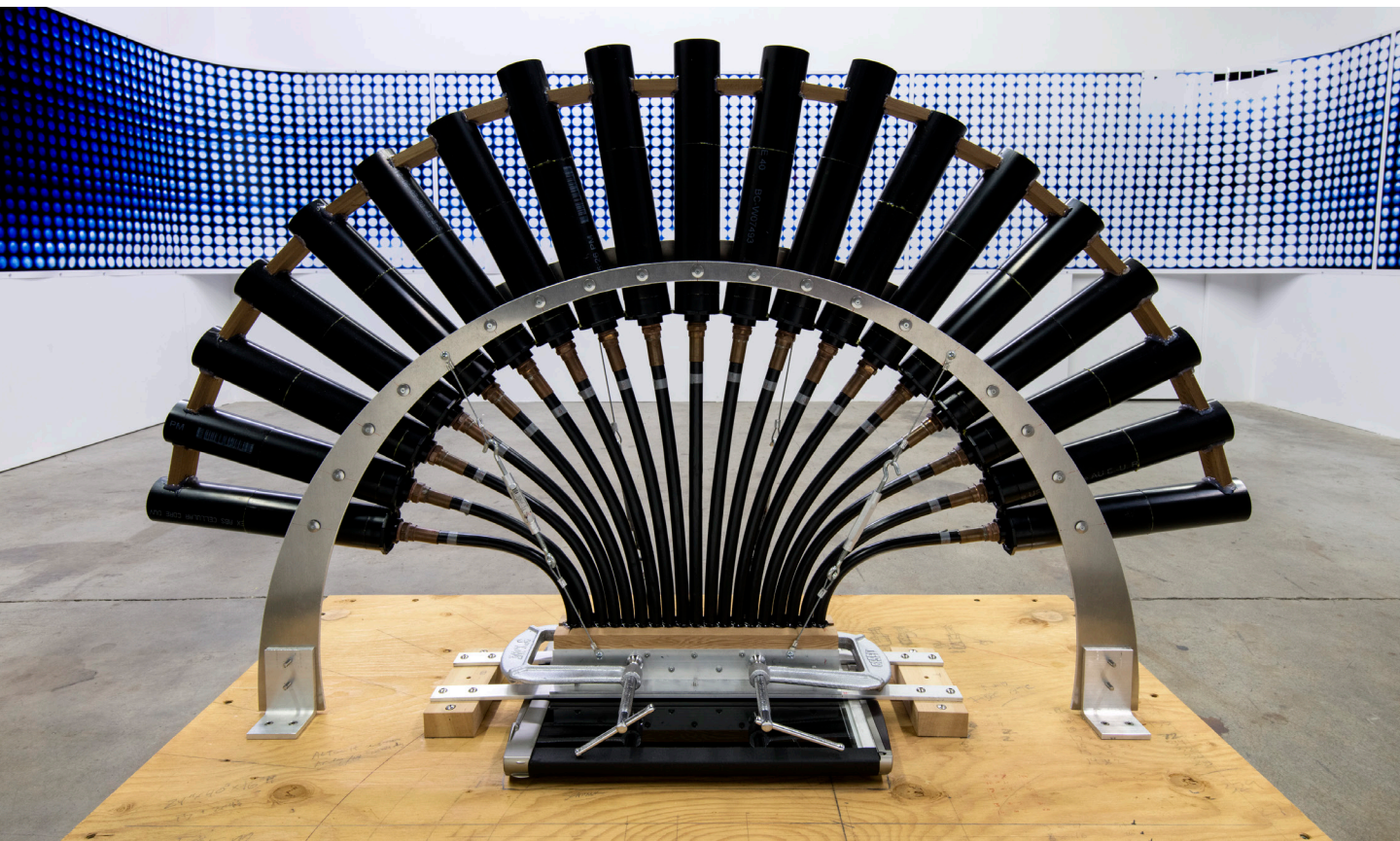


Aryen Hoekstra
Marco Buonocore
Scott Massey
To Fall by Eye



SEPTEMBER 11 TO OCTOBER 17 2015

G44

Centre for
Contemporary
Photography

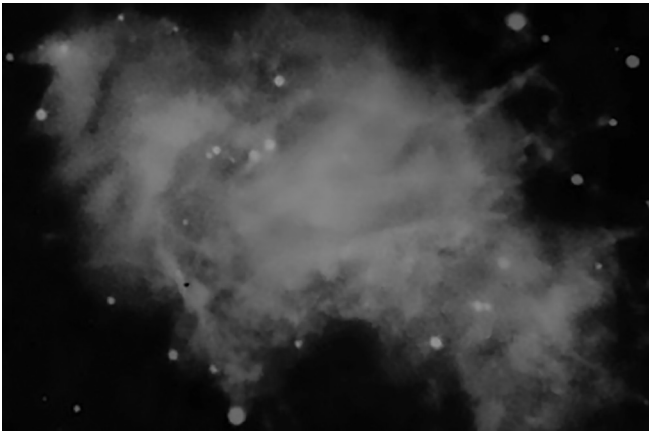
To Fall by Eye

Fraser McCallum

In Yves Klein’s photograph *Leap into the Void* (1960), the artist jumps triumphantly from a rooftop, and is held in photographic suspension mid-leap above a street in suburban Paris. Klein’s action is one of blind faith, certain that flight will prevent the painful fate that gravity ensures him. Although it is ambiguous into what void Klein may be leaping, the faith needed to make this work was dependent on photographic technology: his *Leap* is a photomontage, which erases the crucial fact that his landing was softened by a tarp held by friends below.

Klein’s *Leap* is emblematic of a sense of groundlessness that began in the 1960s as the epoch of late modernity took hold. In this era, the foundational bedrock upon which human activity could find meaning – such as God, Nature or Reason – was seen to crumble, and in lieu of solid ground, artists and thinkers of the time saw an abyss.