

Merge Visible

6 to 10 September 2016

Mall Galleries, The Mall, London SW1
www.mallgalleries.org.uk

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Mall Galleries presents *Merge Visible*, its first exhibition of digital collage in contemporary fine art photography. This exhibition features work by six eminent practitioners, all of whom utilise computer software to create imaginative compositions, part reality, part fantasy, offering a window into the world around us.



Deborah Baker explores the cycles of life and seasonal change through the techniques of montage and layering, which she applies to photographs of plants as they grow and develop in her woodland garden. The aim is the representation of the subject "... in a recognisable and arresting form, emphasised by the methods of process and production unique to digital photographic imagery." Exemplifying this effect especially well is Baker's *Betulanimbusi* (2013), in which crisp, chiaroscuroed leaves, frozen in free fall, exude theatricality well beyond traditional botanical art.

Lisa Creagh is likewise inspired by plant life. However Creagh prefers mainly generic, shop bought, hothouse bred varieties. These she photographs in her studio - under controlled lighting, using photographic techniques such as soft focus and hard edges - from all sides and in all states of budding to drooping. Next, Creagh assembles, manipulates and repeats individual images until a random but decorative pattern emerges, in the style of Islamic floral carpets, which were thrown down in the Persian desert by nomadic tribes to create an 'instant garden' in the sand. One can see this inspiration most clearly in Creagh's largest exhibit, *Floriculture 2* (2015).

Ellie Davies' exhibits explore the essential character of forests, in particular as "potent symbols in folklore, fairy tale and myth, places of enchantment and magic as well as danger and mystery." Davies achieves this by 'interposing' pictures of mature and ancient forests with images of constellations taken by the Hubble telescope, thus creating pictures that convey with bewildering beauty the fundamental otherness of the forest landscape, as captured so well in *Stars 15* (2015).

Barbara Nati focuses on the dangers of environmental degradation. Using digital montage techniques, Nati creates dystopian visions of the future – none more discordant than *The House of this Evening, All Mine #1* (2013), in which a ramshackle tenement occupies a treetop, with dark clouds overhead. These premonitions, which Nati has described as 'postcards from the future', deliver social and ethical messages about the environment we are living in today.

Emily Allchurch's oeuvre addresses the environment too, although with a focus on urban locations. Her practice creates a dialogue with historical artworks, using photographs that she takes on site, to reconstruct the original in a contemporary idiom. Each artwork is a journey around a city or place, compressed into a single scene, to reveal a modern social narrative. In the example of *Babel London (after Bruegel)*, hundreds of photographic fragments reimagine London as a modern-day Babel - a chaotic construction site, a "celebration, as well as a warning about architectural hubris."

Suzanne Moxhay merges elements to create fictional worlds which possess a reality of their own. Moxhay accomplishes this by creating crude stage sets on glass panels from cut-out fragments of books, magazines and paintings, which she photographs and manipulates. She "work[s] intuitively with the material, finding points of connection between parts of images." In so doing, Moxhay conceives images of surreal spaces, reminiscent of empty film sets – staged scenes pregnant with narrative potential.

Although these artists have swapped easel and canvas for computer screen and software, they are without doubt heavily influenced by the more traditional practice of fine art painting. Emily Allchurch, perhaps the most, as her works are contemporary reconstructions of particular Old Master paintings by the likes of Bruegel and Piranesi. Deborah Baker admits that the abstract nature of her images is indebted to abstract expressionism and its practitioners, from Willem de Kooning to Jackson Pollock. While according to Lisa Creagh, her works owe much to Dutch Flower paintings and Byzantine ecclesiastical art, as well as Islamic geometrical designs. Barbara Nati acknowledges the influence of nineteenth century painting to her work, and Suzanne Moxhay, the early film-making technique of matte painting, where backdrops were painted on sheets of glass and integrated by the camera with the live-action on set.

