

Radial Survey

Destiny of a Place

——Vol.1

Silver Eye Center
for Photography

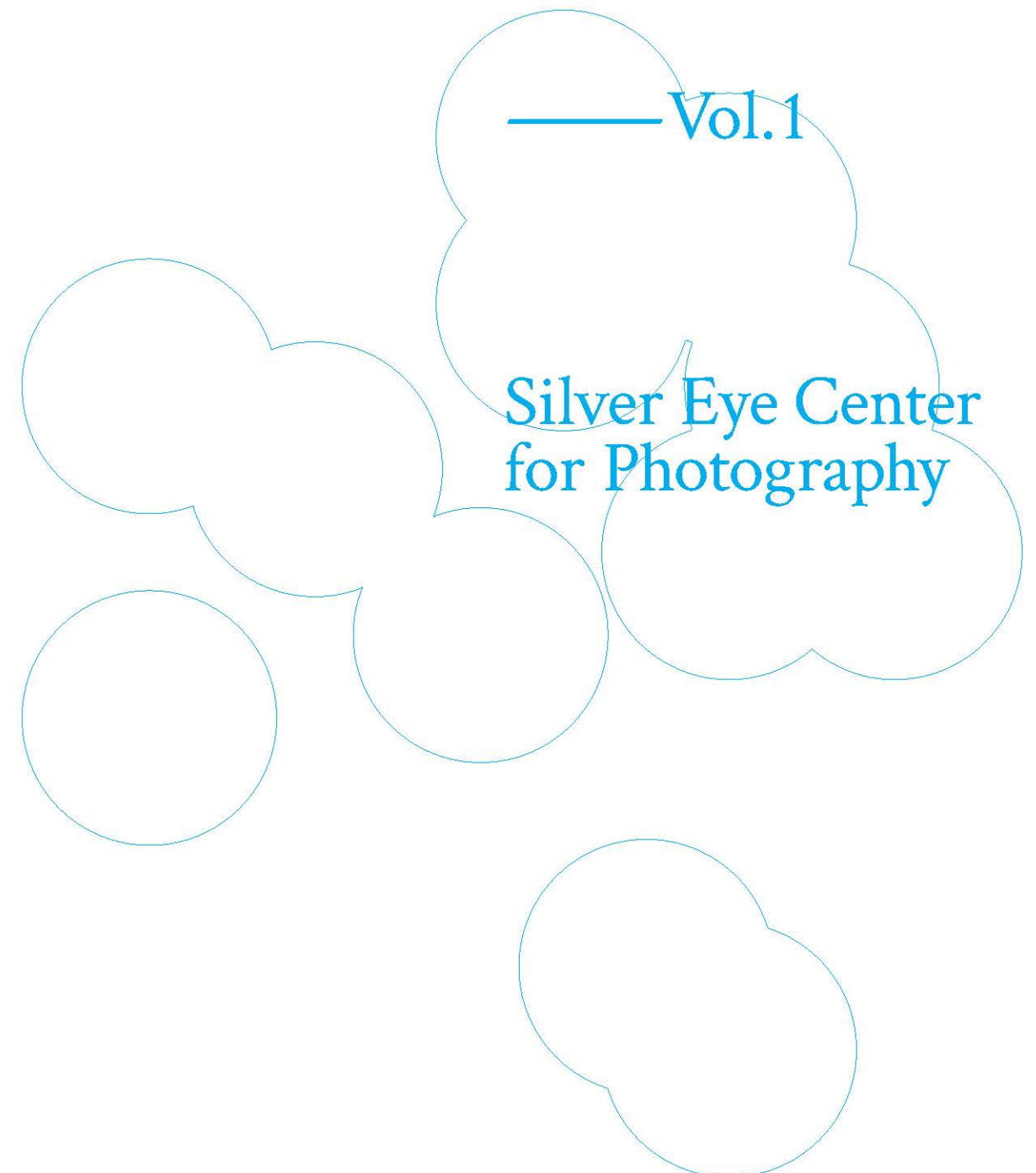


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<p>Held in Abeyance Miranda Mellis</p>			
<p>Simone Weil wrote that “Attention consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty, and ready to be penetrated by the object. It means holding in abeyance what we already know about this object.” Melissa Catanese’s work ‘holds in abeyance’ in this way, allowing us to ‘suspend’ what we think we know about, say, a foot, a light fixture, a branch. But if any object may</p>			
<p>be a valid object for contemplation, then what kind of theology is this? In many museums are ritual objects which, in vitrines, on display, are in a sacrilegious position relative to the purposes for which they were originally created and intended. Learning the provenance of such sacred objects and returning them to where and whom they belong is part of the work of decolonizing museums.</p>			
<p>And then there are works that seem to exist to remind us that our images, our things, our components, the accumulated storehouse of objects that have remained with us—even our bodies—all that has given us a sense of continuity over time—is the provenance, ultimately, of all that infinitely and indefinitely exceeds us. That we are ultimately dispersed into other bodies, human and nonhuman. That the ideas we have about our life come from the future as well as the past.</p>			
<p>Such are Catanese’s images of unbecoming, of edge states. They form a metonymic constellation. The edge of a forest leads to the edge of a room leads to the edge of a body. There is warning here, taboo and delicacy, an ambiguous invitation to question: Why do</p>			
<p>senses of meaningfulness extend and recede, evade and then disclose, come forward and then dissipate? How can the same thing be both unfixed and pinned to a time; lost in space and yet imbued with a purposive stillness; at once exposed and secret, composed and entropic, ordinary and yet unrecognizable?</p>			

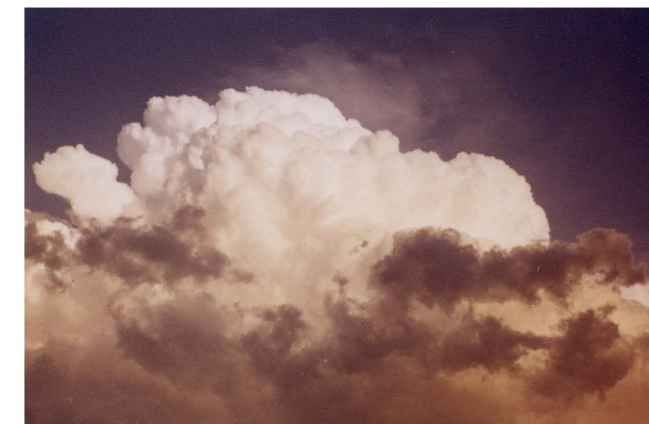
Apsis
(2018)

b. 1979
Pittsburgh, PA



“Editing and sequencing is an intuitive process that’s tricky to articulate. I like to think of myself as a conduit, working in service of the images and their desires, but the fact is, I also have my own psychological motivations at stake, and that force is somewhat abstract. I’m creating a fiction by placing one photograph next to another in a sequence, and I try to get to a headspace where that fiction, or those new associations, can reveal themselves in the process. I think about formal and conceptual structures when I’m editing. I like repetition. I like dissonance. It sounds new-agey, but the connections are metaphysical.”