¹ Since late modernity, diverse iterations of post-foundational thought in the humanities have attempted to grapple with this new groundlessness. Forming a constellation of interrelated reference points, *To Fall by Eye* at Gallery 44 reflects on the faith in technology that emerged in the 1960s as a reaction to newfound instability. The artists in the exhibition, Marco Buonocore, Aryen Hoekstra and Scott Massey, examine the ways in which photography was used to dispel or anchor the post-foundational sense of free fall. Their works are each concerned with specific cultural moments or byproducts of late modernity where belief in human ingenuity compensated for the anxieties of the time.

La chute à vue – to “fall by eye” – is a parachutists’ term to describe a jump without an altimeter. Lacking the vital instrument for skydiving, the parachutist must rely solely on her senses to know when to pull the ripcord. The term has been adopted by French theorist Paul Virilio to illustrate the contemporary condition of groundlessness, where the human sensorium is often in conflict with, or subservient to,



Aryen Hoekstra source material: U.S. Science Pavillion "Crab Nebula," 1962

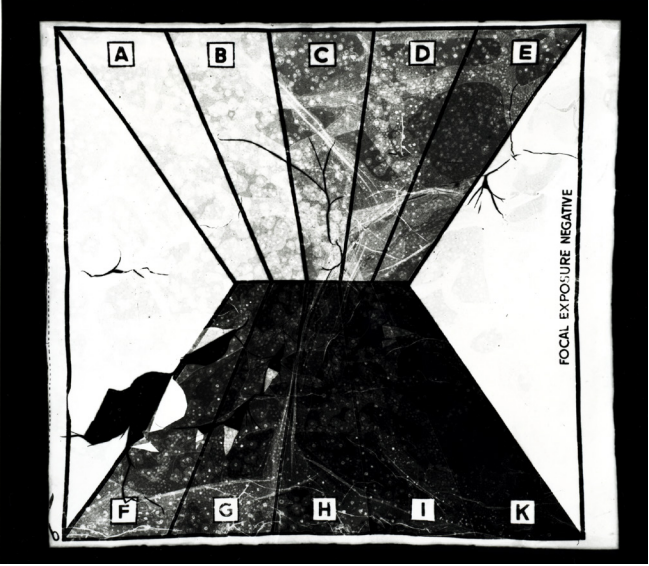
the technological apparatus.² Klein’s *Leap* is itself a kind of *chute à vue*, where the artist appears to jump foolishly to a painful end, but is in fact caught by an intervention masked over in the making of the image.

