

## SUSPENDING THE VIEWER

By Don Lambert April 29, 2010

A review of Tim Forcade: Spectacular Uncertainty



Tim Forcade, "Frozen Grasses," lacquered pigment print on board, 32" x 48", 2007. Image: courtesy of the artist

Strecker-Nelson Gallery

Manhattan, Kansas

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The splendors of everyday nature, when heightened through the eyes and lenses of Tim Forcade, become even more so emphasized. On whatever levels you experience his works — intellectual or emotional, technical or sensual — be prepared to be awakened.

Spectacular Uncertainty is the title of Forcade's new book as well as his latest exhibition, which consisted of two dozen photographs, as large as 40 inches by 60 inches. The subjects were fragments of nature — a thrusting drop of water or a cavernous orchid. When magnified by as much as 50 times, the subjects receded, often barely there. What emerged were gently arousing and abstracted spans of light and color. All these works were created in the last five years, besting the 40-year career of the ever-restless, ever-searching-beyond-the-limits artist-photographer who grew up in Prairie Village, Kansas.

It is hard to imagine Lawrence, Kansas-based Forcade's works looking better anywhere than they did in the Strecker-Nelson Gallery, in downtown Manhattan and owned by Jay and Barbara Nelson. The second story of the 101-year-old building on the National Register of Historic Places has 12-foot-high ceilings and nearly floor-to-ceiling windows. Natural light streaming from the south changes the look and feel of the gallery by the minute. Against the putty-colored walls, Forcade's works popped. Making this exhibit even more cohesive was that Forcade, a self-professed artist-nerd, had installed the exhibition virtually in a 3-D replica weeks before any actual hanging.

Tim Forcade, "WaterFall," pigment print, 18" x 27", 2006. Image: courtesy of the artist



More spectacular than the setting and installation of Spectacular Uncertainty was the work itself: "spectacular" because of the unexpected scale, color, light, and effervescence; "uncertainty" because of what Forcade has described in his work as "the dichotomy between the photographic realism and ambiguous abstraction."

One such uncertainty was whether you were seeing photographs or paintings. It didn't really matter. Nor did the obligatory conversations trying to peg the work into art history or photography history. Forcade seems to thrive on this ambiguity with statements such as, "Though I use a camera, I don't care about making photographs... I work to suspend the viewer, however briefly, in the spectacular uncertainty that is in the world."

The cameras Forcade uses have ranged from viewfinder cameras to his current Nikon (digital) combined with various lenses, computers, and both solvent and aqueous pigment ink printers. "For my long-standing passion for technology, this current work is very much an extension of my meditation practice — the notion of being aware enough to notice the spectacular appearing right in front of me," Forcade explains.

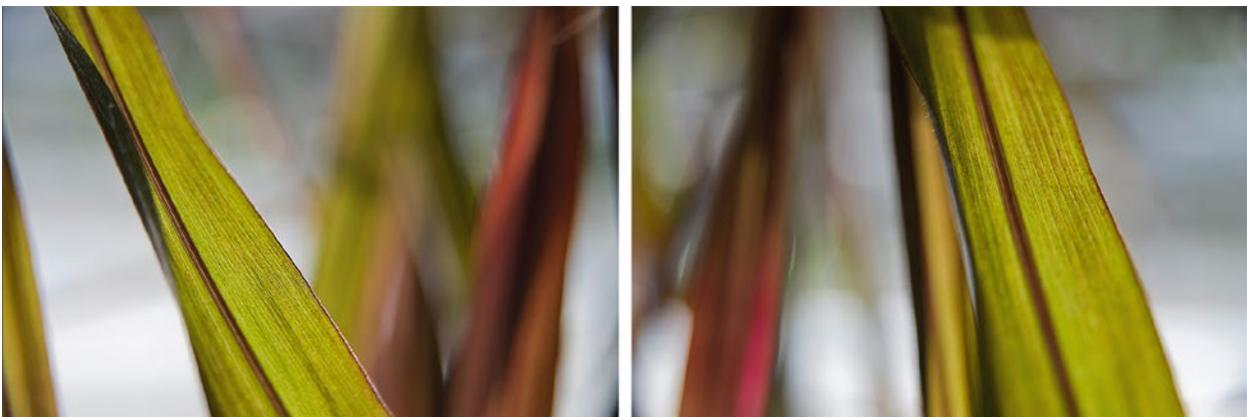


Tim Forcade, "Interchange," lacquered pigment print on board, 32" x 48", 2009. Image: courtesy of the artist

Might have all of the photographs in the Strecker-Nelson Gallery been metaphors for life? Frozen Grasses could almost be an abstract-expressionist painting with its profusion and confusion of light marks jutting through a darker, undefined background. In Waterfall, dappled lighting creates a series of textures resembling plastic, neon, and fur. Guise focuses and unfocuses on multiple yellow blooms, their curved edges and granular surfaces fading into obscurity. In Weeds, deconstructed stems and flowers meld into brilliant yellows and greens. Inadvertent is a diptych 72 inches wide with undulating diagonal leaves floating against a distant flowering background. In Interchange, rippling beach waves mirror a blue-white gusting sky. Mudra filters a flower into translucency suggesting East Indian colors and dances.

Born in 1947, Tim Forcade graduated from Shawnee Mission East High School, where he drew obsessively, studying classical and surrealist artists. At the University of Kansas, where he received a degree in drawing and painting, he went through the obligatory phases of Abstract Expressionism and hard-edged abstraction.

Midway through his experience at KU, in 1967, he stopped painting, divorced traditional media entirely, and began to experiment with light, photography, and electronics. For instance, he worked with a live model, theatrical stroboscopic lighting, and a manually rotating gel wheel to create numerous photographic figure studies.



Tim Forcade, "Inadvertent," pigment print on canvas, 24" x 72", 2008. Image: courtesy of the artist

His other experiments included motorized paintings created to be viewed under strobe lighting, live multi-projector performances, and what he calls light machines produced over the next 20 years that create compositions directly from sound. Installations and photography from these works were shown at the Kansas City Artists Coalition and the Dykes Library at the KU Medical Center in the 1980s. "I worked with the distinct characteristics of each light machine in its live 'performing' state and as a means to create abstract photographs," Forcade says. In retrospect, one senses a seamless continuity of images stretching from these early experiments to date.

That's exactly what you see in Forcade's work today, shown keenly in Spectacular Uncertainty. These photographs have a quality of being painstakingly assembled rather than simply photographed. These are not the works of a 20-something who stumbled onto a revelatory vision. Rather, Tim Forcade, after an odyssey extending through lights, motors, cameras, and computers, has created his own vision by infusing art and technology with his ongoing spectacular uncertainties.