

# THE INHABITANTS OF SPACE

FEATURING:

MILES COLLYER  
DEREK COULOMBE  
ERIKA DEFREITAS  
ALEXIS DIRKS

CURATED BY:

KRISTIE MACDONALD  
MEGHAN PRICE

May 12 – June 10, 2017

Opening Reception

Friday, May 12  
6:30-8:30 pm



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# THE INHABITANTS OF SPACE

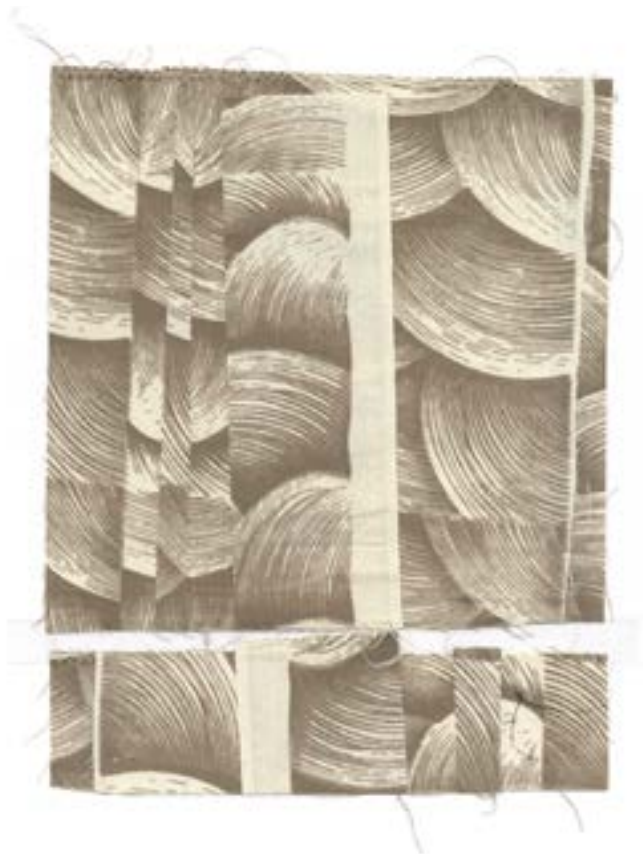
BY KRISTIE MACDONALD

*The Inhabitants of Space* takes its title from the dedication of *Flatland* (1884), Edwin A. Abbott's satirical sci-fi novella, which breaks down the geographical, architectural, and social structures of the world into a two-dimensional parody.<sup>1</sup> Abbott's flattened versions of bodies and places allow him to represent his subjects from a new perspective, simultaneously simplifying and complicating them structurally and philosophically.<sup>2</sup> As in *Flatland*, the artworks

included in this exhibition explore three-dimensional space by compressing it, calling attention to the relationship between depth and the image surface through reproduction. Techniques including photography, scanography, and xerography are pivotal to the production of each artwork. Each artist in the exhibition confronts the capacities of capture and print technologies to explore how we depict spaces, and consequently how we build images.

Artists Miles Collyer, Derek Coulombe, Erika DeFreitas, and Alexis Dirks provide new vantage points from which to consider their subject matter—ranging from the patterns of household textiles, to concrete and wood construction materials, and photographs of bodily forms that saturate books and magazines. Each artist generates sculptures or collages in order to reiterate them photographically; their assemblages are produced to be subsumed by the printed image, rather than presented in the viewers' immediate space. The artworks in this exhibition are records of process wherein viewers can observe evidence of labour and actions unfolding. Properties of the tools used to make each work are evidenced—the acts of cutting, pasting, copying, scanning, fading, folding, and re-photographing are, in part, subject matter. Pointing us towards their processes of production, each artist asks us to consider what is obscured and what is highlighted in the act of building up, when what is built can only be viewed through the flattened space of photographic mediation.

Erika DeFreitas' series, *untitled (these textile works)* (2015), depicts fabric remnants that have been folded, cut, and layered to emphasize and disrupt the patterns they



carry. The textiles pictured are visibly severed and recombined; their prints and patterns are variously destroyed and mended. We are made aware of the partial nature of these remnants and their correlation to mass-produced bolts of fabric. One can imagine them in relationship to the garments or linens from which they have been trimmed. The irregular shapes and small quantities of the textiles with which DeFreitas has chosen to work refer to the tradition of scrap quilting, blankets made from what is left over rather than cutting down new cloth. DeFreitas explores the limit of shape, pattern, and surface area in her small assemblages much the same way a quilter might strive to design a pattern given the limitation of their remnants bin.