Aryen Hoekstra’s work draws upon several interrelated reference points from the era at which post-foundational thought emerged. Hoekstra identifies intersections between technology, spectacle and visual culture, using the 1962 World’s Fair in Seattle as a point of departure. Influenced by the aerospace industry in that city, the fair (called the Century 21 Exposition) envisioned a future shaped by science and technology. The perils of unbridled technophilia were

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apparent even in the opening festivities of the Exposition, when the mechanical failure of a fighter jet forced its pilot to eject and parachute back to earth, while his plane crashed into a suburban neighbourhood and killed two people.

Hoekstra reworks images from the Century 21 Exposition using his own logic of display and exhibition practices. Images of outer space and Bobo the chimpanzee (all of

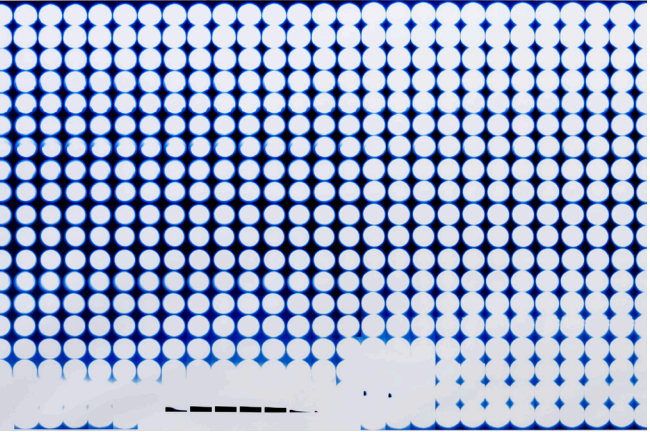


Marco Buonocore, *Focal Exposure Negative*, 83mm x 75mm, gelatin silver print, 2015

which were exhibited at the fair) are printed by Hoekstra using liquid photographic emulsion onto Cinefoil, a mal-leable matte black foil used to shape and block light by entertainment-industry technicians. Another light-shaping device – the photographer’s umbrella – is reappropriated as sculpture to become equally suggestive of a *chute à vue* parachute. Hoekstra’s umbrella-parachutes are printed with images from the Century 21 Exposition, suggesting a blind faith in technological salvation.

In Marco Buonocore’s *Test Negatives* (2015), the apparatus enabling manipulated images such as Klein’s *Leap* is laid bare. The test negatives enlarged and printed by Buonocore were sold by photography lens and supply manufacturers to facilitate precise enlarger calibration for darkroom printing in the 1960s and 1970s. These negatives enabled a printer to achieve the proper planar alignment of film, lens and light-sensitive paper, and they revealed the quality of an enlarger lens. Exhibiting tools that are typically unseen, Buonocore’s *Test Negatives* become arbiters between the backstage trickery of the darkroom and the final prints produced in that reification process. The bright whites, deep blacks and spectacular geometric patterns lend the prints a false optimism of the ambition toward photographic mastery and perfection.

Buonocore speculates on the aesthetic qualities of these utilitarian tools by enlarging and printing them using traditional darkroom printing techniques. He shows the test negatives to be more than tools; they possess their own aesthetic logic, which is highly reminiscent of 1960s Op Art. Concurrent with Yves Klein’s fascination with optical perception³, British artists such as Bridget Riley made hard-edge



Scott Massey, *Array Assembly* (detail), 2013

abstract paintings that undermined the perceived objectivity of visual perception. These Op artists employed visual tricks to show the eye to be an imperfect mediator of experience.