Common to them all, though, is the use of photography as their medium and computer technology as their tool to create meticulously choreographed compositions, seamlessly integrated, which provoke intense visual resonances, alive to the digital age.

All work is for sale.



"Within my work I use photography to reconstruct Old Master paintings and prints to create contemporary narratives. My starting point is an intensive encounter with a city or place, to absorb an impression and gather a huge image library. From this resource, hundreds of photographs are selected and meticulously spliced together to create a seamless new 'fictional' space. The resulting photographic images have a resonance with place, history and culture, and deal with the passage of time and the changes to a landscape, fusing contemporary life with a sense of history.

Presenting the work as lightboxes maximises their theatricality, and creates a window into another world."

Babel London (after Bruegel) (2015) (detail)
Transparency on bespoke LED lightbox
125 x 148,5 x 8,3 cm





"The aim of this work is to represent the experience and effect of simply 'being' in the garden. For me, this was essentially inspiring, and emphasised an increased awareness of my fragility and insignificance. Inevitably, I am aware that these images also reference issues of environmental concerns, together with plant identification and classification."

Betulaannubisi (2013) (detail)
Digital photo
84,1 x 118,9 x 5 cm





Floriculture 2 (2015) (detail)
Digital C-type on Kodak Endura paper
165 x 254 x 4 cm



Lisa Creagh

"To make this work, individual shots of flowers are taken with controlled lighting in a studio context. The flowers are mainly generic, shop bought, hothouse bred varieties. It is important that they contain some perfect specimens, as might have been found in the mythic Garden of Eden "before the fall". As with botanical studies, flowers are shot from all sides and in all states of budding to drooping.

Photographic techniques such as soft focus and hard edges create a sense of distance and deep space, as well as the illusion of depth. These individual images are then manipulated, assembled and painstakingly repeated using a unique method that emulates a pattern, whilst remaining visually random."



"These altered landscapes operate on a number of levels. They are a reflection of my personal relationship with the forest, a meditation on universal themes relating to the psyche and call into question the concept of landscape as a social and cultural construct. Most importantly they draw the viewer into the forest space, asking them to consider how their own identity is shaped by the landscapes they live in."

Stars 15 (2015) (detail)
Photography
85 x 125 x 5 cm





"My work developed from an interest in the constructed worlds of film, where natural and artificial elements are merged by the camera to draw the viewer into a fictional world. Drawing from an archive of collated material, I create intricate photomontages which are reminiscent of empty sets – staged scenes with a sense of narrative potential. My source material is drawn from an archive of collected imagery – from mid-century books and magazines to contemporary found photographs as well as my own photographs and small paintings. Referencing certain pictorial and filmic conventions, I attempt to reveal the uneasy, unsettling, unreal elements of the appropriated imagery I use."

Dais (2016) (detail)
Archival pigment on photorag
71 x 84 cm





Barbara Nati's oeuvre lies beyond what is commonly intended as photography, mostly standing out for its estranging effect. Her profoundly lyric investigation takes shape through a wise and skillful use of digital and technological tools. Her language always hovers between poetic and ironic, delivering essential social and ethical messages, with a particular focus on environmental issues ... Every setting, as a matter of fact, invites the viewer to look again at those things we take for granted and unleashes a visceral response by the viewer who is asked for a rational interpretation through a gloomy metaphor of the upcoming future.

The House of this Evening, All Mine #1 (2013) (detail)
Digital collage on Kodak Metallic
125 x 75 cm



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6 to 10 September, 10am to 5pm

Mall Galleries
The Mall, London SW1
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Admission Free

Under Construction Artist Talk

Saturday 10 September, 11am to 1pm

Meet the artists exhibiting in *Merge Visible* and learn about the processes behind their work and their place within the emergent practice of digital collage in contemporary fine art photography.

Tickets £5, Students £3

Free to Friends of Mall Galleries

Book your place by calling 020 7930 6844 with your credit, debit or Friends card to hand.

All images courtesy of the artists

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