various strategies I have employed in my work play with Duchampian notions of artistic indifference, containment, and selection by treating the photographic image as readymade.

Photography served Duchamp's purposes. Most of what we know about Duchamp's original readymades, produced between 1913 and 1921, stem from photographic images – the most famous taken by Alfred Steiglitz of *Fountain* in 1917 (fig 1). I have wondered if Stieglitz ever imagined the ramifications that photographing *Fountain* would have on the visual art of the late 20th and 21st centuries.

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[1] Marcel Duchamp, *Boîte Verte* (The Green Box, 1934).
[2] Nancy Foote, 'The Anti-Photographers', in *The Last Picture Show*, ed. Douglas Fogle, (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2003), 24.
[3] Ibid.

Fig 1. Alfred Stieglitz, *Fountain* photograph of sculpture by Marcel Duchamp, 1917.

Through his New York gallery *291* and publication *Camera Work*, Stieglitz introduced the American public to leading avant-garde European artists, and by 1917 he was at the forefront of modern art in America. With this knowledge, it is easy to assume that Stieglitz would have understood, to some extent anyway, the lasting influence Duchamp and his readymade has had on contemporary art. Yet it is unknown if he recognised or perceived its influence or potential impact on photography.

The fact that this most notorious readymade survived the year 1917 through a photograph raises an interesting point for me as a photographic practitioner. The equation of photography with the readymade paradigm de-emphasises the technical aspects of the discipline. I deliberately downplay technical production skills in components of my work. For example, in *Shoebox lids as frames*, I use pre-existing found images sourced from Flickr™.[4] Lids from shoeboxes that have been sourced from the store 'Number One Shoe Warehouse' are used as found frames.

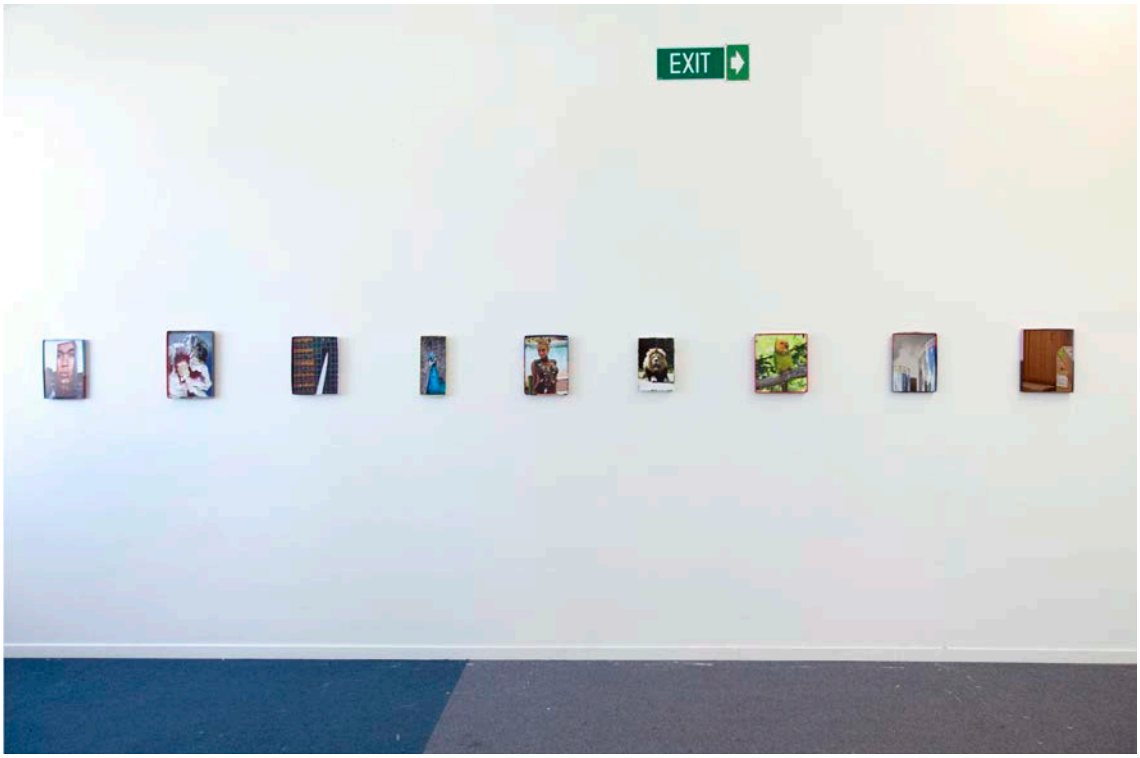

Fig 2. Shaun Waugh *Shoebox lids as frames*, crit installation view, 2011.

These frames demarcate the traditional border to a work of art while at the same time debunking its norm. Conversely, these de-skilling and anti-aesthetic strategies are counteracted in the *Covenant cut-outs* series, where digital manipulation is used to mask and conceal parts of the photograph under a single colour as an attempt to foreground the role of selection.

[4] Flickr is an image-hosting website that was created in 2004. It is a popular website for users to share and embed personal photographs. It was reported in June 2011 that Flickr had a total of 51 million registered members and 80 million unique visitors. In August 2011, the site reported that it was hosting more than 6 billion images. This number continues to grow steadily. Photos and videos can be accessed from Flickr without the need to register an account, but an account must be made in order to upload content onto the website. Wikipedia, "Flickr", accessed, 14 October 2012. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flickr.

In my own work, I also appropriate strategies present in Duchamp's notion of the 'readymade' and the 'tableau'. This enables links to discussion of the work of Ed Ruscha, John Baldessari, and Jeff Wall. In particular, I have examined how two of Duchamp's works – *3 Standard Stoppages* (1913-14) and *Étant donnés* (1946-66) – influenced Ruscha's *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, Baldessari's *Choosing* series, and Wall's *Destroyed Room*.

The works of Ruscha, Wall, and Baldessari have influenced conceptual and pictorial directions in my studio work. This is because their strategies resist any requirement to provide a clear sense of limits. An example of this is Ed Ruscha's decision to photograph only 26 gasoline between Los Angeles and Oklahoma City simply because of his preference for the number 26. This form of decision-making is especially critical because my work considers the notion of the 'pictorial' as allowing for a more intuitive sense of decision-making. This sits in opposition to conceptual art's more deliberate, rationalised, and theoretical working methods. My aim is to explore a balance in photography's self-reflexive critique through the combination of both 'pictorial' and 'conceptual' strategies. For example, *Aeroplane hit by lightning* (fig 2), the first tableau the viewer encounters in The Engine Room, encapsulates and sets up the relationship of the viewer to the readymade photographic image as '*regardeur*' – a relationship that is explored further in the other works in the main gallery.

A watershed publication for me is *Photography after Conceptual Art* (2010), in which the editors bring together a series of essays that champion and challenge Jeff Wall's claim that recent photography represents a turn away from conceptual art as 'the last moment of the pre-history of photography as art'. [5]
My studio work has attempted to investigate Wall's claim in light of Duchamp's legacy and to explore the new possibilities and implications of a contemporary photographic practice.

[5] Diamuid Cosetello and Margaret Iversen, eds., 'Introduction: Photography After Conceptual Art' in *Photography After Conceptual Art*, (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 1.

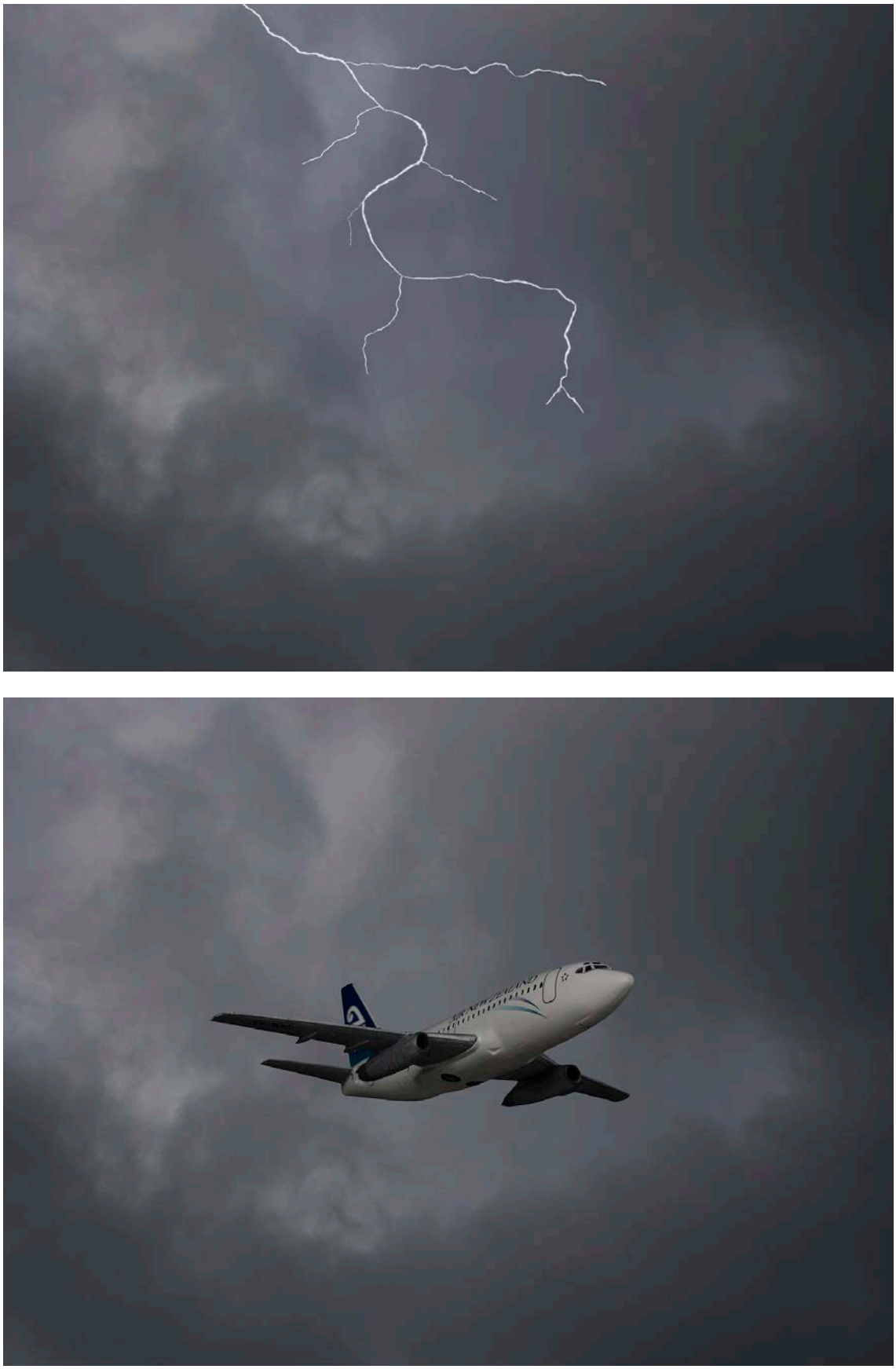

Fig 3. Shaun Waugh *Aeroplane hit by lightning*, 2012.

