

Object Number: L2012.162

JoAnn Verburg

American, born 1950

Water Diptych, 2006, G280

Video

“I liked the look of the waterline, which was a sort of drawing line, creating not only a plane — like the plane of the film, the plane of focus, the plane of the glass in the frame in the gallery — but also a dividing line separating my world from their different underwater world,” Ms. Verburg said in the interview, referring to ‘Untitled’ (Sally and Ricardo) 1983.”

Artist’s Biography: JoAnn Verburg was born in 1950 in Somerset, New Jersey and was “hooked” on photography from the very beginning. Her father worked as a chemist and then as an executive for Ansco (GAF), the American manufacturer of photographic papers, so that photography was ever present in her family life. She was provided with film and was always shooting and loved looking at her pictures. She attended Wesleyan University in Ohio where she majored in sociology. Rather than write the papers for her major, she would spend hours engrossed in photography books. She decided to learn how to print photographs. She was unable to get into a photography class that she wanted and convinced her sculpture teacher to take her on as an independent student. He was able to help her “look” at photography as a drawing or a print. Upon graduation, Verburg went to Philadelphia Museum of Art where she worked as the coordinator of special events. She was always carrying her camera and had access to a darkroom as well as special exhibitions. She was particularly influenced by Marcel Duchamp, Claes Oldenburg, and Robert Rauschenberg. She entered the Rochester Institute of Photography.

Ms. Verburg first made a name for herself in the late 1970s with “The Rephotographic Survey Project,” an exhibition and book on which she collaborated with Mark Klett, another photographer, and Ellen Manchester, a photo historian. They gathered more than 120 images by William Henry Jackson, Timothy O’Sullivan and others of a largely uninhabited Western landscape in the 19th century. Armed with geological maps and compasses, the modern photographers took photographs of landscapes with the same light and weather conditions as the earlier photographers showing how the landscape had changed. Verdant landscapes had been overtaken by parking lots, rivers changed by the creation of reservoirs, cars and railroads appeared as well as the changes brought on by nature. The gap between the first pictures and the resulting rephotograph provided a sense of time in motion or continuous change, something that would continue to affect her work. Verburg also appreciated that a discrepancy existed between the world and a photograph of it. She was relieved of the expectation that a photograph could ever authentically ever relay human experience. The gap or discrepancy that exists in the resulting photograph is filled by the audience’s imagination, perception and experience. “A lot of what I have done as an artist ... is absolutely directly related to the survey-

looking at the photograph and looking at the place, making that comparison, being amazed by it, and being intrigued by it, to the point that at night I literally would dream a different version of it. I think a lot of my multiple -frame work has to do with the experience of place... It's a way of enlarging human experience." She has said that time does not stand still but her photography is a way of prolonging experience for the viewer. Verburg created one of the first visiting artist's programs for the Polaroid Company in 1978. She invited 30 photographers to participate in the program over two years. They included Jim Dine, Chuck Close, and William Wegman, among others.

Verburg moved to Minneapolis permanently in 1983. As a visiting artist at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis in 1981 her interest shifted from the documentary possibilities of photography to what the medium can reveal about perceptual experience. Collaborating with other visiting artists — dancers, musicians and performance artists like Trisha Brown, David Byrne and Robert Wilson — she began to think of performance as a counterpoint to photography. "Performance disappears as you look at it," she is quoted as saying in the exhibition catalog. "It is unique and unrepeatable, and each viewer who sees it sees it from a different vantage point and therefore has a different experience from every other viewer."

In 1984, during their honeymoon, Jim Moore, a poet and the "everyman" appearing in many of her photographs, and Verburg visited Spoleto, Italy where they now have a small apartment. In the 1990's after a bout of pneumonia, Verburg was unable to spend much time in the dark room developing black and white photos. She was forced to turn her attention to color photography, which furthered her quest to have her viewers play an active role in her photography since the world of color more closely approximates their own world. Around 1995, she began her series of olive groves in the countryside around Spoleto. Each frame can stand on its own but it forces viewers to decide for themselves where they are in relation to the site, encouraging the viewer to engage with the inner self and nature.

