

# Tracing the outlines of time

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In "Four Quartets," T.S. Eliot writes that "to apprehend/ The point of intersection of the timeless/ With time, is an occupation for the saint." Saints have other things on their minds, as well: salvation, halos, whatever. Photographers can be more single-minded. For them, apprehending — and recording — that intersection is *the* occupation.

Arresting time is so central to photography that we simply take that centrality for granted.

Among the virtues of "Keeping Time: Cycle and Duration in Contemporary Photography," which runs at the Photographic Resource Center at Boston University through Jan. 25, is the reminder it brings that time is not just the ocean photography splashes in but also the spray that it raises. The seven photographers here all make explicit the function of temporality in their medium, and do so with means as varied as sunsets and cellphones, smoking cameras and drawn-on tablecloths.

"Keeping Time" consists of 22 discrete photographs, one projected installation, and 48 small photographs (8 inches square) arrayed in a grid. That group of photographs was taken on a digital camera by Byron Wolfe. Dailiness is a form of time's passage familiar to us all. Each day during his 36th year, Wolfe took dozens of pictures around the house. That night, he would choose one worth saving. "The idea," he writes, "was to create a narrative that was attentive to place, change, and the meandering pace and flow of life."

The result is a set of visual vignettes, snapshots of domesticity, their charm enhanced by the elegant scrawl of the captions Wolfe has penciled in. We see a bitten-into plum, a quartet of books family members were reading, a bowl of raspberries, a mitten, even a sheet of white photographic paper with nothing on it but a drawn-in rectangle. Beneath the rectangle Wolfe has written, "Broken camera."

Wolfe's sequence reminds us that, in so many ways, time is a human construct. Our experience of duration owes as much as to *who* as *when*. Or *how*, which is one message of Matthew Pillsbury's work. "I am interested in capturing the importance that computers, televi-

sions, and now cell phones have taken on in our lives," he writes. Pillsbury will expose film in an 8x10 view camera, leaving the shutter open for an amount of time determined by the operation of an item of home electronics: the broadcast of a "Desperate Housewives" episode, for example, or the length of a cellphone conversation.

Pillsbury takes his titles from the place and time he took the image, as in "Eric Watson, Paris, Thursday, March 11th, 2004, 7:40-8:40 p.m." Watson spent that hour using his laptop. Its unreadable glow and his blurry outline are the sole signs of activity during that hour and exemplify the spooky interplay between specificity and indeterminacy in Pillsbury's work.

The human element also defines Rebecca Cummins's color photographs of al fresco table settings. Cummins will bring her own tablecloth to a restaurant or cafe with outdoor seating. As the sun casts shadows from wine bottles, drinking glasses, and the like, Cummins

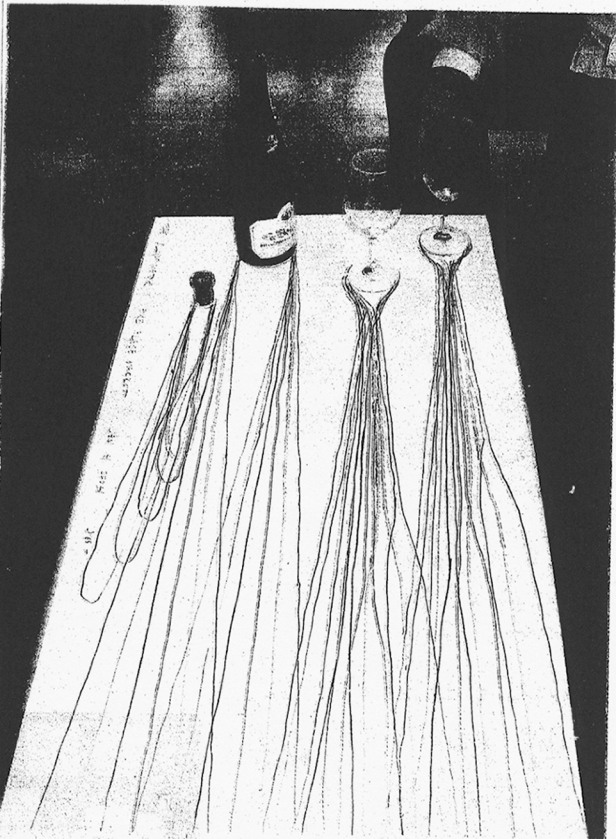
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## PHOTOGRAPHY REVIEW

### KEEPING TIME: CYCLE AND DURATION IN CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY

At the Photographic Resource Center at Boston University, 832 Commonwealth Ave., through Jan. 25. Call 617-875-0600 or go to [www.bu.edu/prc](http://www.bu.edu/prc).



Rebecca Cummins's "Happy Hour at Pike Place Market, Seattle, WA."

traces the outlines of those shadows in colored inks. Meal concluded, she photographs the chromatic accumulation. Visually, it's like having Morris Louis as your waiter.

The conviviality of Cummins's images is far removed from the work of Sharon Harper and Erika Blumenfeld. Their concern is with what Edward Abbey, in "Desert Solitaire," describes as "that ultimate world of sun and stars whose bounds we cannot discover."

For her "Moon Studies and Star Scratches" (what a title!), Harper made multiple overexposures of the nighttime sky over varied durations and sometimes even from different locations. What we see is a celestial layering, an astronomy beyond astronomy, that suggests portals into other worlds. Such is their beauty, they are portals one would like to enter.

Blumenfeld focused on a single star, our own. She took a two-second exposure of it on March 20, 2005, the vernal equinox, at 6:17 p.m., the moment of "civil sunset." She did so again for each subsequent day until the

summer solstice. Blumenfeld then animated the images, showing a circle of white gradually subduing a field of violet. It's impressive conceptually, if rather vague visually.

Stuart Allen's "Light Maps" don't look like photographs at all. They resemble delicately valued color charts. He disables the white balance feature in his digital camera, and these abstract-looking changes in color are the result.

All photographs are, so to speak, sun-singed. In his "Sunburned" series, Chris McCaw takes things to the next level. He uses specialized equipment, some of his own making, to overexpose film to such a degree as literally to burn it inside the camera. Think of the process as a visual equivalent of distressing a surface. Where a photograph captures an instant in time, McCaw's techniques indicate time's ongoing effects on that instant.

"My favorite part," McCaw writes, "is watching smoke come out of the camera and the vague scent of roasted marshmallows as the gelatin in the paper cooks." McCaw's camera might look quite nice on one of Cummins's tablecloths, don't you think?