Duchamp's *indifferent selection*

The readymade is Duchamp's most famous concept, a paradigm that shifted from a reliance on an object's visible form to establishing meaning with the assent of the viewer.[6] The first object Duchamp declared to be a readymade was *Bicycle Wheel* (1913) (fig 4), a bicycle wheel fastened on top of a wooden stool. When Duchamp exhibited the work in the 1960s, he offered viewers the chance to spin the wheel and thus set it in motion. During the 1960s and 1970s, Duchamp's notion of the readymade began to enjoy a delayed reception and became highly influential on art practice. It offered the chance to highlight art's conception, deconstructing the aesthetic canons of painting and sculpture, while also raising philosophical questions about the traditional definitions of art and role of the artist.[7] Duchamp believed that the readymade refuted 'the possibility of defining art' in terms of 'form'.[8]

A key to the readymade's impact is the process of indifferently selecting the object. Duchamp's claim of indifference was inherently one of neutrality. No attention to aesthetic beauty, the complete absence of good and bad 'taste', and only the artist's signature, inscription, or punning titles connected the readymade to Duchamp's invention.

Fig 4. Marcel Duchamp, *Bicycle Wheel*, 1913, replica 1964.

[6] Hans Belting, *Looking Through Duchamp's Door: Art and Perspective in the Work of Duchamp. Sugimoto. Jeff Wall*, trans. Steven Lindberg, (Köln: W. König 2009), 49.
[7] Joseph Kosuth claims in his 1969 essay *Art After Philosophy* that Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel* is the origin of Conceptual Art.
[8] Belting, *Looking Through Duchamp's Door*, 49.

It is important to qualify the nature of 'selection' and 'indifference' in regard to aesthetics. In her 2004 essay *Readymade, Found Object, Photograph*, Margaret Iversen describes how the readymade '…embodies different aspects of the most influential account of what might be called the subject dimension of our relation to art – Immanuel Kant's conception of the aesthetic'.[9] In this text, Iverson argues that the most important defining feature in aesthetic judgment, according to Kant's *The Critique of Judgement*, is its 'disinterestedness'. Iverson claims that, although there is no clear comparison between Kant's disinterestedness and Duchamp's indifference, the anti-aesthetic tradition in twentieth-century art is a development of one of the defining features of the aesthetic itself, and became a strategy for short-circuiting subjectivity as qualifier for the relationship between artist and work of art.[10] Duchamp, after Kant,[11] rejected retinal and pictorial fascination. Instead, he shifted emphasis away from the 'retinal shudder' – Duchamp's inflammatory remark that rejected the depictive idealism of painting. Duchamp's modus operandi was to place emphasis on the idea of 'returning painting to the services of the mind'.

Duchamp's legacy transfers the notion of 'autonomy' from the object of fine art to the cognitive freedom of the artist, best exemplified by the blurring of boundaries between art and life.[12] Duchamp's use of 'indifference' does not suggest lack of interest or care, rather it must be understood as a means to an end, to thwart a trajectory of painting that had come to rely too much upon visual pleasure.

To explain the term 'disinterestedness', Iverson defines three different types of interest: ethical, instrumental, and appetitive interest. Iverson describes how ethical and instrumental interests generally answer a rational demand, but how appetitive interest cannot be determined by something that satisfies a desire or lack.[13] Iverson mentions that typical psychoanalytic categories seem to be of little relevance to this notion of appetitive interest, as it seems that the judgement itself is made by some part of the self that is unlike what we normally think of as subjectivity. Yet, contradictorily, this judgement cannot be objective in the sense of rational or cognitive thought/reason.

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[9] Margaret Iversen, 'Readymade, Found Object, Photograph', *Art Journal*, 63, 2, (2004): 45.
[10] Iversen, 'Readymade, Found Object, Photograph', 48.
[11] This is a play on the title of Thierry de Duve's 1996 book *Kant after Duchamp* in which the first two chapters deal with the subjective experience of art as understood by Martians who visit planet Earth and encounter art but who hold no previous understanding of the term.
[12] Michael Newman, 'Towards the Reinvigoration of the 'Western Tableau'': Some Notes on Jeff Wall and Duchamp', *Oxford Art Journal*, 30,1, (2007): 88, accessed June 18, 2011. doi: 10.1093/oxartj/kcl035.
[13] Iversen, 'Readymade, Found Object, Photograph', 46.

This is because the object of aesthetic judgement escapes rational definition and cognitive clarity, because it is the focus of an opaque, suggestive, direct sensory experience. It is this opacity that stimulates the free play of imagination and understanding.[14]
As I will discuss in regards to my *Shoebox lids as frames* and *Covenant cut-out* series, my work uses concepts of indifference, containment, and selection to explore my interest in how this opacity of imagination is stimulated in the viewer when bringing together multiple sets of images and ideas. Because it relates to the sensory and mental activity occasioned by the object, aesthetic judgement is said to be reflective rather than determinate. The activity of judgement is pleasurable in itself, as it satisfies the mind's desire for coherence without '…subsuming the sensuous particular under any definite concept and so bringing the activity to an end'.[15]

Iversen furthers the debate by describing how Kant offered very few examples of the kind of experience he was describing in *The Critique of Judgement*, but how the 19th century German philosophers Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Arthur Schopenhauer connected Kant's disinterested aesthetic attitude to seventeenth century Dutch still-life genre painting. 'Schopenhauer's stress on the dominance of the will in our everyday lives meant that he particularly admired Netherlandish depictions of the everyday, undistorted by appetite or desire.'[16] Iversen expands on this theory: '…what is being described here is an art practice that tries to circumvent selfish desire, power, mastery, possessiveness – the whole complex of relations that normally governs our lives, believing the accomplishment of this is called disinterestedness.'[17] Iversen acknowledges Arthur Danto's point that 'Duchamp pushed the logic of disinterestedness to such extremes that it bites its own tail'[18] with Danto stating that '…Duchamp's anti-aesthetic carries with it an implicit anti-subjectivity which is to be found at the very heart of Kantian aesthetics'.[19]

The readymade shifted questions away from aesthetic experience to questions of what constitutes a work of art. Through its reductive strategies, the readymade questioned the need to involve craft or whether the artist's signature, or the location of the object in an art gallery, was enough to single out an object as art.

[14] Iversen, 'Readymade, Found Object, Photograph', 46.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid., 47.
[19] Ibid.

Iversen believes that, through these reductive strategies, the readymade forces us to reflect on the relation of art to commodity and 'the aesthetic to the appetitive'.[20]

The notions of indifference and disinterestedness are important to the readymade because they escape the expectations of taste, which can be defined as 'a repetition of something already accepted'.[21] In the *Shoebox-lids as frames*, the formal qualities of the shoebox-lid, rather than 'artistic' judgements of taste, determine the selection of the image from Flickr. This strategy illuminates my interest in the practice of letting the materials determinate the choice of image. These ideas are also demonstrated in the *Covenant cut-out* series, where the choice of colour that fills in the masked space is randomly selected from a photographic colour reference table. That table is referenced in *Colorchecker chart* (fig 5). Its colour patches have 'spectral reflectances'[22] that are intended to mimic those of natural objects such as human skin, foliage, flowers or primary colours typical of photographic processes such as cyan, magenta, and yellow.[23]

Fig 5. *ColorChecker chart*

[20] Iversen, 'Readymade, Found Object, Photograph', 47.
[21] Ibid., 46.
[22] A reflectance is the fraction of electromagnetic power reflected from a specific sample.
[23] Wikipedia contributors, "Colorchecker", *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ColorChecker (accessed 17 October 2012).

The Readymade and Photography: Ed Ruscha, John Baldessari, and negating Duchamp's *3 Standard stoppages*

Without a doubt Duchamp, with his good friend and collaborator Man Ray, used photography for conceptual ends. Duchamp rivaled the pictorial conventions of painting when creating the portrait of his notorious alias *Rrose Sélavy* (fig 6).

Fig 6. Man Ray, Duchamp as *Rrose Sélavy*, 1920-21.

Often Duchamp toyed with photography's mechanical devices, taking double exposures, creating three-dimensional stereoscopic images, or deliberately shifting the camera when taking an image to eschew autonomous control. Such strategies foreshadow Canadian photographer and art historian Jeff Wall's claim that 'conceptual art's essential achievements are either created in the form of photographs or are otherwise mediated by them'.[24] In her 1976 essay *Anti-Photographers*, Nancy Foote explores the notion that, due to Duchamp's underpinning of conceptual art, photography is stripped of its 'artistic pretentions'.[25] The conceptual artist of the 1960s believed that art-photography was too comfortably nestled in its own pictorial (truthful) tradition of depiction and had 'yet to accomplish its preliminary auto-dethronement, or deconstruction, which the other arts had established as fundamental to their development'.[26] The self-critique that previously had occurred in painting and sculpture meant those mediums had moved away from their own historic aestheticised foundation of depiction to a position where an art object was art because of its declarative gesture: it acted like art.[27]

The conceptual artist's use of photography-as-readymade was generally explored in two ways. Initially, in the conceptual, proto-conceptual, and post-conceptual practices of the 1960s and 1970s, photography was used as a tool for documenting and presenting artistic processes. Artists such as Richard Long, Bruce Nauman, and Ed Ruscha captured 'studio-events' and artistic gestures or actions, whereas in the 1980s artists such as Sherrie Levine, Richard Prince, and John Baldessari shifted to a more self-conscious 'anti-aesthetic' practice of postmodern appropriation.[28]

Art historian Michael Newman suggests that Prince and Levine are indebted to Duchamp because they were treating the image as a readymade by re-photographing and re-using images and through the act of selection – a strategy that Duchamp had likened to operating with an 'aesthetic indifference'.[29]

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[24] Matthew S. Witkovsky, ed., 'The Unfixed Photograph', in *Light Years: Conceptual Art and the Photograph 1964—1977*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 16.
[25] Foote, 'The Anti-Photographers', 24.
[26] Virginia Adams, 'Illusion and Disillusionment in the Works of Jeff Wall and Gerhard Richter: Picturing (post) Modern Life', (PhD diss., University of Maryland, 2007), 1.
[27] Jeff Wall, 'Marks of Indifference: Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art', in *The Last Picture Show*, ed. Dougles Fogle, (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2003), 33.
[28] Cosetello and Iversen, *Introduction: Photography After Conceptual Art*, 1.
[29] Newman, 'Towards the Reinvigoration of the 'Western Tableau'', 85-86.