Verburg has had major exhibitions at the Walker Art Center and at MOMA. (An interesting interview can be found on ARTSCONNECTED from the Walker site.) She now divides her time between Spoleto and the Twin Cities. One certainty, she says, is that the Twin Cities will remain her home. She's also considering shooting more work closer to Minnesota. In lieu of a nearby ocean, she imagines quiet time at a lake to satisfy her current craving to photograph water as exemplified by this installation. "What keeps me here is partly Jim, and I really love the whole feeling of the politics and people," she says. "When I moved here, I was really thinking about who I am and who I wanted to be. It's not that it's not up in the air now, but it's up in the air differently."

Questions:

- Look closely at this installation. How would you describe it?
- Are these two separate videos, or just one?
- What emotions do you experience as you watch these videos? Do you notice a difference in your reaction to each of the videos?
- What is the artist attempting to create with these videos?

- What are some of the ways humans are transformed by water?
- Do you think this is art? Why or why not?
- JoAnn Verburg has another piece in G202, Thanksgiving 2001. It is a very different piece, a six-panel work. Which do you prefer. Why?



Thanksgiving, 2001

Gallery Label:

JoAnn Verburg

Thanksgiving, 2001, G206

Six chromogenic prints each mounted to Plexiglas

Courtesy of Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York

Patient observation and careful art scholarship are at the heart of JoAnn Verburg's photographs. While her subjects vary from ancient olive trees to people's faces, here she focuses on the intricacies and transcendent nature of an Italian landscape. Using a 5 x 7-inch camera, she employs selective focus to accentuate one part of a photograph while leaving other portions evocatively blurry. The multi-panel format suggests that seeing, like viewing cinema, is a process that occurs over time—we don't see just one thing in a single moment.

That Verburg's multi-panel approach recalls the folding screens on view in the museum's Asian galleries is no accident. For years Verburg has been inspired by Japanese, Korean, and Chinese screens, and studied how images move from one panel to the next, their spaces shifting forward and back, the individual pictures seeming both independent and integrated. The natural world is in process, and both the Asian screens and these photographs give us simple structures and beautiful subjects that reflect dynamic changes. Careful observation of both nature and art makes our human experiences rich and full.

In Her Own Words:



JoAnn Verburg, *Untitled (1/11/92)*, 1992

Right. So subjective, so about me, so personal, and yet I'm aware that you have another perspective. There are other vantage points, there are other perspectives, other subjective beings outside my frame and my imagination. That would be the basic use of the newspaper. Then I often give the viewer something to read, which is usually (but not always) life-size newspaper text. In that case, there are two things going on. One is that you're engaging the subject matter, which tends to be a story about the consequences of war or greed. Second, you're also doing what the person in the image is doing, which I love. Jim is reading the newspaper as you are reading the newspaper, only he is not a person. He's the simulacrum, and you're the person. The time in the photograph and the time in the gallery are in collusion in some really odd way, a way that appeals to me. There's that—the question about what's reality—and the fact that these things all exist simultaneously.



JoAnn Verburg, *Untitled (Ceaurescu/Nap)*, 1990

I was photographing Jim. I was still getting used to the idea that I was living with somebody, which was disturbing every cell of me because I'd never lived with anybody before. I wasn't used to it, and I loved living alone. I was photographing him and absorbing the idea of him. In this particular case, I was staying in Florida. I thought, "Well, I'll just try doing a panoramic image of the two halves of his body."

At the time, I was looking through art books and found a Van Gogh, one of the sunflower paintings,

in reproduction. And I was thinking, “Where’d that green come from?” I realized it had been reflected, or at least that’s my idea. I think Van Gogh reflected green into the picture, because it makes no sense otherwise. It comes from nowhere. I thought, “I’m going to try that.” I took something red, and put the newspaper in near his feet and bounced red light on it.

The newspaper is life size in the final image. You can read the story: It’s the day that Ceausescu, the dictator of Romania, was executed. It looks a little bit like Manet’s *Execution of Maximilian*. This is coming out of a series of very quiet, intimate, love-filled, or questioning portraits, and I thought, “I’m going to hate this.”

When I put the two together and I looked at it later as a diptych, I actually felt that by adding the newspaper, what started out as—I don’t want to say a claustrophobic portrait—but certainly an intact portrait that wasn’t missing anything, the sense of Jim’s reality shifted to being even more separate. Not isolated, but somehow even more private and intimate.