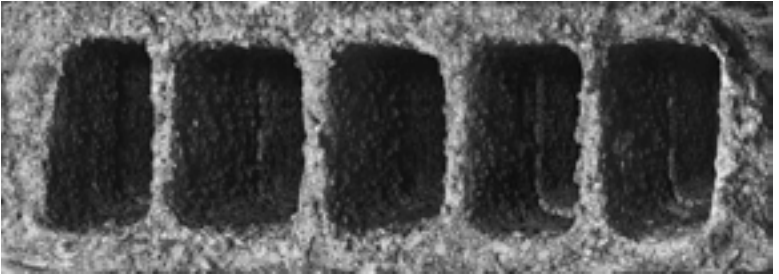
DeFreitas' remnants are reduced to material surfaces and inhabit a shallow space, compressed on the scanning bed and yet reproduced with the precision used to capture museum objects. Each collage is suspended in a white void; the slight space between folds and seams on each piece of fabric becomes magnified and immense. We tend to conceive of textiles as two-dimensional, yet cloth is

a composite of fibres in the round. Textile artist Annie Albers once referred to cloth as a pliable plane, both stable enough to embody the architecture of a tent dwelling and malleable enough to cover the body.<sup>3</sup> In many ways, textiles are an origin point for our relationship to material culture—the English word *stuff* is a translation of the French *étoffe*, meaning cloth.<sup>4</sup>

Acts of stacking and layering lie at the centre of Alexis Dirks' art practice; her work asks viewers to consider collaged pieces of printed matter, paper cuttings, and drawings within the space of a photographic reproduction. Dirks builds her collages on tabletop surfaces; the layers are visibly loose, stacked but not adhered. Her images contain traces of ambient light that generates subtle shadows beneath curling corners. Viewing Dirks' photographed collages one is acutely aware of depth and space despite the flat surface of the print. Just as DeFreitas' textiles are objects in the round, so too do Dirks' paper fragments occupy three-dimensional space. Paper, like cloth, is produced by building up and intertwining fibres.

In *Bended Knees* (2017), Dirks has cut up multiple copies of the same photograph—a leg clothed in bold geometrically patterned pants. Overlapping at intersecting angles, paired cuttings of knees appear almost as if sitting cross-legged. The repeated pattern she has culled from the pages of fashion magazines suggests the syncopated rhythms we might attribute to seasons, stratigraphy, and other markers of time. These knees rest atop large sheets of pink construction paper faded with outlines generated by prolonged exposure to sunlight. The construction paper is photographic in and of itself—one can observe how scraps of paper stacked and removed over time have created variously saturated and desaturated silhouettes according to how long each was left to block the sun.

As in her photographs, Dirks' sculptural work layers images and patterns—stacking, and wrapping them around plinths, as well as spreading them across walls or the floor. Image surfaces are always dimensional in her work, even when they lie flat. This is evident in *Discomforting Figure* (2017), a delicate collage of found photographs and gestural drawings of bodies (that read as cubist sculptures), resting atop a fractured grid of freehand lines drawn in pen. Dirks' drawings of fractured modernist figures sit alongside textbook page reproductions of early stone sculpture, including Cycladic figurines with arms characteristically folded across their chests. The Cycladic figures, like Dirks' collage, are subtly dimensional, shallow and hugging themselves tight while jutting their heads and knees ever so slightly into space.

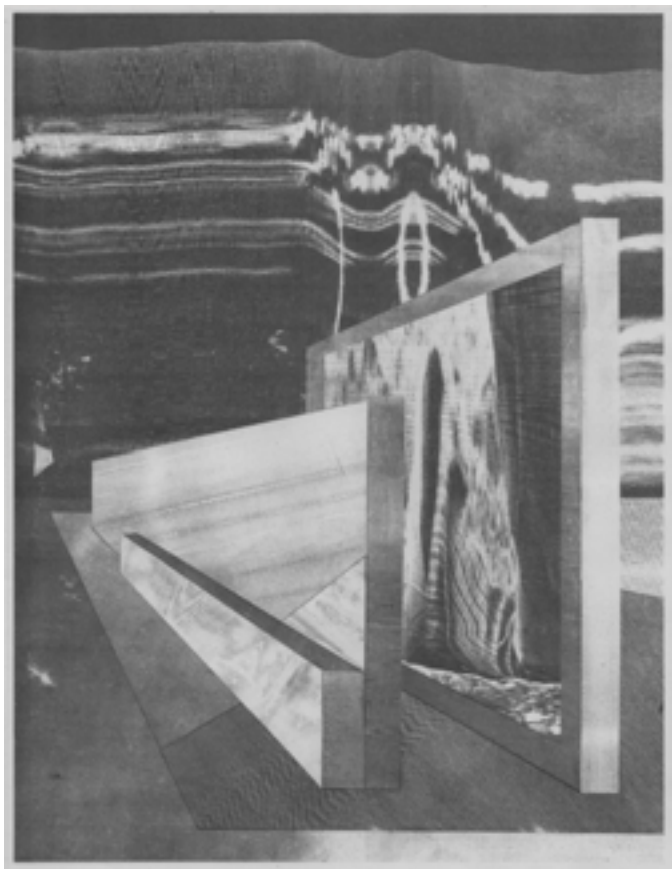


Dirks has printed her photographed collage on a pliable fabric, which is wrapped around two tall plinths in such a way that it resembles a pair of pants.