In the introduction of his seminal text *'Marks of Indifference': Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art*, Jeff Wall discusses the importance of conceptual art's role in transforming the terms and conditions within which photography defined its relationship with the arts, establishing photography 'as an institutionalised modernist form evolving explicitly through the dynamics of its auto-critique'.[30] Wall understood that photography could not challenge its own historic aestheticised foundation of depiction, like painting and sculpture, because photography by its very physical nature must *depict*. Therefore, Wall believed that, for photography to participate in similar conversations as the other mediums, and to stimulate its own auto-critique, it had to put the necessary condition of depiction into active play and transcend 'the worn-out criteria for photography as sheer picture-making'.[31]

Wall argues that the dialectics of 1920s and 1930s avant-garde experimentation in painting and sculpture, and the critique of the non-autonomous work of art, enabled the possibility of art works created through the imitation of photojournalism.[32] In his widely celebrated and yet highly criticised text *Marks of Indifference*, Wall argues that the conceptual artists turned to the snapshot and amateur photojournalism to overcome the social exclusivity of art and break the opposition between avant-garde and the kitsch.[33]

Margaret Iverson is critical of Wall's reading that conceptual photography simply mimics the non-autonomous use of the medium, whether that is amateur or journalistic, believing that this reading diminishes the relationship to early avant-garde movements such as Dada and surrealism.[34] Artists such as Hannah Hoch and Raoul Hausmann cut pictures from magazines and newspapers and pasted them together in composite images to create what they and other Berlin Dadaists called 'photomontage'.[35] Hoch and Hausmann, in particular, celebrated photography's mechanical aspects and used the appropriation of the mass media to provide endless material for the Dadaists' scathing critiques.

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[30] Wall, 'Marks of Indifference', 32.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid., 33.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Margaret Iversen, 'Auto-maticity: Ruscha and Performative Photography', in *Photography after Conceptual Art*, eds., Diarmoid Costello and Margaret Iverson, (Chichester; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 25.
[35] Mary Warner Marien, ed., 'A New Vision', in *Photography: A Cultural History*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002),249.

Mary Warner Marien recounts that "the disjunctive cuts of photomontage effectively captured the fissures and shocks of modernity",[36] describing how photomontage was more than just formal inventiveness, rather, it attempted to reflect the rapid changes and disruptions to daily life in the period immediately after World War I. Substituting scissors and glue for brushes and paint, and calling themselves *monteurs* (mechanics) rather than artists, the Berlin Dadaists employed photomontage in their radical assault on traditional art.[37]

These strategies opposed pioneering art photography practitioners such as Alfred Stieglitz, who had sought to translate the self-referentiality of the modernist position in painting into a "self-consciousness about photography for photography's sake".[38] In Wall's view, conceptual artists sought to make photography a critical medium by articulating and up-ending its own aesthetic assumptions. They believed that, through self-critique, photography ought to be understood as an artistic discipline participating in modernism.[39] Robin Kelsey believes that this argument holds a disarming brilliance, in which Wall dismantles perceptions of art photography as, paradoxically, a precondition to photography becoming modernist art.[40]

A widely cited example of the proto-conceptual/amateur imitation of photojournalism is Ed Ruscha's *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (1963) (fig 6). This took as its subject a photo-essay format in light of Duchamp's readymade. Ed Ruscha is quoted as saying, 'mine are simply reproductions of a photo… thus [*Twentysix Gasoline Stations*] is not a book to house a collection of art photographs – they are technical data like industrial photography'.[41]

Ruscha regarded his photographs as readymades whose aesthetic quality became a matter of secondary importance and virtual indifference.[42] With *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, Ruscha set himself the simple brief of photographing all the gasoline stations along Route 66 between Los Angles and Oklahoma City.

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[36] Mary Warner Marien, ed., 'A New Vision', in *Photography: A Cultural History*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002),249.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Foote, 'The Anti-Photographers', 24.
[39] Robin Kelsey, 'Hazarded into the blue', in *Light Years: Conceptual Art and the Photograph 1964—1977*, ed., Matthew S. Witkovsky, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 139.
[40] Kelsey, 'Hazarded into the blue', 137.
[41] Iversen, 'Auto-maticity', 25.
[42] Foote, 'The Anti-Photographers', 25.

He understood the photographs to be records of these found large-scaled readymades, documenting them as anti-landmarks or poor monuments (fig 7).[43]

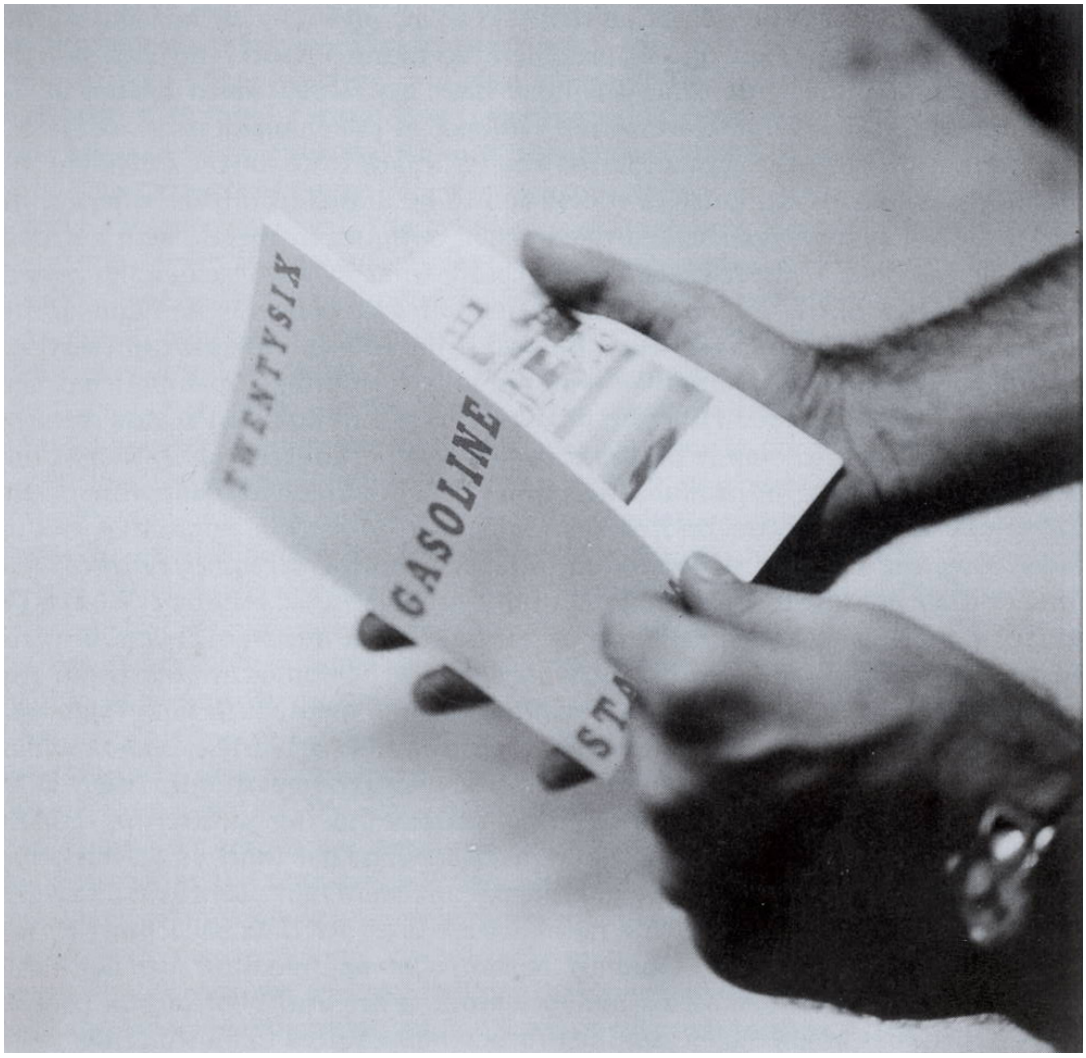

Fig 7. Ed Ruscha, *Hands Flipping Pages (Twentysix Gasoline Stations)*, 1963.

In *Auto-Maticity: Ruscha and Performative Photography* (2010), Margaret Iversen recounts an interview in which Ruscha remarked how *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* began as 'a play on words', expressing how he liked the word 'gasoline' and the quantity 'twenty-six', and how the design for the book cover was finished well before a photograph had even been taken of a single station.[44] Because of the priority given to the title, Iverson believes that Ruscha's work can be understood of a form of instruction, and she cites Duchamp's *3 Standard Stoppages* (1913-14) as its precedent.[45]

[43] Iversen, 'Auto-maticity', 16.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.

