

Adam Gooder: Photographs

This exhibit joins two bodies of work, “Blind” and “Darkroom Flowers,” both explorations of the sensory elements of photography. Descriptions of both bodies of work are below. They play off each other in several ways. First, all images are shot on black and white film, developed by hand and printed in a traditional photographic darkroom. Many are made with a macro lens for very close up view, in which texture and focus are exaggerated. These images are all about the intersection between vision and touch, the seen and the unseen, and how limiting the scope and perspective can enable one to see more instead of less. My work with my friend Witold Potempa on “Blind” inspired “Darkroom Flowers.” In the first project, I tried to understand and show Potempa’s minimal vision and use of touch to compensate for it. In the next project, I adopted his friend’s macro perspective to explore his own photographic way of seeing, and the intersection between texture, materials and vision.

Blind

In this series of black and white images, I use photography to explore blindness. My subject, Witold Potempa, has only ten percent of his vision in one eye. He uses one half-inch thick lens and touch to navigate the world. I use a macro lens, like his lens, and seek out strong sources of light, as he does. This work challenged me: how should I visualize the absence of vision? Each image is a play on vision and its absence, using lens, light and darkness.

Six months into our collaboration, I discovered Witold was a serious amateur photographer before he lost his vision. So, I gave Witold one of my cameras, with autofocus, so he could shoot what he sees. His photography has become a part of this project. Recently, we interviewed each other—about his blindness, and my photography. I hope that this text, thoughtfully edited, can be included in the book I hope to create.

Darkroom Flowers

Living subjects change constantly, but the photograph captures just a sliver of time and preserves it. In *memento mori*, (Latin for “remember your mortality”), the Victorian daguerreotypes of loved ones lying in their coffins, death is commemorated by the photograph. The flowers in these photographs are all picked, and thus doomed. The subtle browns, yellows and pinks brought out by the lith developing process make the prints themselves seem like they are moldering, dissolving, or decaying in some way.

These flowers, picked at various stages of entropy, suggest more than the common flowers and weeds that they are. We imbue them with our personalities, hopes and fears. Some reach, open, lilt, shrivel or crumble. Some evoke the metaphorical mourning of a loved one, the beginning of a slow collapse into nothingness. A flower surrounded by darkness feels lonely or desolate. Some flower interiors become little worlds, a cave to climb inside of or a mountain peak to scale.

These images celebrate the material of the print: penciled, graphic, papery flatness or lush, dense silver emulsion. Light highlights veins, like X-rays, or cuts the flower’s profile out of blackness. The mottled fog and prominent grain make each image stark or sumptuous; one wonders where the object’s texture leaves off and the texture of the photograph begins. This confusion between real and imagined, live and dead, paper and petal is the fun of these images.

The technique used to create these images of dying flowers may be dying, too. These prints are the result of experimentation in a traditional wet darkroom with Lith chemistry and extinct papers, as old as thirty years. Some of these prints spent up to an hour in the developer, until it was murky and exhausted. The combination of grainy film negatives, old paper and worn out chemistry makes these new prints feel like antiques.

In every way, these images grasp at mortality.

Artist Biography – Adam Gooder

Adam Gooder is a photographer currently preoccupied with magical light, organic shapes and old processes. The tactility of shooting and printing with film and chemistry are vital; Adam's current work is evidence of his recent return to the darkroom and reinvigoration. A filmmaker by training, he is interested in how images play off one another and what story they might tell.

Adam currently teaches advanced photography at Concord-Carlisle High School. Adam has taught photography and digital video production at the college level for fifteen years, at the Art Institute of Boston, Massachusetts College of Art and Design, and the New England Institute of Art. Adam has collaborated with non-profit organizations and individual artists on many freelance projects. He lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.