

## Peter Holzhauer

Peter Holzhauer is on a mission to teach his viewers to see anew. Based in Los Angeles, he guides our attention to the accidental, the presence of well-intentioned but unfortunate urban planning, and the misplacement and even defacement of the natural setting. Holzhauer's approach is that of a visual anthropologist, surveying the city and countryside for signs of what has become of us—how the consequences of our use of the land have created the fabric of our environment today. In his series *The Marine Layer* (2005–2008) and *Los Angeles Class* (2005–2008), Holzhauer has exposed form in the world where form might easily be ignored. Telephone wires crisscross at the heights of palm trees. Malt liquor advertising—"Expect Everything"—hangs ironically over a cluster of downtrodden homes. A billboard with a celebrity endorsement for cognac obscures another house, yet it is in turn dwarfed by its surroundings—streets, palms, telephone poles, and the Los Angeles hillside behind it dense with still more homes. In Holzhauer's deadpan portrayal of the metropolis, daily ironies sharpen under perpetual sunshine through the clash of prosperity and destitution, the jumble of the natural and the man-made. In his choice of subject, Holzhauer explores the nature of nostalgia and the lingering on of the past. His series *Residue of the Reel* (2005–2008) reflects on the contrast of this sunny environment with his upbringing in Maine, including his former work as a boat stern man. Holzhauer recalls how on a return visit to Maine, when he ran into his former boat captain and told him of his new home, "He looked at me like I was crazy."<sup>5</sup> Yet Holzhauer is committed to reckoning with the nature of this new and different environment. Frequent scenes of absurdity include Holzhauer's photograph of a prominent electrical wall outlet that appears as something talismanic and even living. Los Angeles architecture, such as the Bonaventure Hotel downtown, glitters in ethereal accomplishment. Water takes the form of giant blocks of ice, melting slowly on the curb. Discarded plastic cups litter a dirty puddle like stars forming the northern sky. Holzhauer documents claims on the local terrain by individuals we will never see or know, such as the person who, while repainting a wall, painted around the creeping vines clinging to the cinderblocks rather than removing this tenuous living things. Here, we are transported to the moment of this decision and to the moment when Holzhauer pressed the shutter to record it. We are reminded of being products of our surroundings, even as life feels largely accidental. How we perceive these accidents of incident, and how we learn from them, determines our future.

Photographic exploration also provides the artist with ways to understand the relationship of the past to the present. Wood describes her concern as one of the “mapping” and “navigation” of personal history, similar to statements made by such other Assembly photographers as Peter Holzhauer, Whitney Hubbs, Matt Lipps, and Asha Schechter. In her most recent series, *I have only what I remember* (2009), Wood continues to investigate the ways photography can elicit meaning from the personal archive that is memory and the ways its association with a sense of place can shape identity. As seen in *Sesame Street* (1980, 2008) (2008), she revisits what was once the center of her early life, the former home of her grandparents, now emptied in final preparation for its sale to new inhabitants. Wood projects into these rooms multiple, overlapping family snapshots that bring to life once more the arts, artifacts, figures, and circumstances that shaped her past experiences and thus her present memories. The sight of herself as a small child standing before an obsolete television set—the construction of the documented past—elicits an inescapable reckoning with past experience, urging us to recall anew the former presence of rooms and relationships that shape our current selves.

In total, the eight artists of ASSEMBLY—Nicole Belle, Matthew Brandt, Peter Holzhauer, Whitney Hubbs, Matt Lipps, Joey Lehman Morris, Asha Schechter and Augusta Wood—offer an enlarged sense of the possibilities for photographic practice today. Drawing on Southern California’s cultural heritage with its emphasis on material construction and conceptual experiment, their work suggests broader trends in contemporary American practice, including a desire to curate one’s own life in an ever more digital world. The works on view represent early achievement in these diverse artists’ promising careers. How their photographic investigations will continue to unfold remains, therefore, a subject of much interest and excitement.

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*Editor’s note:* Charlotte Cotton was originally commissioned by FotoFest to be one of the curators for the FotoFest 2010 CONTEMPORARY U.S. PHOTOGRAPHY exhibits. At that time, she was Curator and Head of the Wallis Annenberg Photography Department at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). At her suggestion, the actual curating of ASSEMBLY: EIGHT EMERGING PHOTOGRAPHERS FROM SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA was done by the team of photography curators at LACMA.