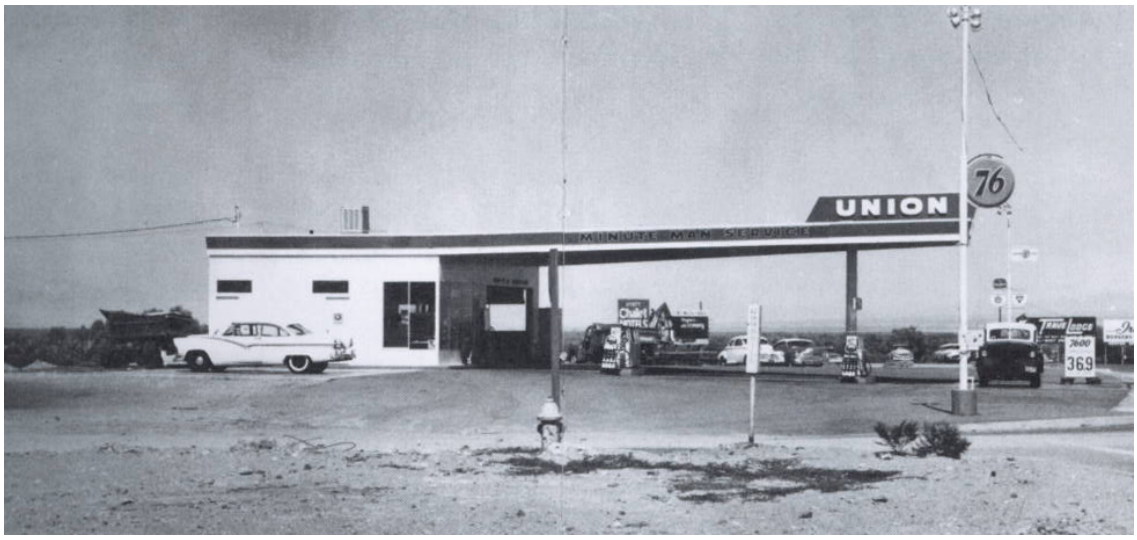

Fig 8. Ed Ruscha, '*Union*, Needles, California, 1962', from *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, 1963.

3 Standard Stoppages (fig 8) is an early example in which a work defined by 'instruction' is clearly manifested. Iversen tells us that *3 Standard Stoppages* is framed by an instruction and cannot be understood without reference to these included by Duchamp in the *Boîte Verte* (The Green Box, 1934):

> '…If a straight horizontal thread is one metre long falls from a height of one metre onto a horizontal plane distorting itself *as it pleases* and creates a new shape of the unit of length…3 patterns obtained in more or less similar conditions: *considered in relation to one another* they are an *approximate reconstitution* of a measure of length.'[46]

[46] Iversen, 'Auto-maticity', 16.

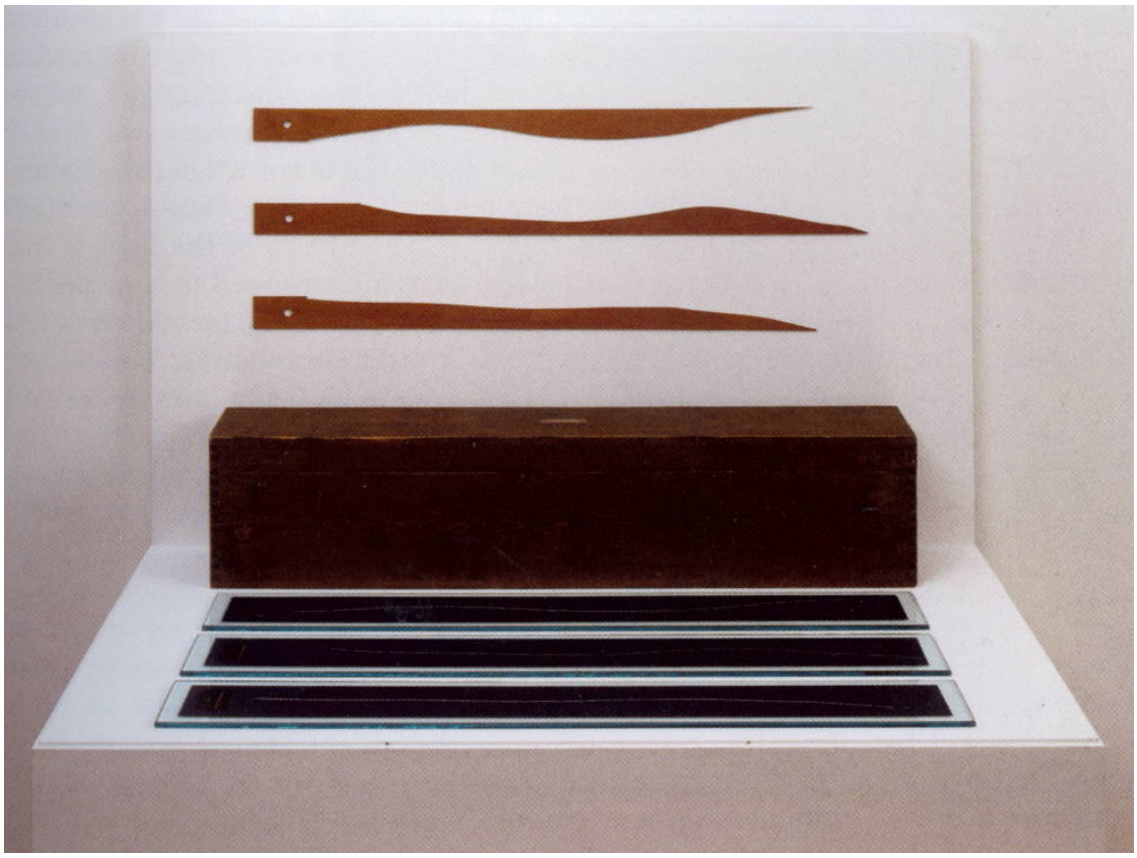

Fig 8. Marcel Duchamp, *3 Standard Stoppages*, 1913-14, replica 1964.

Duchamp fastened the three lengths of thread to wood panels and made templates of them. These he placed in an old croquet box as 'canned chance' to replace the standard unit of measure – the one metre rule through which people have become accustomed to in daily lives as standardised law.

Iversen compares Duchamp's detailed description to Ruscha's own form of instruction when recording those twenty-six gasoline stations on route from Los Angles to Oklahoma City. She believes that in both *3 Standard Stoppages* and *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* instruction dictates the initial conditions of the experiment without determining the outcome. Instruction is used as a tool for abdicating authorial control to generate chance effects and unanticipated outcomes – hence Duchamp's 'canned chance'.[47]

[47] Iversen, 'Auto-maticity', 16.

In *Auto-Maticity: Ruscha and Performative Photography* (2010), Iversen extends her exploration of the photographic medium in relation to Duchamp's canned chance. While *3 Standard Stoppages* did not involve photography, Iverson believes that Duchamp was fully aware of the camera's significance – as an apparatus designed to produce canned chance effects and unexpected outcomes.
If the modern camera provided relative ease in producing the desired result, it is its automaticity and mechanical nature that can lead to the unintended 'happy accident'. Iversen quotes American photographer Walker Evans' description of how the camera excels at 'reflecting swift chance, disarray, wonder, and experiment', to support what she believes is an 'intrinsic connection … between the instructional means of short-circuiting authorial agency, of ensuring non-interference, and a certain use of the medium of photography'.[48]

Similarly to in Ruscha's *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, Duchamp's notion of canned chance and short-circuiting authorial agency through instruction is also at play in my work *Shoebox-lids as frames*. With *Shoebox-lids as frames*, the intention was to exercise an understanding of the various photographic strategies and principles employed by the conceptual artists of the 1970s or 1980s. It was important for me to refer to *Shoebox-lids as frames* (figs 10-11) as an exercise, because the intention in making the work was to 'stretch out' and 'run' with some of the key concepts I am exploring within my research. Throughout the exercise, I considered Ruscha's declaration that his photographs are readymades.

For the *Shoebox lids as frames*, I used the strategy of adopting found and appropriated images in a similar vein to that of the conceptual artists of the 1970s or 1980s. Whereas artists such as Sherrie Levine, Richard Prince, or John Baldessari collected their found imagery from popular culture, magazines, and advertising, or in the case of Baldessari old black and white Hollywood film stills, my imagery was collected through the Internet.
I used the popular photo sharing and image hosting website, Flickr™ as the source of my found imagery. Ownership of the appropriated imagery had to be considered, and the images I selected were under contract through Creative Commons/Attribution license. This is a contract where the Flickr™ user has openly submitted their images, letting others, at no charge, copy and distribute their copyrighted work if given credit.

[48] Iversen, 'Auto-maticity', 16-17.

Fig 10. Shaun Waugh, *Shoebox lids as frames*, 2011.

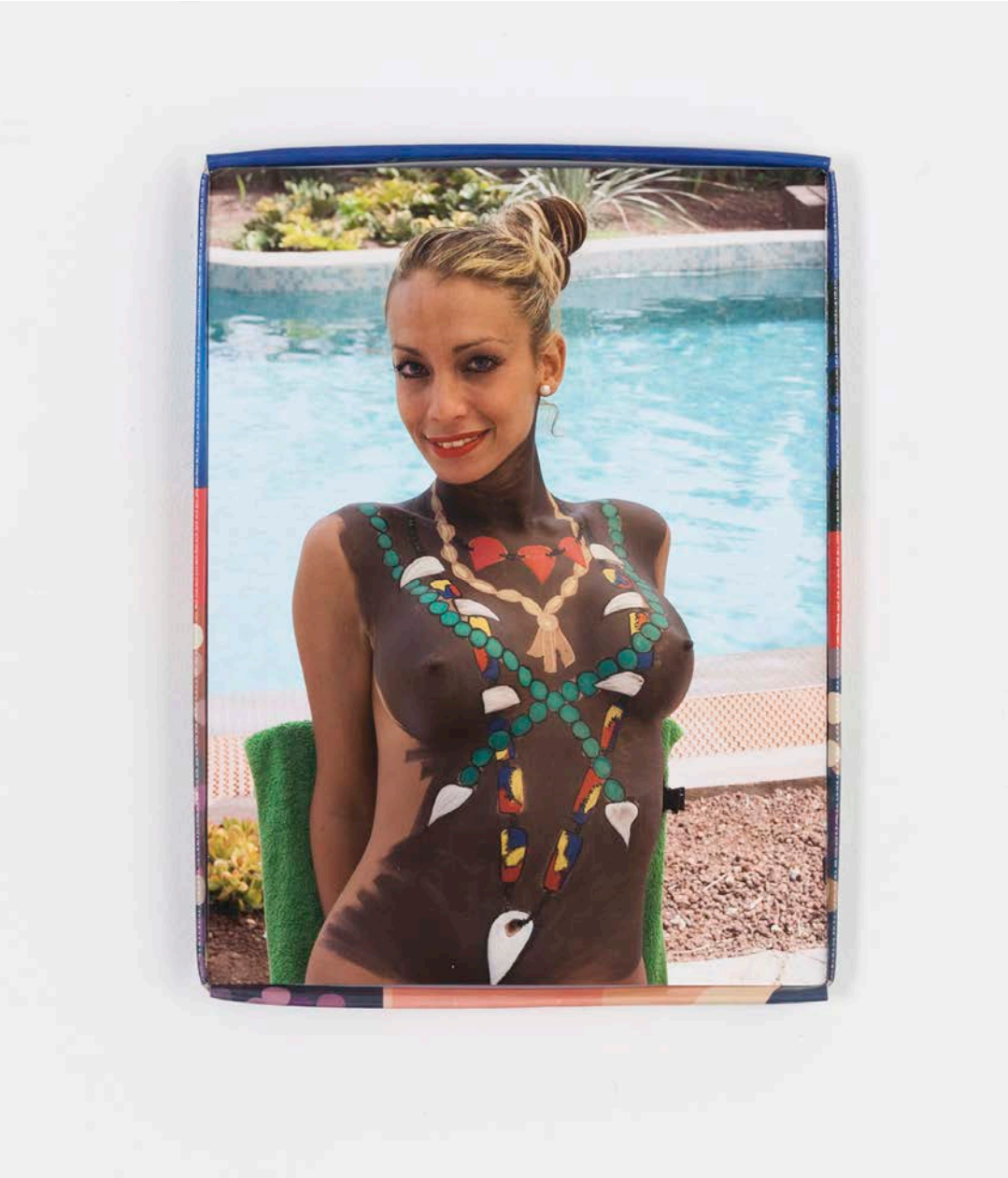

Fig 11. Shaun Waugh, *Shoebox lids as frames*, 2011.