JoAnn Verburg, *Secrets: Iraq*, 1991

At the time I was working on these pieces, I had been told a secret by someone and I was told not to say anything. I’m really good at keeping secrets, but it drove me crazy. It felt like a lie because I was walking around in my life feeling as though there was another layer that was hidden and had to remain hidden.

I was in a place with one of these tables—with the perforations on the table’s metal surface—and I discovered something odd and useful when I was looking through my camera’s lens: wherever a shadow was cast on an out-of-focus part of the table, you could see through the tabletop. Where there was sun on the table, even if it was out of focus, it seemed to be a solid (or perforated) plane. When I placed the newspaper headline under a shadow, the reality of the story seemed hidden under a different reality. On top of the table, there was a sense of leisure: light, color, and a bottle of sparkling water. What could be better?

It was a metaphor for me for the hidden existing in another more conscious version of reality having to do with this specific personal problem I had. But of course, there were greater problems that we face—in this case, poverty. The newspaper has this ridiculous headline that says, “In Ravaged South Bronx, a Camelot Is Envisioned.” I placed the headline under an out-of-focus shadow, so that it could be seen below the tabletop.

In the case of *Secrets: Iraq* (1991), beneath the coffee cup, with the beautiful morning light coming in, there’s a story about our American troops who have not been inoculated because the military didn’t send the right kind of medicine with them when they shipped them over to Iraq. All you have to do is turn 30 degrees to the left, and there’s so much going on that you’re ignoring. But it’s still there. It’s like this festering secret.

I was taking these pictures in frustration because I needed to let this out somehow but I couldn’t tell the secret. That was the personal motivation, and of course, absolutely, the personal and the political are intertwined and inseparable.



AS IT IS AGAIN by JoAnn Verburg

AS IT IS AGAIN is a new artwork in a new format made specifically as a free application for the iPad by internationally renowned photographer JoAnn Verburg.

Artists have historically taken advantage of technological innovations, whether it is oil paint or film with sound, and exploited the medium to communicate in the language of art. JoAnn Verburg is no newcomer to trailblazing; as a pioneering photographer of her generation, Verburg employs an array of formats and styles to examine what Museum of Modern Art curator Susan Kismaric calls “Verburg’s ultimate subject: the creation of nontheatrical space that functions as a threshold of experience.”

For this new project and new medium, Verburg cuts open fresh territory, constructing a method and a format that have yet to be fully explored. While she continues her trademark use of selective focus and multiple frames to emphasize photography’s relationship to time, she does so in an imaginative and stylistic way that can only be experienced on an iPad.

While the format of this project is very new, the images capture an old subject matter. Verburg presents the blossoming of almond trees in Italy after a long winter. Depicting the glacially paced transition between seasons, the images reveal the idea, as the artist says, “...things--even things that seem permanent-- change. That even in impermanence and loss beauty exists.”

Another very intriguing area that Verburg has ventured into:

Bloomington Central Station JoAnn Verburg, artist Disappearing Act: In Transit, 2004 Photographic imagery on glass windscreen panels.

At first there appears to be no art at this station, except perhaps for the structure itself. There is a park across the tracks that offers some impressive views — there are tall sculptures that look like stripped trees that jut out from the ground at odd angles. There are also walking paths, small fountains, and plenty of seating. But the platform itself seems a bit barren. There is something to see here though — it's just a little invisible at first. As with all of the stations, there are glass enclosures to protect commuters from the elements. These glass surfaces catch every reflection and every glare, so at this station the image on one of the windows could be mistaken for a reflection of an actual tree. But there are no trees nearby as old as the one on the window. And so on closer inspection, the tree is actually a translucent image that resembles a film negative that only exists on the glass.

Interview with Euan Karr: <http://www.mnartists.org/article.do?rid=176369>

Web site: <http://www.pacemacgill.com/joannverburg.html>

http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/15/arts/design/15geft.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

Artsconnected: Walker site for interview

Present Tense, Photographs by Joanne Verburg, Museum of Modern Art, NY
(exhibition both at the MOMA and Walker with an essay by Susan Kismaric).