In Scott Massey’s work, photographic technologies tasked with recording phenomena in the natural environment and outer space are similarly called into question. Massey uses the image-making tools of astronomy, optics or quantum physics to problematize the documentation undertaken in these disciplines. In *The Day Breaks*, he employs a quasi-scientific methodology to photograph the changing colour and intensity of sunlight on a clear day. Using a flatbed scanner connected to nineteen enlarger lenses, Massey’s apparatus photographed the sky from sunrise to sunset at variable intervals, creating a large grid of black, blue and white colour fields corresponding to the intensity of the sun over time.

In the exhibition, a long roll of photographic paper bends to the contours of the gallery; it reads left to right – dawn to dusk – as the account of one terrestrial revolution. Massey’s complex photographic apparatus sits nearby: its lenses point skyward, fanning out like an organ from the ABS pipe that connects them to the scanner. The apparatus and images are at the very edge of what can easily be termed photography, thus deconstructing the many constituent parts of the medium. The abstract nature of the images recorded by Massey’s apparatus raise a host of issues in the representation of scientific data, where comprehensibility is highly contingent on specialist knowledge.

The works of Buonocore, Hoekstra and Massey reflect on the history of photography and its apparatuses through the ongoing transition from modernism and the analogue era to postmodernism and the rise of digital technology. The sense of groundlessness in the latter is echoed in the processes undertaken by the artists to destabilize the foundational codes of visual representation.

¹ Martin, J. (2009). Review of Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau. *Contemporary Political Theory*, 8(1), pp. 113-115. Oliver Marchart’s book, reviewed by Martin, locates the emergence of post-foundational thought as a Leftist reaction to Martin Heidegger’s critique of metaphysics in the work of 1960s philosophers such as Jean-Luc Nancy, Claude Lefort, Alain Badiou and Ernesto Laclau.

² Virilio, P. (1994). Gravitational Space. In L. Louppe (Ed.), *Traces of Dance* (pp. 35-59). Paris: Editions Dis Voir.
³ Yves Klein’s monochrome paintings using his patented International Klein Blue were his own tongue-in-cheek manner of espousing an interest in optics and visual perception.

Cover image

Scott Massey, *Array Assembly*,
2013

Poster image

Marco Buonocore, *Leitz
Focomat V35 Autofocus Test*
Positive, 36mm x 24mm,
digital c print, 2015

Back image (right)

Aryen Hoekstra source
material: United States
SPACE AGE Commemorative
MEDAL (1962) made at the
U.S. Mint in Philadelphia by
the authorization of United
States Congress. Designed
by George Tsutakawa



Gallery 44 Centre for Contemporary Photography is a non-profit artist-run centre committed to photography as a multi-faceted and ever-changing artform. Founded in 1979 to establish a supportive environment for the development of photography, Gallery 44's mandate is to provide a context for reflection and dialogue on contemporary photography and its related practices. Gallery 44 offers exhibition and publication opportunities to national and international artists, award-winning education programs, and affordable production facilities for artists. Through its programs, Gallery 44 is engaged in changing conceptions of the photographic image and its modes of production.

Fiona Annis is a Montréal-based visual artist and researcher whose practice emphasizes the use of scores and time-based media. Fiona has presented her work at The AC Institute (New York City), The Canadian Centre for Architecture (Montréal) Goldsmith's University (London), LowSalt Gallery (Glasgow), and The Art Gallery of Alberta (Edmonton). Her work has been published in *BlackFlash Magazine*, *Front: Contemporary Art & Ideas*, and *Imagining Science*, winner of the New York Book Show Award. Fiona recently completed a six-month residency at The Center for Alternative Photography in New York City, and currently teaches at Concordia University.

Nives Hajdin is a Toronto-based art writer and curator. She holds an MFA in Criticism and Curatorial Practice from OCAD University. Her thesis examined the effects of social surveillance in contemporary society, and her curatorial interests include urban interventions in alternative public spaces. Her writing has appeared in *Canadian Art*, *C Magazine*, and publications for Xpace Cultural Centre and Waddington's Auctioneers and Appraisers. She has an upcoming publication in *The Journal of Curatorial Studies* and was the Publication Coordinator for Luis Jacob's anthology, *Commerce by Artists* (Toronto: Art Metropole, 2011).