The negation of authorial agency was explored through the setting of limitations on the type of image I was able to choose when making selections from Flickr™ user accounts. I contained my choices to the ten most popular 'tagged' categories, which were: Animals, Architecture, Art, Asia, Australia, Autumn, Baby, Band, Barcelona, and Beach. Ironically, and an unintentionally further short-circuiting of authorial agency, the computer algorithms that Flickr™ use to gather this information form an alphabetically categorized list.

Like *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* or *3 Standard Stoppages*, instruction determined the initial conditions of *Shoebox-lids as frames* without predetermining an outcome. The strategy I repeated was to source a suitable empty shoebox from Number One Shoe Warehouse to act as a frame or mounting device. I then trawled through pages of user-uploaded photographs on Flickr™ to find an image that I thought matched the frame within strict aesthetic guidelines (such as colour and proportionality) within the categories outlined above. I then printed out the photograph, and mounted it in the appropriately chosen frame. It is this combination of selecting and assembling according to predetermined criteria (instructions) that activates the work as a readymade.

Nancy Foote believes that American artist John Baldessari parodies the idea of art through selection, referring us back to Duchamp, though vastly enlarged in scope through the use of photography.[49] In his *Choosing* series, Baldessari calls attention to the process involved in making choices (fig 12). In *Hazarded into the Blue: John Baldessari and Photography in the Early 1970s*, Robin Kelsey suggests that it is worth considering how Baldessari's sustained inquiry into 'pointing' responded to photography's historical refashioning of the Duchampian problem of selection.[50]

Kelsey describes how '…Duchamp's hobgoblins of taste and selection…' were important to Baldessari in the early 1970s. Baldessari's *Choosing (A game for Two Players)* is a photographic series where Baldessari asked participants to select three individual vegetables from an array of a specified type (e.g., green beans). Baldessari then chose one of the three by pointing to it, and a photograph was taken to record this act.

Kelsey believes that Baldessari's *Choosing* series is, among other things, about the indexical selection of a photographic subject.[51] Both Guy Debord and Rosalind Krauss have addressed the photograph's index as stands-in for that which once was real. An event or object can become known through the photographic document. Similarly, it seems, Baldessari determines that a bean or stalk of rhubarb, when pointed to, is selected precisely to be photographed again. Kelsey states that, through photography's automatism, the medium clarifies the irreducible nature of preference. Depicting something through photography can seem like little more than pointing the camera at it, cutting out 'this' portion of the visual field and not 'that'.[52] Kelsey considers that

[49] Foote, 'The Anti-Photographers', 27.
[50] Kelsey, 'Hazarded into the Blue', 141.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.

Baldessari's use of photography in the 1970s was able to negate the role of the artist in aesthetic selection.

> 'Like his modernist predecessors, Baldessari contended with the challenges of making art in an era marked by, on one hand, the impossibility of relying on artistic subjectivity to sustain aesthetic value and, on the other, the impossibility on objective principles, including chance.'[53]

Alongside works like *Choosing (A Game for Two Players)*, Baldessari uses found and collected black and white film stills from Hollywood cinema dumpsters and second-hand shops to arrange and collage into new appropriated pictures, often masking or covering up the central subject of the picture with a colourful circle (fig 13).

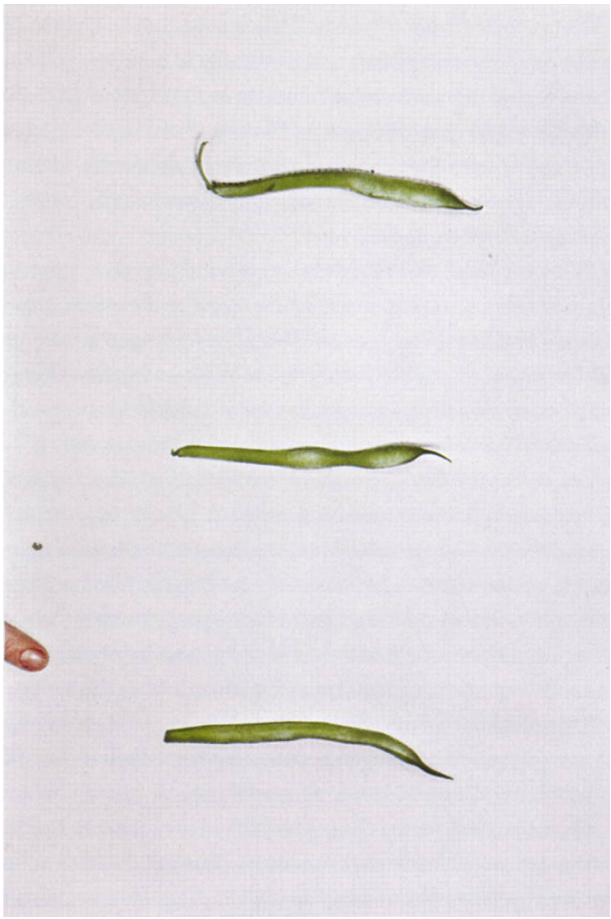

Fig 12. John Baldessari, *Choosing (A game for Two Players): Green Beans*, 1971.

[53] Kelsey, 'Hazarded into the Blue', 142.

Fig 13. John Baldessari, *Studio*, 1988.

Baldessari credits the spectator with the ability to fill in the gaps: 'I am really interested in what conceptual leaps people can make from one bit of information to another and how they can fill in the space.'[54] In a recent exhibition catalogue published in conjunction with Baldessari's show at the Tate Modern, French critic Marie de Brugerolle describes how Baldessari's use of collaged colour cuts into perceived reality and projects a new narrative that is removed from the photograph or object it once was.[55] It is not so much that the removal of part of the existing image causes confusion and intrigue, but that something wholly different is offered in its place.

[54] Marie de Brugerolle, 'Holy Holograms from Hollywood: John Baldessari's Dialectic Imagery', in *Pure Beauty*, eds., Jessica Morgan and Leslie Jones, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Country Museum of Art, 2010), 310.
[55] Ibid.

In his essay *Revealing by Concealing*, Rainer Fuchs believes that the act of Baldessari marking or eliminating things on the surfaces of photographs, using painterly and semiotic means, is essentially an invitation to think about what lies underneath: all the 'repressed, internalised, and sediment content'.[56]

Fig 14. John Baldessari, *Floating Color*, 1972.

Baldessari's use of photography and intertwined use of pictorial and conceptual strategies signposts a precedent of playfulness present within my own practice. For example, the precedent for my *Covenant cut-out* series would be his treatment of the photographic image using colour and form. This is demonstrated in *Floating Color* (1972), a series which consisted of six ink-jet prints showing the artist throwing coloured sheets of paper from the window of a suburban home (fig 14). The pieces of coloured paper are captured poised between ascent and descent 'hovering in photographic suspension'.[57]

My *Covenant cut-out* (fig 15) series provides an opportunity to expand on Fuchs' notion that eliminating or covering up aspects of an image invites a chance to think about the 'internalised and repressed' information a picture holds. As a conceptual photographic project, *Covenant cut-outs* rides on the back of a important landscape project that has been active in New Zealand since 1977. The QE2 National Trust is an independent statutory organization that was set up to 'encourage and promote, for the benefit of New Zealand, the provision, protection, preservation and enhancement of open space'.
It helps farmers protect significant natural and cultural features on their land, usually by the legal mechanism of an open space covenant.[58] This idea of farmers being able to choose to protect bits of their land that they find culturally significant was something that I found fascinating and stirred similar concerns I have in the challenges of artistic selection.

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[56] Rainer Fuchs, 'Revealing by Concealing', in *Pure Beauty*, eds., Jessica Morgan and Leslie Jones, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Country Museum of Art, 2010), 51.
[57] Kelsey, 'Hazarded into the Blue', 138.
[58] 'About us', QE2 National Trust: Open Space New Zealand, accessed, March 17, 2012. http://www.openspace.org.nz/Site/About_QEII/default.aspx.

