

MUSÉE

VANGUARD OF PHOTOGRAPHY CULTURE

FEB 1 EXHIBITION REVIEW: "PICTURES" AT PETZEL GALLERY

REVIEWS



©Ross Bleckner, *Untitled*, 2008.

By Lana Nauphal

Looking through Petzel Gallery's new online exhibition *Pictures*, one might mistakenly deduce that all nineteen images, with their abstract configurations, bright colors, and evocative use of light, must have stemmed from the mind of one photographer. But these vibrant photographs are accredited to two artists, Philip Smith and Ross Bleckner, who created these images years apart, totally unaware of the other's works. By a stroke of serendipity, both artists created a collection of captivating, probing photographs, perfectly suited to be in dialogue with each other on Petzel's digital walls.

Curator Ricky Lee was the architect behind Smith and Bleckner's coming together for *Pictures*. "It was just a feeling

that I had," he says. "They did know of each other, but they didn't know each other. I talk to both of them on a regular basis. I just thought 'wow wouldn't it be interesting to see?' Let's let people see the photographs together

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Lana Nauphal, "Exhibition Review: 'PICTURES' at Petzel Gallery," *Musée Magazine*, February 1, 2021.

to spark a conversation." Lee had the instinct to pair the works of both artists together as they explore photography in depth for the first time, as more than a means to an end.

For Smith, photography has always been an integral part of his creative practice. Even for pieces in other mediums, Smith works off of photographs of found images—from science textbooks, spy manuals, or even magic books—and he has re-appropriated those very negatives for this exhibit. Smith's photographs for *Pictures* are imbued with an almost mystical element of chance: their intense photographic palette is the result of their negatives having accumulated scratches and paint splotches from laying around the studio for years, which then turned into serendipitous bursts of light and color as they were put through the scanner.

The process behind Bleckner's photographs was also touched by chance. Years ago, Bleckner was working on a fashion shoot with a rare 20x24 polaroid camera—only six have ever been produced. Once he was done with his work, and

realized he had access to the polaroid for the rest of the day, he spent the afternoon tinkering around, letting his instinct guide him. Bleckner set the camera on long exposure and threw various sources of light into the lens—flashlights, LEDs, and laser pointers on strings. Thus his images for *Pictures* were born.

The serendipity behind *Pictures*' creation—from Lee's pairing of the two artists, to the making of the works themselves—aligns itself well with the images' intrinsic spiritual dimensions. In *Pictures*, both Bleckner and Smith investigate photography's connection to our internal world, on all levels: how it can capture the very atoms that make up our DNA, as well as reflect, or even prompt, the metaphysical properties of our souls. And there is in fact an almost trance-like, hallucinatory quality to both artists' photographs. Smith's images, whether depicting statuettes or DNA strands,

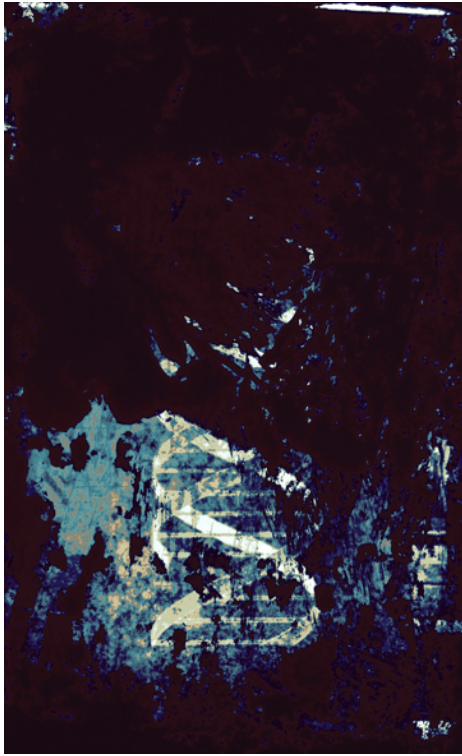


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are made to function like sentinels—each one a unique talisman watching over the viewer. Bleckner’s experimentation with various incarnations of light is meant to reveal the possibility of different modes of perception, as well as reflect our own inner light, or inner processes.



©Phillip Smith, *DNA Cloud*, 2020.



©Phillip Smith, *Globe 1*, 2020.

“[The show] makes you think about photography in a totally different way. It’s more impressionistic.” Lee concludes. “When you look at both of [their images] or you see them together, it provokes emotion.” Indeed Lee’s marriage of Bleckner and Smith’s work culminates in a deeply expressive energy, which emanates from the screen. The photographs, in their vibrant abstraction, transgress the customary boundary between art and admirer, and they implore—even instigate—a visceral examination of the viewer’s own inner world.

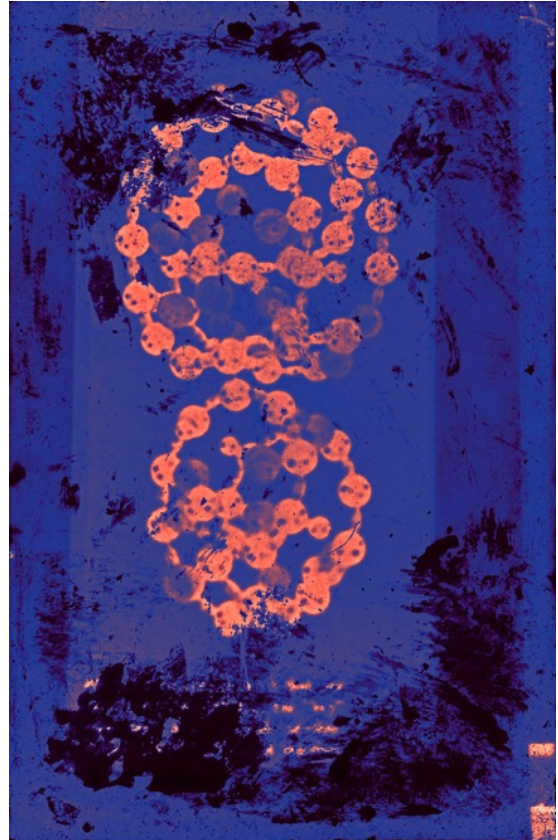
You can visit *Pictures’* online exhibition [here](#).

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