March 23 - April 21, 2002  
University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson, Texas,  
Visual Arts Building Main Gallery

Picture I.D. is an exhibition of photographs and digital works, created by Texas artists, that explores issues relating to likeness and identity.

Curated by Marilyn Walsgrove, Associate Professor,  
University of Texas at Dallas  
Opening reception: Saturday, March 23, 2002  
6:30 pm - 9:00 pm, Visual Arts Main Gallery

Panel Discussion: Saturday March 23, 2002  
7:00 pm, Visual Arts Main Gallery  
Randall Garrett, artist, Dallas  
Alan Govean, artist, writer, Dallas  
Barbara McCandless, curator of photographs, Imon  
Carter Museum, Fort Worth

Exhibiting Artists:  
Nicole Brendt, Dallas  
Tommy Cramer-Campbell, Longview  
Wade Crowder, Dallas  
Koleta Doolin, Dallas  
Randall Garrett, Dallas  
Alan Govean, Dallas  
Tim Trace, Sherman

James F. Rybar reminisces about photography in 1902, noting the camera's omniscient power, "He [the camera] could prove character in a man's face at sight. To his eye a rogue was a rogue, the honest man, when found, was recognized and properly estimated." Living in a digital age we find such a statement amusing, yet we understand the 19th century fascination with photography's claim to objectivity. From the mug shots of the seven escapists from Texas' Connolly unit to the reliance upon the ubiquitous surveillance video cameras that watch airports, street corners, convenience marts, and ATM's, the visual recording of the human face is a common occurrence. Connecting digital technology with its analogue predecessor, we move from a catalog of mug shots to computerized pattern recognition systems that interpret facial IDs. Photography's connection to this shared experience and our participation in the creation of a portrait archive are legacies of the 19th century—perhaps influenced by the study of phrenology and physiognomy.

In an era when we now establish one's physical identity through signifiers such as fingerprints, DNA, and the mapping of the human genome, the picture ID. might seem somewhat anachronistic. However, the functionality of the picture ID. persists in daily life. Now is the ideal time to reflect on the camera's connection to picture identification, the use of camera-based images to establish identity. Picture I.D. is an exhibition of photographs and digital works, created by Texas artists, that explores issues relating to physical presence, likeness and identity, and the image of the body in contemporary culture. The lens is no longer considered a pure recorder of visual facts. We can ask ourselves if on objective photograph ever existed. The camera can now assist us as we define our own identities and fancies and potential. We can document our own lives, affirm the existence of individuals who live outside of our daily sphere, and make the invisible visible. Perhaps photography's entrance into the digital age marks an embrace of performance, the collaborative engagement of the sitter and the photographer, and the investigation of new methods to image the self.

Scholar Graham Clarke notes in the opening to The Portrait in Photography that the photograph can only provide a single glimpse of the individual. He states that the photographic portrait:

"as the formal representation of a face as bodily is, by its very nature, enigmatic. And part of this enigma is embedded in the nature of identity as itself ambiguous, for the portrait advertises an indi individual who endlessly eludes the single, static and fixed frame of a public portrait. In an official context, the photograph validates identity: be it on passport, driving licence, or form. It has the status of a signature and declares itself as an authentic presence of the individual. Once again, however, the authenticity is problematic. The photograph displaces, rather than represents, the individual. It codifies the person in relation to other frames of reference and other hierarchies of significance."

Clarke points to photography's limitations as a potential recorder of likeness or human resemblance, as well as identity, namely one's character or personality. The photograph is unable to fully portray the richness of human identity in the context of the "single, static, and fixed frame," and lends itself to the establishment of stereotypes through photographic convention. Graham Clarke points to the various social applications of the photograph, its ability to indicate social standing through signifiers such as dress, props, or pose when compared to existing standards or definitions of social types. The most pronounced example of such an application of photographic process occurs in the composites of Francis Galton, the father of eugenics. Galton's documentation of family resemblance appears logical. However, his embrace of technical processes, in a kind of statistical application of photographic imagery, produced such visual photographic models as the "Jewish type" or the "criminal type." These composite photographs created from the superimposition of a number of portraits, were designed to produce an image that would facilitate identification of the alien, the undesirable, the outlaw, the other. As artist and writer Allen Sekula notes:

"Through one of his several applications of composite portraiture, Galton attempted to construct a purely optical apparnce of the criminal type. This photographic impression of an abstract, statistically defined, and empirically nonexistent criminal face was both the most bizarre and the most sophisticated of many concurrent attempts to marshal photographic evidence in the search for the essence of crime."

