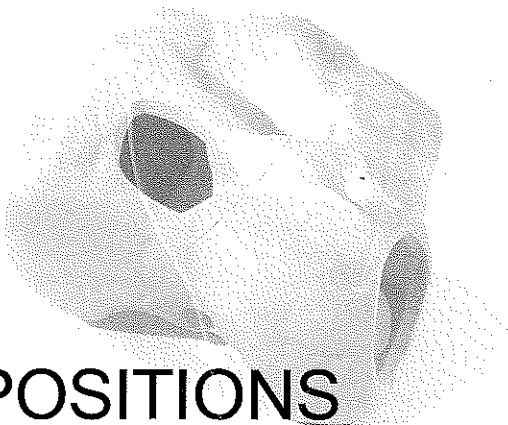
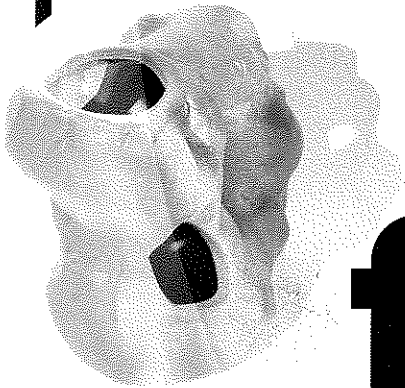


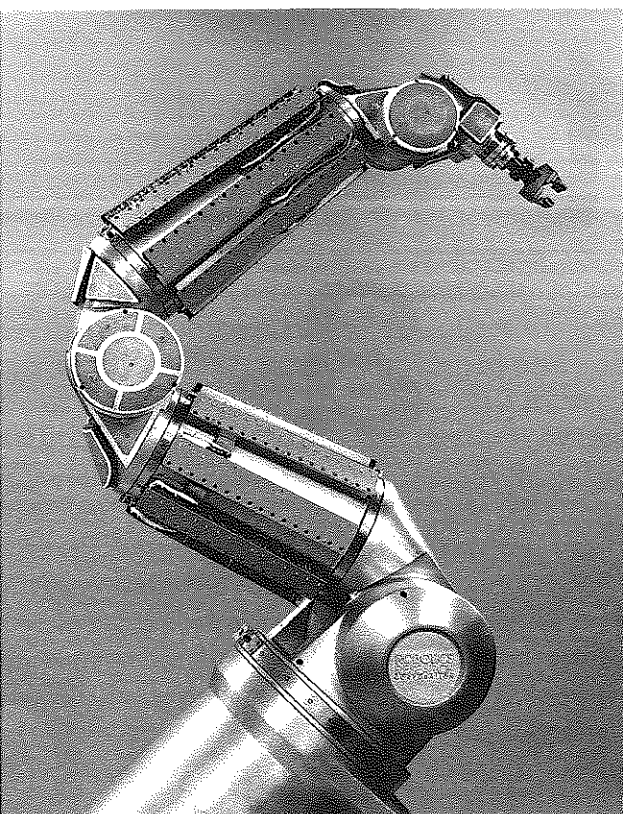
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'Robotic arm with seven degrees of movement, UK Robotics', 1997 from 'Deep Blue' © Peter Fraser, courtesy Peter Fraser and Camilla Grimaldi Gallery, London

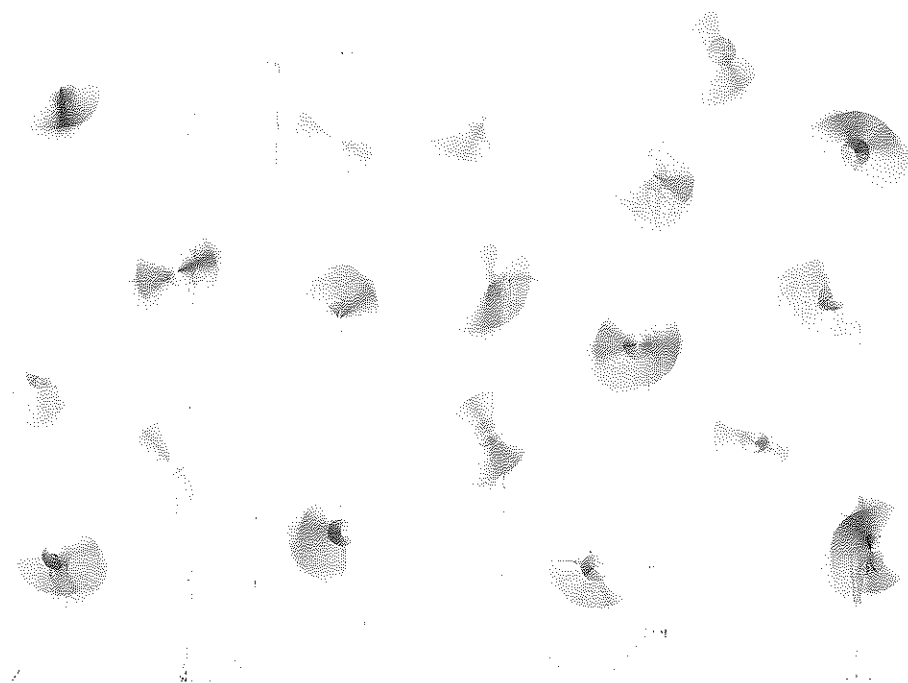
Below:
Colour Wheels, 2012
© Olaf Bruening,
courtesy the artist /
Metro Pictures

