

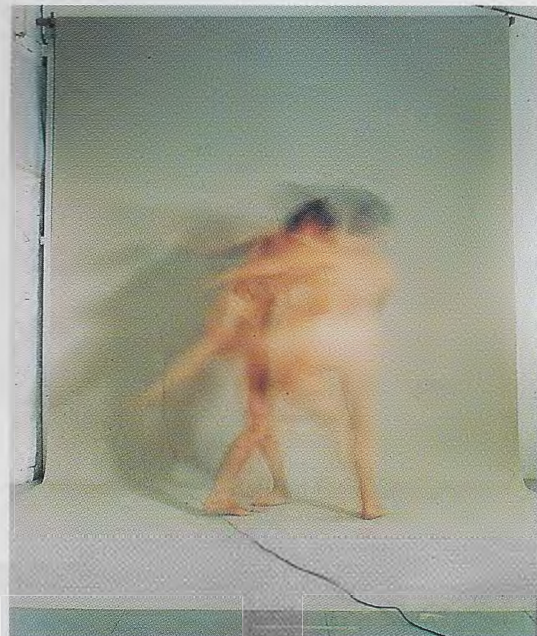
Art in America



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Jemima Stehli: One part of *Triptych, Grey Green Painting*, 2000, C-type print, 85% by 71 inches; at Chisenhale.

Carleton Watkins and Ansel Adams in portraying the magnificent geographical features of the American West. Unlike his expeditionary predecessors, however, Toedtmeier is a native of the region, devoted to photographing an environment he knows as home. His images are emphatically specific in location and perspective—*Ecola Point from the North*, for example, or *Chapman Point Looking toward Canon Beach*. And he sees this world through the eyes of a scientist; with a degree in geology, he is able to identify the processes of vulcanism, sedimentation and erosion, and record their effects with equal parts empiricism and wonder.

This exhibition of 20 new black-and-white photographs rendered the coastal headlands of northern Oregon, characterized by dramatic rock formations of heart-stopping beauty, pummeled by an unrelenting sea.

Terry Toedtmeier: *Lost Boy Cave*, 2000, gelatin silver print, 14% by 17% inches; at PDX.



The Pacific appears in these images in frothy waves, tide pools and mist, but Toedtmeier's stated subject is igneous rock. He titled the series "Invasive Basalt," signaling the far-away geological origin of the littoral stone mounds that fascinate him. These mounds are distal flows, solidified rivers of magma that erupted millions of years ago in what is now eastern Oregon and traversed hundreds of miles of terrain to the ocean. Toedtmeier depicts this hard black mineral in all its picturesque

manifestations—monumental arches; dark, wet caverns; outcrops that stand upright like sentinels on the beach. Avoiding the scenic or panoramic in these views, he tends to focus on a single feature, such as the mouth of a cave or a narrow crevice, relying on stark tonal contrasts for his powerful compositional effects.

In this liminal zone where land meets water and the atmosphere is cold and damp, Toedtmeier finds a visual chronicle of natural forces working through history. Remarkably, his documentary earth science ultimately arrives at a kind of haunting spirituality. Occasionally in these photographs, a figure appears, contemplative, reverent and as dwarfed by the elements as Friedrich's *Monk by the Sea*. However, it's light that infuses these frozen moments with mystical possibilities. In *Sunrise, Agate Beach (near Oceanside)*, Toedtmeier captures the first rays of dawn glinting over the hills, while in the shadowy interior of *Lost Boy Cave*, daylight intrudes as an ethereal glow. The ocean haze gives light a palpable presence here; Toedtmeier is its solitary witness and his camera its indexical scribe. Ironically, while studying obdurate rock he discovers a transcendent luminosity. —Sue Taylor

LONDON

Jemima Stehli at Chisenhale

Jemima Stehli's 7-foot-high photographs hugged all four walls of this cavernous exhibition space. Two of the works, *Triptych, Grey Green Painting* and *Triptych, Headless Orange*, were based on paintings by Francis Bacon. Each showed images of Stehli wrestling another woman against green and orange backdrops, their bodies blurred by movement to evoke the Bacon originals. Mounted on foamcore on an adjacent wall was *After Helmut Newton's 'Here They Come,'* a black-and-white diptych of Stehli posing naked and clothed. Her identical poses mimic Newton's paired photographs showing a group of statuesque fashion models similarly dressed and undressed. Opposite this was *Self-Portrait with Grace*, one of a new series where Stehli photographs herself, casually dressed, standing alongside a confidently naked woman. All these photographs include evidence of their own process (e.g., a shutter release cable in Stehli's hand).

In the past, Stehli has generally worked by assuming the place of a female subject in an existing work by a male artist. An early set of large-scale photographs showed her duplicating the poses and costumes of the fetishized mannequins in Allen Jones's 1960's furniture sculptures. In a powerful later series she photographed her S&M-clad body in a penumbra of Ad Reinhardt blacks intending to convey the erotic nature of her response to his work. The success of these works depends on how we weigh her venture across the representational minefield. Do categories of sexual proclivity blur in this work or is its critique enacted only in the sphere of heterosexual desires? And if so, are the male viewer's prurient cravings exposed or validated by the esthetic delectability of such images? And what changes if the objectified is at the same time the objectifier, in this case the artist?

The new work retains many of the arresting visual qualities of the earlier photos, yet the project has become dispersed as Stehli pursues several investigations simultaneously, any one of which would probably have

been adequate here. Least successful are the Bacon triptychs, which leave unanswered what is made of the displacement of a gay artist's male subjects by female protagonists. Nevertheless, the reprise of Helmut Newton's image is an interesting continuation of her earlier work while the series of self-portraits with naked women marks a deepening of Stehli's provocative art. —Mark Harris

BONN

Olaf Nicolai at the Bonner Kunstverein

Choosing just the right paint from one of Pantone's color fans is such a difficult pleasure. After all, if you are going to speak with Pantone's "power of color" (as the company advertises), you want to express your personal message. Olaf Nicolai (b. 1962) transformed this domestic activity into art when he selected 30 saturated colors from Pantone's Web site for an installation.

As a preliminary move, he altered the Kunstverein's galleries, removing the interchangeable units that form the interior walls and reinstalling them as a single, freestanding 15-by-54-foot plane. His colors, printed on paper in vertical stripes of equal width, were installed on both sides of the wall by others, in the random order of their choice.

The subdued atmosphere created by the close-valued stripes was enhanced by the sounds of the well-known German electronic music duo called To Rococo Rot, which emanated from four loudspeakers on the corners of a large, rectangular gray carpet which the wall bisected. These sounds seemed to increase the wall's immensity as they ricocheted off its smooth surface and the hall's outer walls.

You could view the wall as a monolith, or you could study the units of color that stood rigidly next to each other like the bars of a test pattern or the colored keys of a child's musical instrument. *Pantone wall, instrumented* was both part of the architecture and an independent piece of sculpture that could be experienced by walking along it or around it. Instead of including references to nature, as have many of Nicolai's earlier works, this was a completely artificial oasis where you could empty your head and lose