

## Digital Sequences

Since the 1800's, photography has been based on the lens, film, and light. In the past fifteen years, this has changed dramatically. Photographs once based on light sensitive coatings on film are now composed of bytes of information. Chemical reactions that created prints of silver have been replaced by inks or dyes and printed from the instructions programmed into a computer. For fine art photographers this has been a mixed blessing. Some have rebelled and kept to their darkrooms and film, while others have welcomed the new freedoms of digital photography and expanded their work in ways not conceivable with film-based photography.

In researching work for this exhibition, I looked at many different approaches to digital photography and settled on the two photographers in this exhibition both for the timeliness of the content of the imagery and for their 'photographic' use of digital means. Both Gail Rebhan and Chris Jordan are working within the realm of documentary photography. Both are interested in raw information. By using digital software, each has extended what would have been impossible to visualize or present with conventional film and silver based photography.

Jordan's works begin with photographs of the objects and using imaging software he multiplies the object based on the statistic he has chosen to use. He keeps track of the replications so that, in theory, one could count the 106,000 aluminum cans in Cans Seurat. He prints the images large, both to reveal the objects-a small print would be unreadable- and to reinforce his message: two million plastic bottles is a lot of bottle use for five minutes! Jordan's remarkable work doesn't just show a count of the objects; rather each is approached differently. The supermarket bags are stacked into an elegant forest; the cans which are often strewn about our parks and beaches are arranged to replicate George Seurat's famous pointillist painting, La Grande Jatte; and the shipping containers ironically look like the methodically arranged bytes that form digital images. By using the fiction of digital manipulation and by often imitating the effects of the photographic lens -look closely at the depth of field in Plastic Bottles- Jordan has made concrete the abstract numbers that are the reality of our consumptive lives.

At the other end of the consumer spectrum are Gail Rebhan's photographs of her son's room. The photographs, taken while he was home from college for the summer, use a digital camera and digital software. The prints are composites of images taken over several weeks. While the information in Jordan's images is almost wholly constructed from a few actual photographs, the few images that make up Reban's series are packed with information that she did not manipulate, but photographed as found. Using digital software allowed her to organize the information for the viewer around certain repeating objects such as the squirt gun or the skateboard and to note the passage of time. We



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Gallery hours: 10 AM- 5PM Seven days a week.  
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Events associated with the Exhibition:

**Feb 1, 7-9 pm**

**Reception for the Artists**

Gallery talk by Gail Rebhan and  
the curator, Ruth Schilling Harwood

**Feb 23, 3:30 pm**

**Talk by Shannon Perich** on the  
Emerging History of Digital Photography

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Something  
for Everyone!



Cover image: Chris Jordan, Detail, *Cans Seurat*

Montpelier Arts Center

Digital Sequences

Chris Jordan  
Gail Rebhan

January 11- February 29, 2008

can linger over the works and compare one week to the next as in the "what's different" picture puzzles so popular recently. Whether we learn real things about the young man from his "stuff" is not certain. We do learn that there is a lot of the 'waste stream' running through his life- discarded paper, pizza boxes, bottles, etc. Unlike Jordan's large composites where the waste is formalized, the "Room" series shows its impact on our personal lives.

My decision to pair these two photographers in the exhibition and to not include more complex uses of digital software with photography was to emphasize that digital photography still embodies the photographic. Even though we cannot easily tell when a photograph has been manipulated, that may not be the right way to understand the image before you. As documentary photographs both artists' works include truths and fictions, which in the end has always been true of photographs. We bring to this work 150 plus years of looking at photographs and it is this experience and our willingness to engage the works that makes them legitimate.

-Ruth Schilling Harwood, 2008



**The Emerging History of Digital Photography  
Saturday, February 23, 3:30 pm.**

In conjunction with the exhibition, curator Shannon Thomas Perich will speak about the Emerging History of Digital Photography on Saturday Feb. 23 in the Main Gallery.