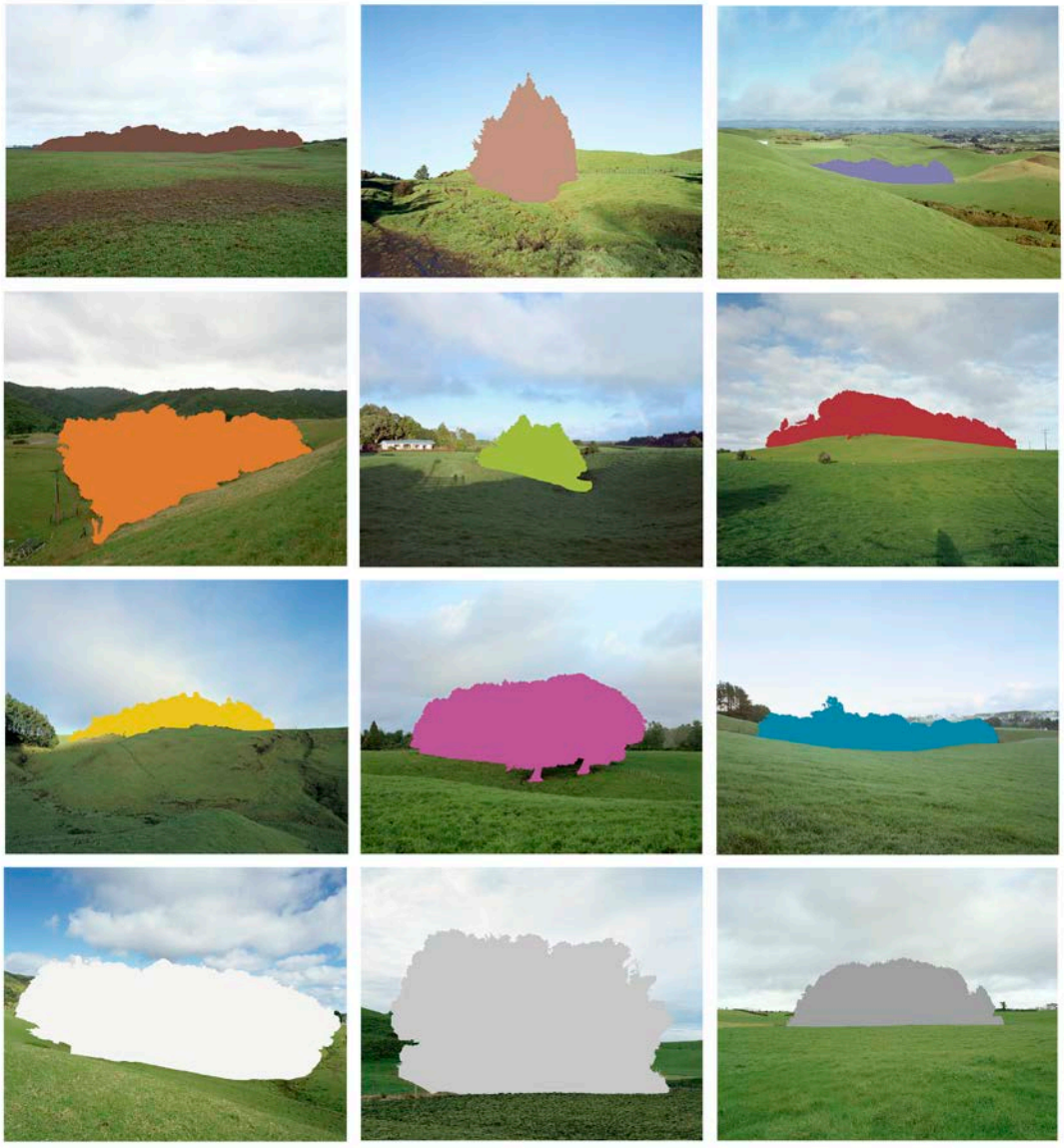

Fig 15. Shaun Waugh, *Covenant cut-outs*, 2011-12.

By choosing to photograph then digitally mask, or cut-out, the central subject of the picture – the covenanted clump of native New Zealand forest – I am able to highlight simultaneously both the concerns around the landowner's selection and those of artistic selection. Similar to Baldessari, I add and subtract collaged colour elements to photographic images to emphasise the process of selection. In ascribing techniques appropriated from Baldessari, the *Covenant cut-outs* are an attempt to place those techniques within the language of photography as readymade. In doing so, I wish to consider how Duchamp's *indifferent selection* may also apply to the farmer choosing to protect one section of bush over another.

The idea of choice, that the farmer or landowner makes to protect sections of their land is reiterated or mimicked in the photograph *Man Shaving* (fig 16).

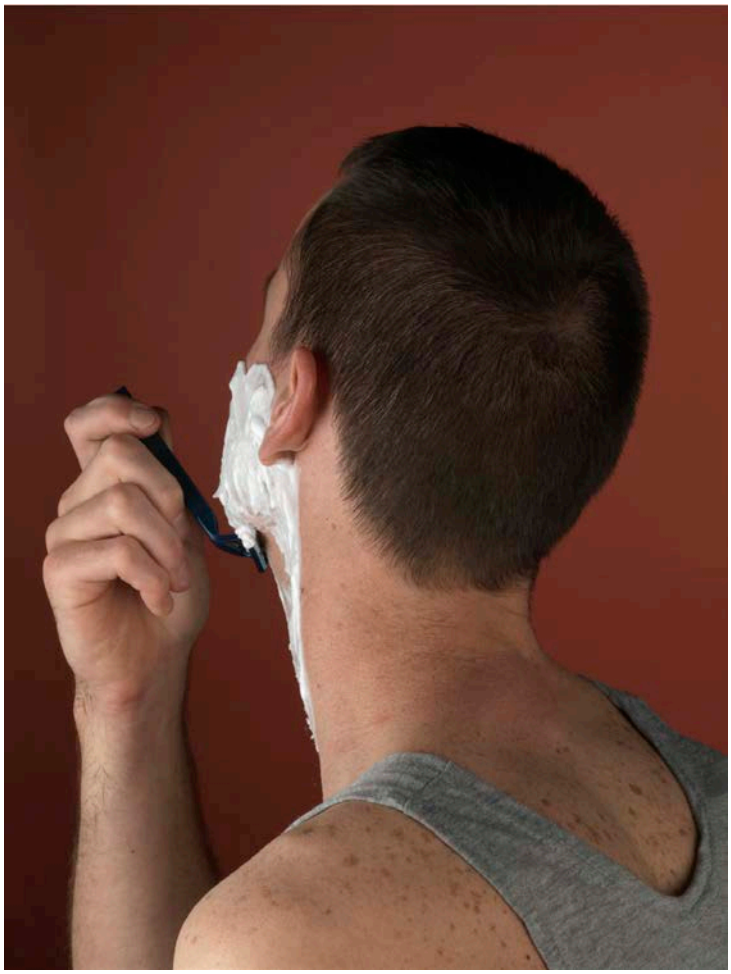

Fig 16. Shaun Waugh, *Man shaving*, 2012.

Arrangements of colour are again used to emphasise the process of selection. The man in *Man Shaving* chooses to remove the hair from his face, whereas the farmer encourages growth within the contained sections. Formal relationships provide further connections between the works and reinforce the idea of indifferent selection. Like *Man Shaving*, the photographic tableau *Golf course hole* also represents ideas of containment, selection, and choice. Formal relationships are deliberately developed between the works so that the shape of the putting green imitates the shape of the coloured bush in the *Covenant cut-outs* and the area of shaving foam in *Man Shaving*. The print scale of *Golf course hole* is important, as it is an attempt to foreground the viewer's role as *regardeur*. At this point, it is important to return to Jeff Wall and Duchamp in regards to the photographic tableau and the concept of the *regardeur.*

The Photographic Tableau: Jeff Wall *observing* Duchamp

The term *photographic tableaux* was coined by French professor Jean-Francois Chevrier in the mid-1980s to describe artists who employed photography to translate perception when viewing real space from a fixed point. These concerns were analysed by Duchamp for more than twenty years between 1946 and 1966 when he was making his tableaux *Étant donnés* (fig 17).

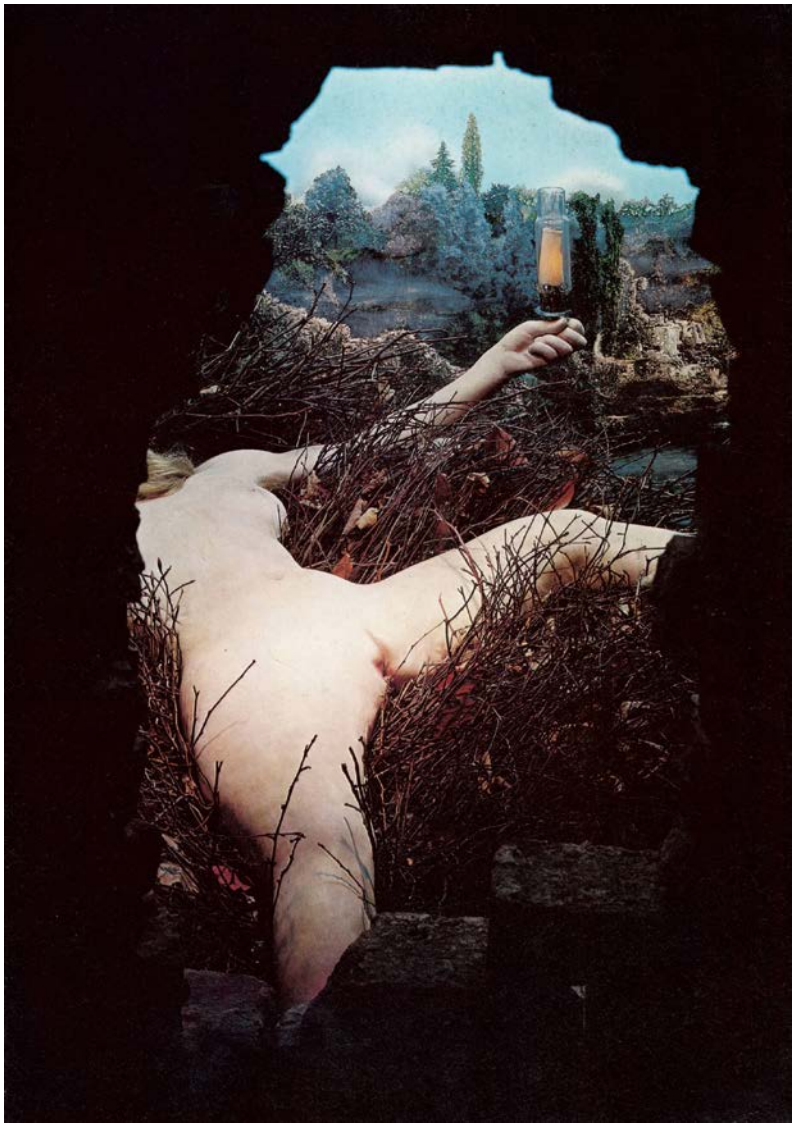

Fig 17. Marcel Duchamp, *Étant donnés*, 1946-66.