The spatial relationship between photographed object and image substrate is also a primary focus for Miles Collyer. His ongoing series of large, wall-mounted, photocopy prints (2015 – present) depict a series of strange bricks, objects that appear genuine in their texture and unreal in their unfamiliar design. Cinder blocks, a ubiquitous material, refer equally to the building site and the contemporary ruin. To produce these images, Collyer casts singular cement blocks with the intention of manipulating them photographically. He shifts and modifies their form and perspective in digital post-production. Collyer's cinder blocks undergo digital manipulations to such an extent that his final images represent nonexistent forms. The images reward us for looking closely at the interplay of light and shadow. The detail with which Collyer captures the texture of his cement blocks camouflages the subtly skewed perspective. The shadowy interior of each block suggests real space and causes us to question the status of the object. Each work in this series is printed as a larger-than-life digital Xerox, which is wheat-pasted directly onto the wall. Collyer's use of disposable and unprecious bond paper prints points to the brick's status as a copy of a copy of a copy.

A distinct relationship exists between the black and white photocopy images of both Miles Collyer and Derek Coulombe; each artist uses texture to fabricate uneasy objects. The depth implied in each image is invented, not quite belonging to the external world. Coulombe manipulates images by photocopying them many times over in order to distort and transform textures found in existing print media. He often moves his source materials across the glass surface of Xerox machines to stretch out forms, consequently recording movement—running away from, or perhaps chasing, the scanning lamp as it captures. In Coulombe's *Lodge II* (2013), we see evidence of this stretching unfold in the background of the image; objects that resemble stacked lumber sit before a

(continued overleaf)



fluxing, textured space, not unlike the undulating output of a video waveform oscilloscope. Much like the waveform display, Coulombe's stretched image elements also trace the light and dark of photographic production; they provide evidence of hands moving over glass in the moment of xerographic capture.

We can see the depth of objects, often shallow, push up against the flatness of the printed image surface in the work of Collyer, Coulombe, DeFreitas, and Dirks. *The Inhabitants of Space* brings together work that exposes its own process of production, images that are representations of the labour of building up assemblages in space, only to flatten those constructions through reproduction. Unravelling the processes embedded in each image, distinguishing (or at least attempting to) between the photographic tricks and real space in each image becomes central to its understanding. We can retrace moments in each artist's process, identifying strange spaces that hover between two and three dimensions, or spaces that drift toward the unreal.

Co-Curator Bios

### KRISTIE MACDONALD

Kristie MacDonald is an artist who lives and works in Toronto. Her practice engages notions of the archive and the collection, as well as their roles in the evolving meanings and contextual histories of images and artifacts. She has recently exhibited her work at the MacLaren Art Centre (Barrie), Art Gallery of Mississauga (Mississauga), BABEL Visningsrom for Kunst (Trondheim, Norway), Reed Collage (Portland, Oregon), G Gallery (Toronto), The International Print Center (NYC). MacDonald is currently a doctoral candidate in the Department of Visual Arts at York University.

Kristie would like to thank Meghan Price, her co-curator and collaborator, for the words and ideas shared during the writing of this text.

### MEGHAN PRICE

Meghan Price is an artist based in Toronto. Her sculpture, print and video work is rooted in the language of textiles and figures' relationships between human time and geological time. Forthcoming and recent exhibition sites include Untitled Art Society (Calgary), AKA art-run (Saskatoon), the Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba (Brandon), Katzman Contemporary (Toronto), Idea Exchange (Cambridge) and Blackwood Gallery (Toronto).

For full artist bios, please see:

[www.openstudio.ca/exhibition/the-inhabitants-of-space/](http://www.openstudio.ca/exhibition/the-inhabitants-of-space/)

<sup>1</sup> Abbott, Edwin A. *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Despite Abbott's imperfect Victorian politics, *Flatland* remains an interesting experiment in shifting perspective. The text is referenced here for its aesthetic tactics, rather than a means to engage with Abbott's particular observations, critiques or social statements.

<sup>3</sup> Albers, Anni. "The Pliable Plane; Textiles in Architecture." *Perspecta* 4 (1957): 36-41.

<sup>4</sup> Pajaczowska, Claire. "Stuff and Nonsense: The Complexity of Cloth." *Textile* 3:3 (2015): 220-249.

Interior images:

Erika DeFreitas, *Untitled [these textile works] No. 4* (detail), 2015, chromogenic print, 26" x 30".

Myles Collyer, *Linear Perspective and Other Related Atrocities*, 2016, digital photocopy on bond paper, wheat paste, 97" x 277".

Derek Coulombe, *Lodge II*, 2013, Inkjet Print, 16" x 22".

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Cover image: Alexis Dirks, *Bended Knees* (detail), 2017, archival inkjet print, 35" x 24".

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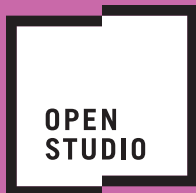
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