Allen Sekula's review of the work of Francis Galton and Alphonse Bertillon, should be considered in light of the introduction of facial recognition systems that use "landmarks" to establish a connection to an existing pattern. Galton's composites and Bertillon's use of photography and anthropometrical methodologies provide unsettling reminders of flawed 19th century models that sought to fix and identify the criminal body. The fusion of the image archive and the database foster an application of techniques that favor security over privacy, in a post-911 era. Prior to September 11th producers of these new means of surveillance sought to increase distribution of these Facial scanners while some professionals doubted that scanning would be effective due to low light, awkward camera angles, and the fact that in crowded settings the apprehension of suspects would be impossible due to time delays. In the context of digital technology our faith in optics, the ability of the lens to record visual information, is brought into question. Perhaps the camera's new role is not that of capturing likeness; instead it can be used for exploring the potential for locating one's identity.

The artists included in Picture I.D. investigate, challenge, and negotiate the conventions of photographic representation, to reveal the methods we use to locate our own identities.
Tim Tracz
Sherman, Texas

Sepia-colored digital prints merge the artist’s photographs with 19th-century snapshots, portraits, and documents of landscapes and interiors. The blurring of the distinction between document and artist’s construction confounds the viewer’s attempt to find the “true” character of the subjects in these portraits. Tim Tracz photographic composites seamlessly juxtapose photographic elements that are derived from moments extracted over a century apart from one another. Tracz becomes the ultimate archivist, collecting images from both past and present. His collection of 19th- and early 20th-century snapshots, documents of important sites and portraits, are merged with uncanny records of gardens and architectural structures from a diverse range of locales. Our attempts to locate meaning in the photograph are frustrated as we finally notice flaws in perspective, juxtapositions of scale, and more importantly dislocations in time and place. Tracz’s vision balances precariously on photography’s claims to truth and his own ability to construct illusory worlds from disparate elements.

The subject, smaller in relationship to the environment, seems to be coddled; our interpretation is guided or confounded by an incongruous meeting of subject and place. An elderly woman holds a white blanket for our review in photoograph 090004. The white plane becomes a tabula rasa, a sign for absence, a document for a wasted life, or product of a lifelong effort. Given the context created by Tracz, we are unable to discern the blanket’s meaning, the woman’s relationship to this object and the space defined by the frame. We become consciously aware of the conventions of pose.

The images construct not only a reference to time and place but they also include a sitter—situated in a world that interferences with the spectator’s interpretation of identity. The images portray likeness but confound a clear determination of identity. Tracz attempts to “create a viewer’s response based on a kind of logical and believable relationship between these subjects or sitter” and their new forced environment, even while there is a clear discrepancy in temporal cues.” Tracz’s subtle montage work, especially in terms of the selection of a dramatic and complex spatial stage in which he places the sitter, recalls the photographs of Atget that got such attention from the Surrealists. Ultimately, we respond to the dreamlike quality of the work in our desire to believe the photograph; at the same time the logic of the photograph gradually unravels, reminding us of photography’s fallibility in a digital age.

Kaleta Doolin
Dallas, Texas

Kaleta Doolin’s digital juxtapositions, portraits and figure studies of the artist/past with the artist/present, reveal a real/ideal dichotomy and critique our culture’s futile search for the ideal body. Photographs of the artist taken in her youth provide a record of the artist’s body in her prime, a mirror of the advertisements that grace grocery checkout counters, highway billboards and television commercials. The idealized body, trim, long and perfected, frames an inset image that documents an abdominal incision. This medical surgery at middle age scars the body, demonstrates its wear, its endurance over time. For some reason we recall from the altered body, yet our curiosity always draws us in, reminding us of our own frailty and mortality. The bandages that wrap her head in her series of self-portraits, the scars that crisscross the abdomen in her study beauty marks, all interrupt the body’s dominant position in the picture plane. While the bandages hinder our ability to identify the artist in her self-portrait, the scars ironically provide a current depiction of the body. These marks will provide a means of identification along with other signifiers—fingerprints, rings, and strands of hair. Doolin’s uses digital technology to reveal the flaws that the photographic or digital airbrush hastens to erase. In some ways, Doolin’s work is similar to the intense self-documents of artist Hannah Wilke, that review her physical decline at the end of her life and stand in stark contrast to her earlier performance studies in the 1970s. Amelia Jones comments on Wilke’s work are helpful here:

The medicalization of Wilke’s body and its brutalization through illness turn it from sexual object (of her own and other’s pleasure) to scientific object, and yet while the regimes of medicine work to strip away individual identity, Wilke’s sense of humor and compulsion to perform once again transform an objectifying practice into an opportunity for self-expression.

Like Wilke, Doolin’s extreme juxtapositions convey a sense of humor. She reveals her abdomen marked with a scar that runs across the body like a smile. Rather than lament a lost body of youth, or hide the evidence of physical transformation and pain, Doolin’s work performs a wry commentary on mortality. These photographs brought together in time through digital montage, provide an evocative juxtaposition of both subject and photographic treatment. In self-portrait 2, a series of clinical color headshots stands in contrast to the idealized black and white profile placed below it. Images of the ideal body and the raw document collide in a single composition, producing a friction that underscores both our own vulnerability and our shared quest for the fountain of youth.