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11 am to 5 pm

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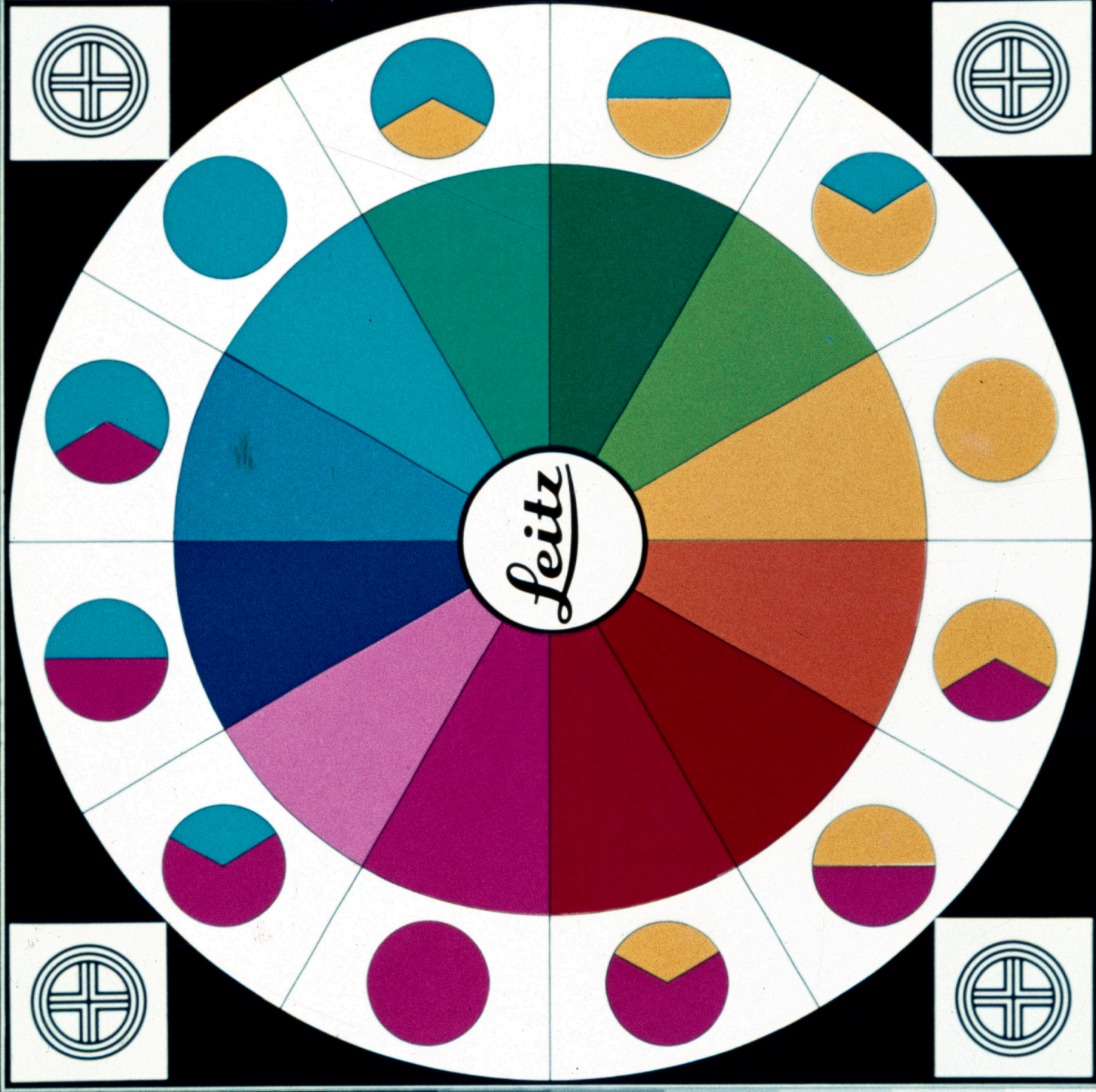
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FOCOMAT V35
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TEST