Shannon Thomas Perich has been an associate curator in the Photographic History Collection at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History since 1996. She holds a master's degree in museum studies from George Washington University as well as a BFA in photography and a BA in art history from the University of Arizona, Tucson. Her research interests include vernacular and snapshot photographs, William Henry Fox Talbot, Richard Avedon, and the history of digital photography.

Detail, *Shipping Containers* from *Running the Numbers* by Chris Jordan

**Room**

I photographed my son's room when he was home from college for the summer. Each panel follows the placement of one object, such as a pizza box or a remote control device, over a period of time. This work is about contemporary American disposable society, mass consumption, and male clutter. The entire series consists of ten panels.

-Gail Rebhan, 2007

List of Works

- Squirt Gun**
- Tennis Ball**
- Skateboard**
- Mitt**
- Remote Control**
- Flip Flop**
- Laptop**
- End Table**
- Celeste**
- Keystone**



Each composite is a 40"x 40" laminated archival inkjet (giclee) print.  
Price per print is \$1500.

Accompanying the exhibition is a copy of the book, Mother-Son Talk.

Published in 1996, the book features images with dialogues between the artist and her then 5 and 8 year old sons on a range of topics. Copies of the book are available for purchase at the front desk for \$15-.

Much of Rebhan's work has centered on the family and many of her projects have been created as books using digital technology. Her work is in the collections of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Smithsonian American Art Museum, and the Polaroid Corporation among others. She is included in several books including *Reframings: New American Feminist Photographies*, *Pregnant Pictures*, and *Our Grandmothers: Photographs by 75 Women Photographers*. Rebhan received her MFA from the California Institute of the Arts and teaches at the Woodbridge campus of Northern Virginia Community College. She has exhibited nationally and in Europe and locally exhibited her previous body of work, "Aging," at Pyramid Atlantic last year. Her work can be viewed at [www.gailrebhan.com](http://www.gailrebhan.com)

Image: *Squirt Gun* detail from the series *Room* by Gail Rebhan

**Running the Numbers:  
An American Self-Portrait**

This series looks at contemporary American culture through the austere lens of statistics. Each image portrays a specific quantity of something: fifteen million sheets of office paper (five minutes of paper use); 106,000 aluminum cans (thirty seconds of can consumption) and so on. My hope is that images representing these quantities might have a different effect than the raw numbers alone, such as we find daily in articles and books. Statistics can feel abstract and anesthetizing, making it difficult to connect with and make meaning of 3.6 million SUV sales in one year, for example, or 2.3 million Americans in prison, or 426,000 cell phones retired every day. This project visually examines these vast and bizarre measures of our society, in large intricately detailed prints assembled from thousands of smaller photographs. My underlying desire is to affirm and sanctify the crucial role of the individual in a society that is increasingly enormous, incomprehensible, and overwhelming.

-Chris Jordan, Seattle, 2007

List of Works

**Cans Seurat**, 2007 44" x 67.5"

Depicts 106,000 aluminum cans, the number used in the US every thirty seconds.

**Plastic Bottles**, 2007 44"x 88"

Depicts two million plastic beverage bottles, the number used in the US every five minutes.

**Paper Bags**, 2007 44" x 59"

Depicts 1.14 million brown paper supermarket bags, the number used in the US every hour.

**Shipping Containers**, 2007 60"x 100"

Depicts 75,000 shipping containers, the number processed through American ports each day.

*All prints are archival pigmented inkjet prints.  
Prints may be purchased through the artist's galleries.*

Chris Jordan is a Seattle based photographer whose work has been exhibited and published extensively including the book, *In Katrina's Wake*,(2005). He is represented by Von Lintel Gallery in New York and Paul Kopeikin Gallery in Los Angeles. His work can be viewed at [www.chrisjordan.com](http://www.chrisjordan.com).

Interviews with Chris Jordan can be seen at The Steven Colbert Report ([www.comedycentral.com/shows/thecolbertreport/videos/celebrityinterviews/index.jhtml](http://www.comedycentral.com/shows/thecolbertreport/videos/celebrityinterviews/index.jhtml)) and Bill Moyers Journal ([www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/archives](http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/archives) and search on 9/ 21/07.)