

KEITH DE LELLIS
GALLERY

FINE ART PHOTOGRAPHY

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TRICK PHOTOGRAPHY AND VISUAL EFFECTS

January 19 – March 18, 2023

Keith de Lellis Gallery is pleased to present a group exhibition of over forty photographs created during the 19th and 20th centuries that historically altered and redefined the capabilities of the medium by utilizing pre-digital innovations such as photo montage, photo collage, double exposures and the darkroom process of composite printing. This show elegantly brings together photographs motivated by both advertising and artistic intents to highlight the significant level of ingenuity applied by artists across the fields to deliberately visualize their subject matter, of which many on display are painstakingly constructed by hand. An example of such artistry is found in a star-studded montage published by L. J. Lipp Publishing of Hollywood, California in 1928 with hundreds of faces of Hollywood's famous actors and actresses, including Charlie Chaplin and Tom Mix, Hollywood's first Western star. In another photograph we witness a beaming Fred Astaire miraculously dancing through the clouds as he plays the role of Charlie Hill from the 1952 film *The Belle of New York*.

Trick photography lends itself to a surreal atmosphere as it can take elements of reality and assemble them together in an altered, dream-like narrative. Rolf Tietgens (German-American, 1911-1984) made a series of these kinds of images of American mystery novelist Patricia Highsmith, including one on view in which we see a nude Highsmith approaching an illustration of a mysteriously cloaked doorway. Highsmith herself reflected on how photography is able to manipulate reality to question reality, redefining the possibilities not only of photography but how we perceive reality itself, as she inquired in her diary, "where does reality end and photography begin?" (*Diaries and Notebooks*, 1941-1995).

The birth of photo manipulation followed soon after the invention of photography itself, which officially occurred in 1839 when Louis Daguerre announced his invention of the Daguerreotype in France. Varied in subject matter, several photographs on display in this exhibition were produced during the 19th century and are fantastic demonstrations in early applications of composite printing. On view is an anonymous albumen print made during the 1870s, where the portraits of twenty-three different mafioso described as the 'Bandits of Sicily' are captured in a skillfully printed composition. Another photograph from the 1880s comprises a group of thirteen layered studies of women artfully posed in the nude, with some women staring directly back at the viewer while others gaze elsewhere in the distance. A composite print by Marceau of San Francisco combines the portraits of players from the Baltimore and All-American baseball teams during the California Tour of 1897 with a hand drawn background of sporting equipment including a bat, glove and baseball.

Politics and disaster are juxtaposed in the pairing of an anti-axis propaganda photo collage of "Benito Mussolini, the Strong Man of Italy, in a character study of challenge and defiance" (as described in a caption by *International News Photos*) and a collage depicting a city being decimated by an earthquake. In the photo collage fantasy of Mussolini, his large figure looms over a battle scene of long-range guns and steaming cruisers as black smoke fills the air while black paint is brushed over the sky to intensify the ominous atmosphere of the photograph. The latter photo collage also uses paint to imagine a catastrophic scene, this time in Los Angeles, of burning buildings collapsing under siege of an earthquake.

Beginning in the 1920s, as photography replaced illustration in advertising, montage work flourished. On view are several imaginative and dramatic photo montages that combine the use of text, which quickly became the modern way to entice consumers into purchasing a variety of products ranging from fine linens to shoes. A photograph that exemplifies this powerful method of advertising is a piece that markets the Joseph Schlitz Brewing Company as 'the

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beer that made Milwaukee Famous.' In another work we see a handwritten letter praising the comfort of hiking shoes photographed alongside a seemingly candid snapshot of a young couple enjoying a romantic view of the mountains while on horseback. Photographers took cues from these advertisements to advance their own businesses, including Hungarian-American photographer Emery P. Revesz-Biro (1895-1975). Two such examples of his work are on display, with one showing a pair of hands counting the numerous reasons a company should hire him, including his skills in carefulness, reliability and speed.

Welsh photographer Angus McBean (1904-1990) used his skills in photo manipulation to make a surreal composite portrait in 1948 of French film actress Marika Rivera as she appears to gracefully float above the water with a translucent white water lily and flowers framing her face. French photographer Pierre Adam (Active Paris, 1930s) used the same technique of composite printing combined with pen drawings to create a starry night against a black background while a ceramic head symbolic of Taurus, one of the oldest documented constellations, hovers through the dazzlingly constructed sky.

Trick Photography and Visual Effects is a notable exhibition that presents the artistic work of over twenty artists who played an important role in advancing the intricate and fascinating history of photographic manipulation. Collectively this exhibition features the work of Pierre Adam, Geo E. Anderson, David Attie, Will Connell, Gordon Coster, Harry Richardson Cremer, Pedro E. Guerrero, John Hatlem, All Star Picture Library, George Platt Lynes, Wendell MacRae, Marceau, Angus McBean, Nino Migliori, Nickolas Muray, Bertram Park, Mario Perotti, International News Photos, L. J. Lipp Publishing, Emery P. Revesz-Biro, Rolf Tietgens, Underwood & Underwood, and Weegee. *Trick Photography and Visual Effects* is on view at Keith de Lellis Gallery from January 19 through March 18, 2023.

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