Photos: 16" x 20", digital prints, 2001
090004, (top left)
080005, (lower left)
080003, (right)

Photo: self-portrait 2, 20" x 24", ink print, 2000
Nicole Arendt

Nicole Arendt’s color photographs disrupt mediated stereotypes. In color and black and white photographs, the artist uses narrative tableaux to explore issues related to images of the female body, the self, and conventions associated with masquerade. Her two series, Fried Chicken I and Fried Chicken II, depict a young woman who gnaws on a piece of fried chicken. The images remind us of advertising’s subliminal messages relating to the female body and food prepared for visual consumption. The human activity of eating becomes primary in the images; delicate, “feminine,” or ladylike manners are discarded in favor of a coarser depiction. The aban- donment of etiquette, the use of fingers rather than fork and knife, the close-up sequence recording the consumption of meat, and the evidence of teeth against flesh and bone, retain a visceral quality. Here the female figure is active, rather than passive, brusque rather than seductive. The sitter dominates the picture plane through the camera’s close cropping; her action expands outside the frame in a series of photographs. In Carrey and Brazier, a set of gelatin silver prints, the body becomes present through its absence. Here delicate gestures point to the unseen constraints on the body, clothing under clothing, designed to mask actual form. Acting as a veil, the darkened fabric of a pleated dress hides both the body and its binding from the view- er. Only the positioning of thin fingers references the physicality hidden under the dress, a physicality that cannot be revealed due to its inherent flaws. Such imperfections, bulges instead of smooth curves or a lack of fullness across the breast, become unacceptable, obscenities in a culture that celebrates physical perfection, whether naturally or synthetically derived.

Indirectly, Arendt critiques our culture’s adoration of the beautiful celebrity / model, long a staple of photo- graphic exchange and commerce.

Randall Garrett

Randall Garrett’s self-portraits combine autobiography and fantasy. Digital montages present the artist as a 21st-century wannabe astronaut, pointing to photography’s role as a facilitator in imagining the self. Constructed with references to pop culture such as plastic daisies, photograms of kittens, and beaded curtains, the artist appears often dressed as a space explorer, as in babysitswildwonder. Garrett references past and present in terms of our collective associations of space exploration and 60s culture. He states, “The images and objects I work with sometimes have specific cultural references which are ‘sampled’ and recontextualized, much like a DJ might sample a recognizable sound effect within a dance track.” His low-tech approach emphasizes the process of digital compositing by revealing the evidence of pixels. Garrett uses digital photography to invent avatars so he can assume a new identity. His embrace of masquerade allows him to represent himself as an individual from the future—or at least from the 60s age of space travel. The artist’s exaggerated poses often reference gravity, from allusions to boundlessness in laveinlikeoxxygen, where the artist floats in space accompanied by a kitten, to a grounding represented in hevenisforawky where he lies in an expansive landscape of sand. His titles for the work allude to popular tunes from rock music and connote celebrity. Garrett adopts the persona of the celebrity, dancing through space, orchestrating his pose for the camera, visualizing his dreams of high tech travel. The artist revises photographic conventions of the rich and famous, to create an imagined identity.

Photos: hevenisforawky (top right) inkjet, resin and enamel on wood, 30 "x 20 " x 1.5 " , 2001
I’m lost without your love (lower left) inkjet, resin, enamel and plastic flowers on wood 23"x20"x2", 2001
babysitswildwonder (lower right) inkjet print/resin on wood, 18.5 "x 20.5 " x 2 " , 2001
Large color photographic prints document a woman with elaborate tattoos who poses on the streets of Paris, France. Alan Governor’s color photographs and digital prints extend the function of the photographic portrait by displaying the skin of individuals who merge identity and physical transformation via the art of the tattoo. His sitter Valerie performs for the camera. The large triptych presents three views of Valerie, from a profile to the documentation of her back and neck. Her construction of her own body image—from dyed purple hair to blue and gold tattoo to silver fingernails and rings—presents a stark individuality, an awareness of the potential of the body as living art form. Of particular note is the central frame of the triptych, presenting the likeness of the sitter both through a mirrored reflection and a tattoo surrogate. These representations challenge our expectations in terms of portraiture as the sitter turns her back to the viewer.

In the main panel, pointed metallic fingernails that radiate like a sun frame Valerie’s tattooed neck. The contrast in saturation from the sublety of flesh tones to the intensity of the inked patterns commands our attention. These visible markings, permanent body drawings, create a second skin, a cast that allows the individual to assume a new physical self. These photographs underscore the relationship between the art of the tattoo and the construction of personal identity.