According to Chevrier, 'The great discovery of the 1980s was . . . an actual image, which delivers itself and reveals itself here, now, at the moment of its presentation, in the actuality of perception by a *regardeur*, who by looking, as Duchamp said, makes the tableau.'[59]

In making his final work a tableau, Duchamp shifted the focus to the spectator's relationship with the work of art – moreover, the spectator, as *regardeur*, becomes inscribed as part of the art work – a leitmotif that has guided many future practitioners.

Working with the developments in modern large-scale print technologies, artist projects such as Jeff Wall's light-box transparencies, or Thomas Ruff's greatly enlarged portrait photographs of students, produce images designed for the wall - qualifying them to be viewed more through the tradition of painting than photography. Virginia Adams suggests that, by the late 1980s, a significant change in photographic practices occurred with photographer's decisions about scale, clarity, and colour. Ruff and Wall entered into new 'mediumistic and sensory terrain'[60] that gave photographs the impact of large paintings. These large-scaled commercially produced photographs or transparencies were either placed within lightboxes, mounted onto aluminum, or given a stark white border and a wooden frame. Adams states that these works took on the nature of large objects and were quite distinguishable from the familiar notebook-sized black-and-white 'art' photographs of the first half of the century or the color-saturated American street photography.[61] In turn, this now had an effect on the experience of the viewer standing in front of photography.

Wall's large-scale light boxes have been subjected to vigorous critical debate and are often championed in discussion on the photographic tableau. Duchamp's key influence on Wall is not the readymade but rather the peep-show tableau *Étant donnés.* Duchamp is an important figure for Wall, because it is through Duchamp that Wall was able to resolve what he felt were the failings of conceptual art – its austerity and stringency in the rejection of the resources of art's history.[62]

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[59] Jean-Francois Chevrier, 'Shadow and Light', trans. Andrea Loselle, in *A Dialogue about Recent American and European Photography*, eds., Jean-François Chevrier and Ann Goldstein (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1991), 16.
[60] Chevrier, 'Shadow and Light', 16.
[61] Adams, *Illusion and Disillusionment*,1.
[62] Newman, 'Towards the Reinvigoration of the 'Western Tableau'', 91.

Fig 18. Jeff Wall, *Destroyed room,* 1978.

Wall's first characteristic backlit transparency is titled *Destroyed room* (1978) (fig 18). It is a work that is often compared to Duchamp's *Étant donnés*, which has been permanently installed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art since 1969. Like Duchamp's tableau, Wall's *Destroyed Room* is a set-up and built in a studio over time. Michael Newman suggests that the 'hypervisuality' of *Étant donnés*, with its use of back lighting and the internal illumination of the gas lamp, is carried over to the glowing illumination of the fluorescent strips of Wall's lightbox transparencies. Duchamp's naked manikin has been substituted in Wall's *Destroyed Room* by the bed with the vagina transmuted to an enlarged cut, through which spills the innards of the mattress.[63]

The majority of the discussion on the origins of Wall's approach to the photographic tableau is generally focused on his engagement with the paintings of Edouard Manet and his alignment to the criticism and theory of neo-Modernism, as championed by Michael Fried.

[63] Newman, 'Towards the Reinvigoration of the 'Western Tableau'', 91.

However, conceptual art historian and critic Michael Newman believes that Wall's interest in, and critique of, Duchamp has played a greater role.[64] Newman considers the role Duchamp played in this shift from conceptual art to the engagement with the Western tradition of painting. Newman also considers the implication of Duchamp's role, taking into account Wall's pioneering role in opening up the possibilities of the large-scale 'staged' or 'directed' photograph for so many artists.[65] Wall's Duchamp was not the same Duchamp as that of the appropriation artist. Whereas Sherrie Levine or Richard Prince's Duchampian strategy was tailored to already-existing images, Wall's was to draw upon preceding images and re-construct them, using the original not as a source for reproduction but rather as a model for production.

Newman explains how Wall's transparencies of the late 1970s and early 1980s demonstrate Duchamp serving as a model, not of a way of challenging the status of the work of art as such, but rather '… of ways of constructing a picture or *tableau* that will prompt a viewers' spectatorship that is both engaged… and reflective'.[66] This is a crucial turn that privileges not only the work of art but the complex relationship and inscription between viewer and art work. Duchamp's *Manual of Instructions* (1966) for *Étant donnés* provides further important clues in regard to the positioning of objects and the viewer's relation to an unfolding diorama seen through the apparatus of two peepholes or lenses. Newman describes how an inspection of Duchamp's *Manual of Instructions* shows that *Etant donnes* reveals itself, in a double sense, as functioning in accordance to a photographic model.

Newman writes:

> 'For not only could we imagine the camera in the position of the spectator or voyeur, it also looks as if the figure is laid out inside a box that resembles nothing other than the interior of a large-plate camera, or camera obsucra ... as if Duchamp wanted to suggest that the physical set-up is a vision taking place in the head (remember that the camera obscura functioned during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a model for the mind); also to create a short-circuit between the excessive visuality of the 'retinal shudder' and something purely mental.'[67]

[64] Newman, 'Towards the Reinvigoration of the 'Western Tableau'', 83.
[65] Ibid., 89.
[66] Ibid., 86.
[67] Ibid,. 91.

Jeff Wall's *Destroyed Room*, like *Étant donnés*, is a contrived set-up. The scale and clarity of Wall's lightbox-mounted photograph enables close-up inspection, which reveals that the whole image is a set constructed within a photographic studio. Craig Burnett believes that Wall's process is self-referential in this respect, as the painted brick studio wall and wooden boards that hold up the structure can easily be seen through the doorway of the destroyed room.[68] For Wall, it is the photograph rather than the peep hole that determines the fixed viewing position of the projected scene.

Unlike *Étant donnés* and *Destroyed Room*, *Golf course hole* (fig 19) is not a fictional scene constructed within a studio space. Rather, it depicts a 'real' constructed space – a golf course. Here the golf course functions as a giant stage set, constructed through a process of carving out the natural landscape. It echoes similar aspects at work in the *Covenant cut-outs.* As suggested earlier, it is through large print scale that the notions of the *photographic tableau* and *regardeur* are conventionally engaged. These concepts are important because, through the tableau, I am attempting to prompt a spectatorship that is simultaneously engaged and reflective.

Fig 19. Shaun Waugh, *Golf hole image*, 2012.

[68] Craig Burnett, ed., 'The Painter of Modern Life', in *Jeff Wall* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), 9.

Like Wall's choice to show the wooden boards that hold up his constructed set in *Destroyed Room*, I am trying to reflectively engage the viewer in the notion of a constructed scene. The *Covenant cut-outs* and *Golf course hole* reference each other both formally and conceptually. When exhibited opposite to one another, their themes of containment and selection are re-affirmed. As a stage, the *Golf course hole* inscribes the spectator as part of the work through its obvious connection to the landscape.

Golf course hole and the diptych *Aeroplane hit by lightning* are attempts to engage with the viewer beyond spectatorship within the conventions of the *photographic tableau* and *regardeur*. Both works provide a chance to reflect on Newman's notion of the 'short-circuit between the excessive visuality of the "retinal shudder" and something 'purely mental'.

Primarily constructed within the computer, *Aeroplane hit by lightning* depicts the event the title suggests. The diptych follows traditional conventions of left to right eye movements by placing the image of lightning to the left and the image of the aeroplane on the right.

It was important to use the format of the diptych in the construction of this image as it shifts the focus from the work of art, instead inscribing the spectator as *regarduer*. This is further emphasised by both images sharing the same background enabling a smooth transition and play between the eye and the mind. Similar to *Étant donnés* and *Destroyed Room*, *Aeroplane hit by lightning* is set within a constructed space, with the model aeroplane suspended mid-air within its pictorial space. The scale of *Aeroplane hit by lightning* is important in the reading of the work as it needs to be small enough to view both images from a fixed position, but still enlarged enough in print scale to make out the detail of the model aeroplane.

Precedented moves

In a recent essay for the photography journal *Aperture*, David Campany discusses how photography's 'rambling, unsystematic past', and history of printed matter, is becoming increasingly accessible due to the ease of uploading information to the Internet. In the short essay titled *Precedented Photography*, Campany raises the complicated issue that what can be thought to be 'an original' in art photography has actually already had a precedent in photography's 'applied' fields. He cites Ed Ruscha's artist book *Every Building on Sunset Strip* (1966) (fig 20) as being preceded by the Japanese architecture book *Ginza Kaiwai, Ginza Haccho* (1954)(fig 21). In *Ginza Kaiwai, Ginza Haccho*, photographer Yoshikazu Suzuki presents an accordion-like foldout of a panorama of every building on Ginza Street, Tokyo. Although Campany admits that there is no proof to presume Ruscha saw *Ginza Kaiwai, Ginza Haccho* before producing *Every Building on Sunset Strip*, he describes how their similarities are inescapable.[69]

Fig 20. Ed Ruscha, *Every Building on the Sunset Strip, Los Angeles*, 1966.

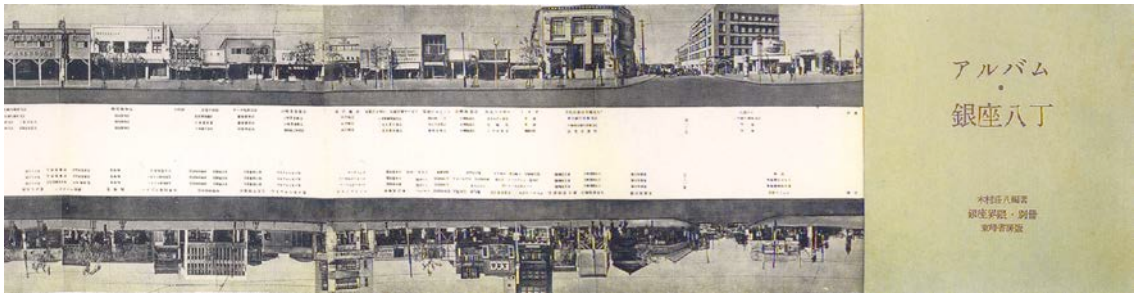


Fig 21. Yoshikazu Suzuki, *Ginza Kaiwai, Ginza Haccho*, 1954.

[69] David Campany, 'Precedented Photography', *Aperture*, vol.206, (2012) 86.