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Photography at The Museum of Modern Art in New York from 1961-1992. Much has been written about Szarkowski's ideas on medium specificity and it would be beyond the scope of the present article to contribute anything further to this field. Instead, I would like to focus on earlier Russian formalism and the diaspora of the



Bauhaus movement in the United States as a key for reading the work of artists in this exhibition.

The concept of defamiliarization, or *ostranenie*, was first coined by Viktor Shklovsky in his 1917 essay *Art as Device*. As a literary strategy, defamiliarization sought to alienate common objects from their everyday context in order to critically interrogate the signifying systems produced by representation. It also informed Bertolt Brecht's notion of the estrangement effect, or *Verfremdungseffekt*, which emphasized the contrivance by means of which illusion normally operates in the theater.

These ideas also found resonance within the Bauhaus movement and were successively dispersed within the United States following the diaspora of artists and intellectuals persecuted by the Nazi regime. The exiles of the Bauhaus arrived in North Carolina, where Josef and Anni Albers taught alongside John Cage and Merce Cunningham at Black Mountain College, in Chicago, where László Moholy-Nagy founded the New Institute of Design and in Los



Flying/Falling,
1987 © John
Divola

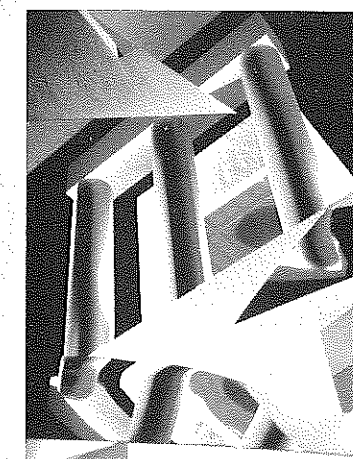
Angeles, where Brecht sought refuge along with Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer.

One of the goals of Brecht's epic theater was to always make the audience aware that they were looking at a play that used various devices such as direct address, onstage lighting and set changes in full view of the audience. These techniques would help break down the so-called fourth wall and prevent the audience from becoming too immersed in the fictional representation happening on stage. In a similar vein, the artists in this exhibition have a variety of devices at their disposal to interrupt the naturalism that photography encourages. Three fields in particular are worth highlighting: colour, software and the Internet.

The ascendancy of colour in art photography began in the late 1970s and transformed what had hitherto been a highbrow monochromatic playing-field into a motley assemblage, equal

parts advertisement, family snapshot and cinema film still. Irving Penn's 1977 *Frozen Food (with String Beans)* is an excellent example of a picture that merges what could be a frozen food ad with a colour field painting. In a certain formal sense it could prefigure Jessica Eaton's *cfaal* series with its indebtedness to

Architectural Site 8,
December 21, 1986
© Barbara Kasten,
courtesy Kadel Willborn
Gallery, Dusseldorf.



Josef Albers' colour theory and square studies. If the colour in Penn's picture could be seen as a prescient bowing of high and low culture, for Eaton colour instead becomes a process completely divergent from what is in front of the camera. Colour becomes simply the combination of hue, saturation and brightness, and each of these elements can be very easily manipulated with relatively minor interventions by the artist.

Software began to make itself known in the late 1980s at a time when artists were engaging with the fragmentation of Postmodernism. Although devoid of digital manipulation, Barbara Kasten's 1986 *Architecture Sites* series is a wonderful synopsis of that period with its electric colours created by a film lighting crew, vertiginous perspectives and disjointed compositions aided by large mirrors placed both in front of her camera and inside the scenes she photographed. These technical and physical distortions of reality lay the basis for Lucas Blalock's purposefully de-skilled use of computer manipulation that place procedurally off-stage elements like the clone stamp and the layer mask at center stage in his photographs. Blalock turns what are effectively tools of invisible intervention into Brechtian set-pieces that interrupt the transparency of the image and the naturalism of its representation. His focus on common objects, particularly those found in 99 cent stores, creates a sort of disavowed recognition that hinges on the formal genericness of his subjects. Joshua Citarella also engages with the new possibilities opened by computer manipulation, albeit within a very specific strand of hyper-realistic photography that emerges from the fashion and beauty industry. He deliberately leaves traces of cosmetic retouch-