Photos:
Valerie, Paris, France
digital print on metallic paper, 2000
18.75" x 30", detail, (top)
34" x 30", detail, (bottom)

Wade Crowder photographs his students from Skyline High to provide us with a glimpse, through images and accompanying text, of the diversity and individuality of young adults as they engage in the process of locating their own place in the larger Dallas community. The black and white photographs, accompanied by text, portray high school students who study photography and journalism. Wade Crowder’s images of students from Skyline High School present an alternative to the classic high school yearbook, the catalog of portraits that following standard commercial practices. The conventional academic grid, an annually constructed archive, overflows occasionally into mediated news of local tragedy or local celebrity. The traditional yearbook from the senior year marks an end to a decade of poses that document physical growth and annual change. In Crowder’s series we don’t see that conventional row upon row of portraits lined up in grids, with an occasional caption or penned scrap. He’s made a point of abandoning the standard portrait at headshot, and his clinical form, along with related props and devices, the neutral backdrop, the even lighting, the posing stool, a mortuary board, or a strand of pearls. Crowder’s project emphasizes, through both visual and verbal description, each student’s personal quest for identity. The student’s interaction with the portraitist is evident from the selection of props, setting, and pose. A camera appears in Joshua’s photograph. Michael rests his face on his hands, covering a smile per—hats, preventing a spontaneous laugh. His height and build demonstrate how small classroom chairs have become; he seems to have outgrown them. His long leather jacket dominates the picture plane while his eyes dart to one side, perhaps in jest, perhaps in modesty, or a bit of both. Joshua on the other hand sits alert; his spine is straight. With camera in hand, a cherished prize from a Gordon Parks workshop, he seems ready to take on the role of visual recorder for his own life and those of his peers. These images exude optimism; the students describe their visions for the future in the text that accompanies each photograph. For Crowder the process of documentation is an ongoing engagement with his students that often occurs in the classroom.

For the past eleven years, I have made portraits of my photography and journalism students at Skyline High School in far east Dallas. With 4,500 students, Skyline is one of the largest high schools in the country. Many of my students take journalism all four years. I am fortunate to see them develop from early adolescence into young adults. Sometimes it’s a single event or maybe something that happens over the summer, but the transition into adulthood is clear and often startling.

Michael Lewis (8’x 10’, gelatin silver print, 2001, above): “When I first came to Skyline from Irving, I kept on getting lost. Then I found my way around. I play football and baseball. I hope to turn pro some day. I like to be in front and behind the camera. For the future, if football and baseball don’t work out, I plan to pursue a career in the media.”

Joshua Hunter (8’x 10’, gelatin silver print, 2001, left): “My name is Joshua Hunter. I was the second place winner of the first annual Gordon Parks Youth Photography Contest. My winning photograph was a picture of a boy doing a handstand on top of a large globe (the photo was handed in upside down, as it looked like the boy was holding up the world). I learned photography at the Artist and Elaine Thornton Foundation’s Summer Youth Photography Workshop, which is held every summer at the South Dallas Cultural Center.”
Tammy Cromer-Campbell creates black and white gelatin portraits that document children who reside in Wimona, Texas, a town polluted by toxic waste. This series, Fruit of the Orchard, reminds us of the connection between our physical selves and the environment in which we live, underscoring both our humanity and our fragility.

Cromer-Campbell’s project documents a shared burden and reminds us of our collective responsibility; she also records the processes related to local activism. She creates positive images of these children that ultimately provide hope for the families who have suffered from the effects of industrial pollution. In Jamiesia and her Cousins (pictured above) we are confronted by a small girl who looms large due to the tight framing and distortion of a Holga camera. We become aware of Jamiesia’s physical problems but are drawn more to the interaction between the children as they push against the edges of the picture plane. Ultimately, these photographs are images of survival rather than pain and suffering.

Jamiesia endures life with a range of ailments—albinism, respiratory problems, and photosensitivity. We live in an age when the potential of digital or medical transformations allows us to achieve a body that can be imagined. Yet with Cromer-Campbell’s work we are reminded of our inability to escape from a physical body; we are ultimately a part of our environment.

Picture I.D.

The artists participating in Picture ID are committed to representing the human form. As they explore options for presenting the body, they engage photographic conventions that form part of our daily lives, selecting some, rejecting others to ultimately achieve their vision. In the end their projects remind us of the possibilities that the lens affords—to revise our own image, to present our own image while critiquing the limitations of existing standards. Picture I.D. is about picturing or imagining identity.

Footnotes

3. Ibid., 3.
7. Roseline Jones, Body Art: Performing the Subject (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 193.
10. Tammy Cromer-Campbell, artist’s statement.
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