Campany describes how Ruscha believes that his photo-books are an extension of the Duchamp's readymade in photographic form, explaining that although Ruscha took the photographs himself he approached it using an industrially standard technique. In this way, he suggests the work is akin to a readymade, in that the images might as well have been appropriated. He suggests that it would not be surprising to find the same or similar panoramas of the Sunset Strip in numerous Los Angeles architectural firms – further complicating the notion of original over precedent, applied photography over art photography. One thing Campany appears certain of is that Ruscha's work is a readymade and the others are not.[70]

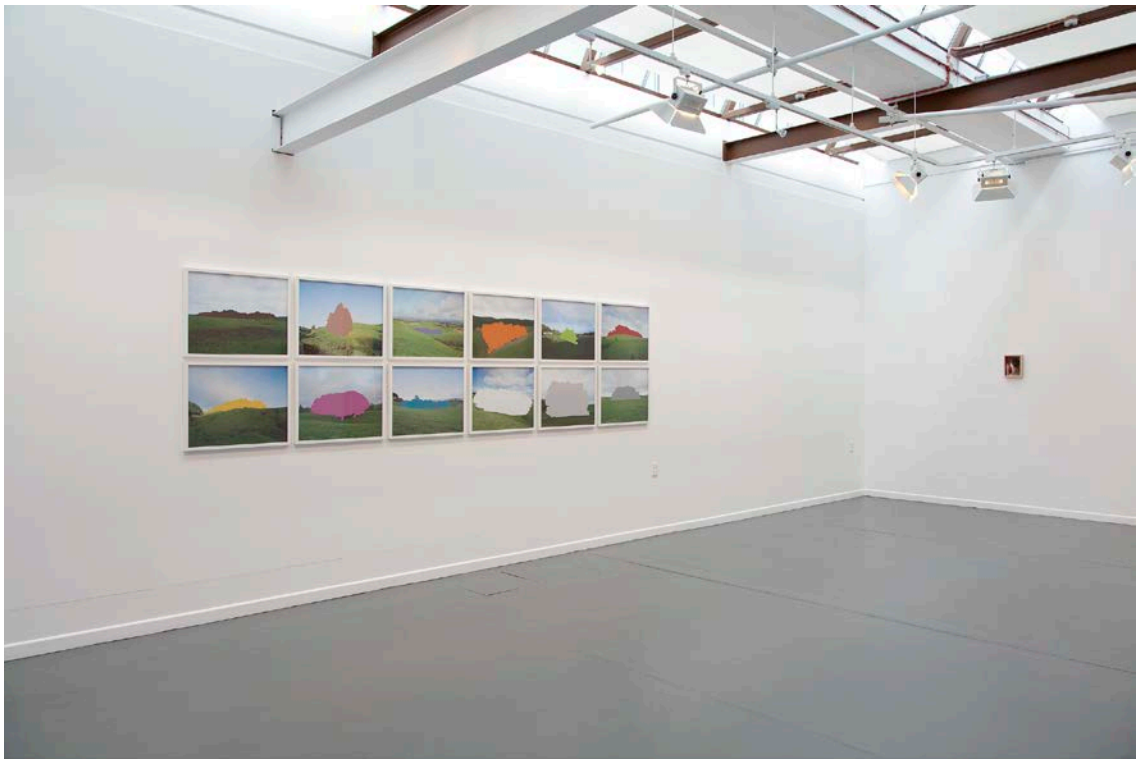
Campany's argument is interesting not because of the allegations of 'who did what first' but rather because of how the notion of 'the precedent' works within contemporary art practice. Campany concludes positively, believing progressive photographers today face many of the challenges faced in the past, but should not succumb to the anxiety that 'it's all been done before'.
Rather he suggests that we be grateful, learn, and build on the situations that have come before.[71]

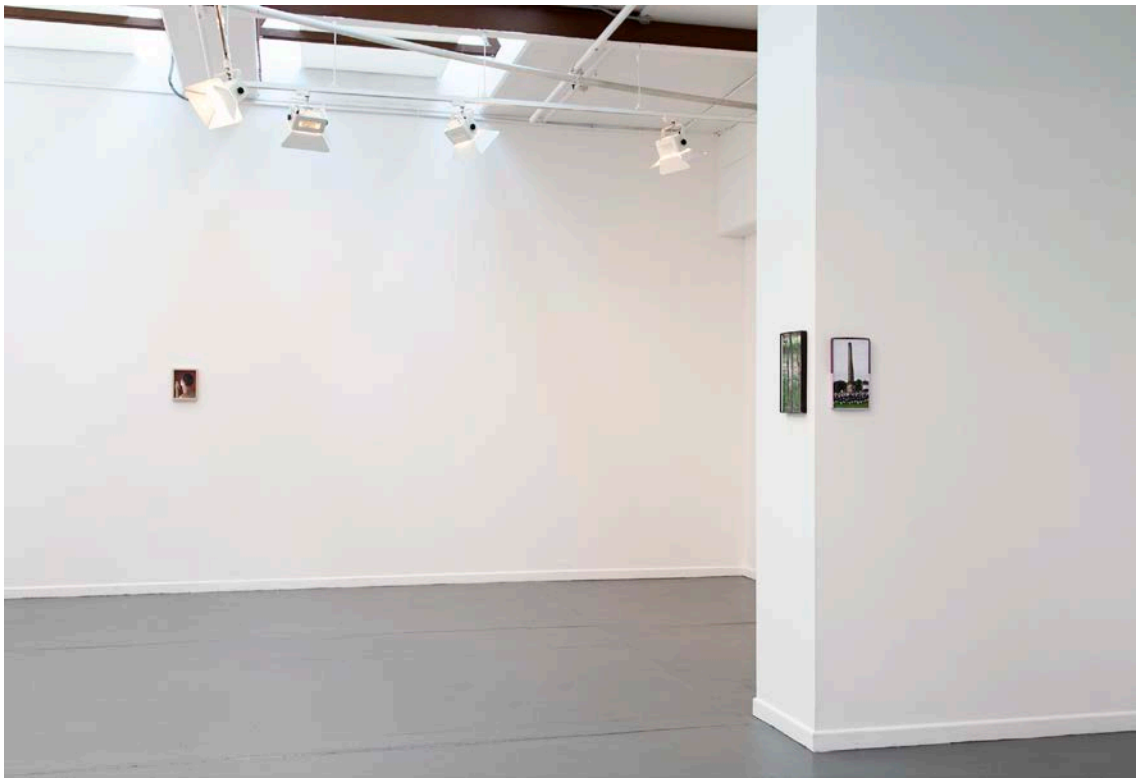
I use Campany's example as a way of acknowledging and participating within the established conventions of the readymade and the photographic tableau in my own practice and the legacies I inherit. As Campany suggests, I am grateful for the situations that have come before. The artists I have discussed throughout this exegesis laid the foundations on which I am building.

For example, in *Shoebox lids as frames*, I reconfigure the Duchampian strategy of using instruction to short-circuit authorial agency in the selection of a Flickr™ image to fit a shoebox-lid frame. One could understand the Flickr image as having already been stripped of 'artistic pretentions'. Similarly, the reconfiguring of the strategies of John Baldessari in the *Covenant cut-outs* and *Man shaving*, and of Duchamp and Wall in the tableaux of *Golf course hole* and *Aeroplane hit by lightning*, reinforce the themes of indifferent selection and the notion of the photographic image as readymade.

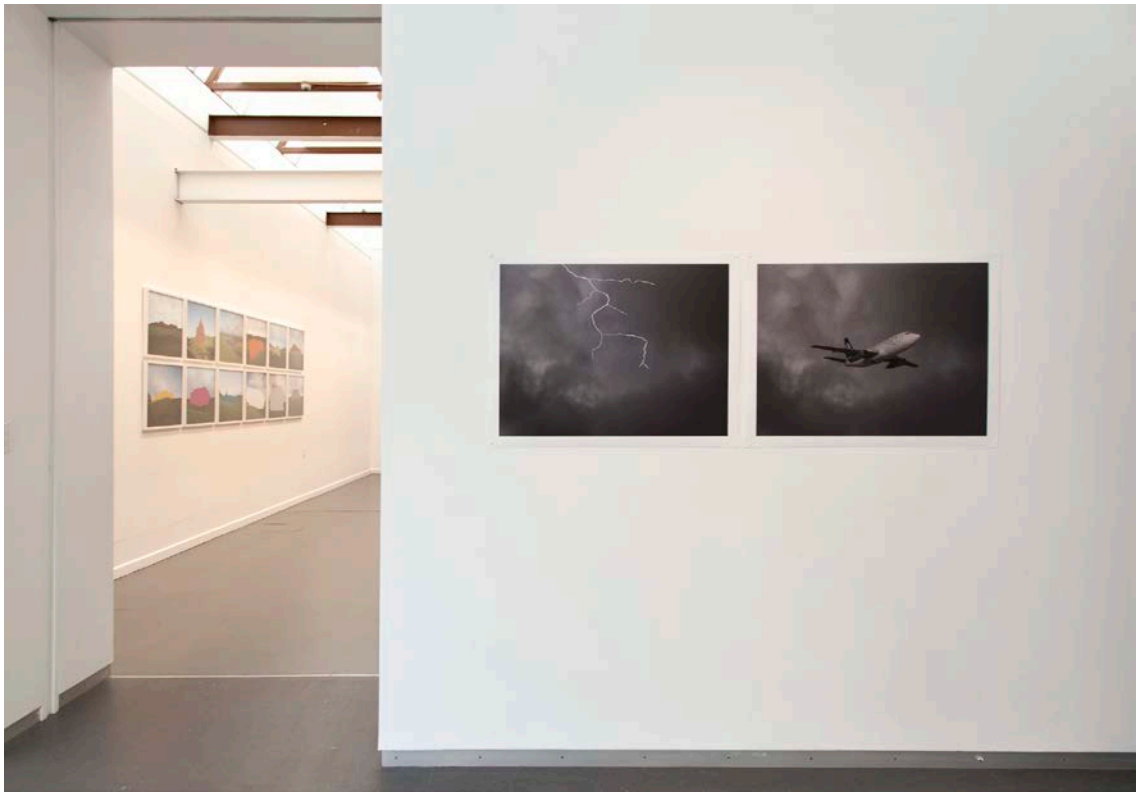
[70] Campany, *Precedented Photography*, 86.
[71] Ibid.

Submission documentation





Shaun Waugh *Indifferent attitude*, submission documentation, The Engine Room, Oct 2012



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