<p>Melissa Catanese's three paneled photographic collage <i>Apsis</i> relishes in the connections one makes when studying a group of images that initially seem to have little context or relationship. Rather than tell a specific story with her images, Catanese creates an enveloping atmosphere, full of mystery, tension, and wonder. Working from an inventory of images, including those made by the artist as well as anonymous found photographs, Catanese builds ambiguous narratives. By combining photographs from her own archive with found images, she questions the authorship and transparency of a photograph. Catanese creates meanings that drift away from the surface of the image into something personal, intuitive, and poetic. While she thinks of herself as a kind of conduit, "working in service of the images and their desires", she readily admits that her own psychological ambitions are also at play in her work. Moving between these two modes of thought, Catanese's work brings forth incredibly nuanced and provocative narrative potential from these images.</p>		
<p><i>Apsis</i> draws its inspiration from the works of filmmaker David Lynch, and his surreal and ambiguous takes on the detective genre. Although it is impossible to solve, <i>Apsis</i> presents its images as evidence from a crime. In one part of the collage, an image of a fingerprint suggests a perpetrator; in another, a golden curtain brushing the carpeted floor of a room is perhaps a crime scene. The figures depicted in her images become potential victims of this imagined investigation. A wire curling along the ground lends a slightly ominous feeling. One can almost hear the faint buzz of the fluorescent light at the top of the frame.</p>		
<p>The tension between the individual images contained within <i>Apsis</i> and their mysterious greater whole is central to Catanese's work. The title itself refers to the extreme points of an elliptical planetary orbit. This cosmic reference is fitting, because <i>Apsis</i> reads like a map of constellations. One can choose to see it for its celestial whole, or one can focus on an individual image, a heavenly body.</p>		



Details from *Apsis*, 2018





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A new survey of
emerging and mid-career
photo-based artists
working within 300 miles
of Pittsburgh.

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Morgan Ashcom

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