

PRESS RELEASE

Science

BERENICE ABBOTT

Documenting science

RAPHAËL DALLAPORTA

Fragile

Curator : Françoise Docquier

Opening reception

Thursday, September 20th 2012 from 6 pm to 9 pm

Show from September 21st until November 22nd 2012

From Wednesday to Saturday from 2 pm to 7 pm

And by appointment

Since its beginnings in 1839, photography has been a rich, potential source of inspiration for scientists. We can see what's invisible – from the infinitely teeny to the infinitely huge –because of it, at the beginning of the 20th century, the avant-garde grabbed this scientific iconography, reworked it and adapted it to their own artistic needs. Photography's keen appeal is as strong as ever and continues to gain momentum.

We have never held a show in the gallery with scientific overtones, so we are more than pleased to exhibit the photography of both Berenice Abbott and Raphaël Dallaporta. Although both working in different areas – fundamental physical mechanisms for one and anatomical parts for the other – the rigorous composition of each image puts both photographers on the same creative line of expression. Beyond their obvious visual force and affect, both bodies of work explore in a forthright manner a new universe, devoid of anecdotes and aestheticism. Thanks to their varying levels of interpretation, these photographs require us to ask questions about our own understanding of the world around us.

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Berenice Abbott, Documenting Science

« We live in a world made by science. But we – the millions of laymen - do not understand or appreciate the knowledge which thus controls daily life. »

Letter from Berenice Abbott to Charles C. Adams, New York City, April 24, 1939.

In 1939 Berenice Abbott started to want to make photographs of scientific phenomena. She experimented making photographs of magnetic fields, soap bubbles, and wave patterns. All of these photographs illustrate the reality and order of their subject consistent with the artist's vision.

Abbott had no formal training in any scientific discipline, but she was endowed with an inquiring mind, a prophetic sense and the perseverance with which to push into the largely unexplored field of scientific photography. She bought secondhand texts on physics and electricity and though she lacked the background to understand them fully she saw how poor most scientific photographs were.

Abbott's ideas about science and photography sounded good ; they looked good on paper but they met with no response. On October 4, 1957, an event occurred that to Abbott's mind saved her life : she saw a newspaper headline announcing the successful launching of Sputnik on that day by the USSR. According to the article that followed, the Soviet success indicated that the United States was falling behind in science, and she remembers thinking, « I wonder if anyone would be interested in scientific photographs now ? » She did not have to wonder very long.

In February, 1958, she talked with Dr. E. P. Little of the Physical Science Study Committee directly. Her passion to convey the world of science through her art was resolute and culminated in her work for this group at MIT in 1958. PSSC was created to reformulate the way science was taught in American high schools. Abbott's photographic illustrations fundamentally changed the way thousands of students visualized some of the principles of physics.

In this day of digital cameras and computer-generated imagery, it is difficult to realize the enormity of her work. First, she had to learn and understand the fundamental idea that needed illustration. Then she needed to envision the photograph required to capture that concept, devise the equipment and lighting to make the photograph, load and unload sheet film in a bulky view camera, develop the negative, and finally make a print that was as true to the science as it was to her aestheticism.

These images are timeless in the elegance of their simplicity and the clarity of her vision. Many seem to be abstractions, but they are not. Each one teaches and illuminates. They are still true to that ideal today, fifty years later.

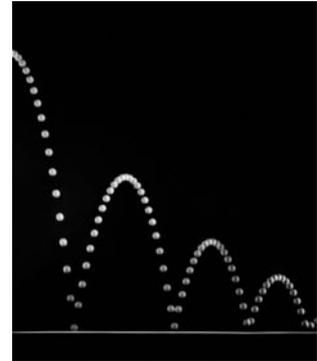
By 1961, « The Image of Physics », a touring exhibition by the Smithsonian Institution Exhibition Service (SITES) effectively achieved the photographer's goal of bringing scientific explanation to a mass audience, offering many Americans their first experience of viewing original fine art photography.

Into the 1980s, the PSSC curriculum's practical labs and memorable photographs conveyed modern physics and principles of science methodology indelibly to a generation and more of American high school students – fulfilling Abbott's quest to « understand or appreciate the knowledge which thus controls daily life ».

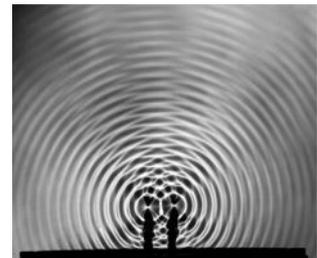
Documenting Science (Selection)

Royalty free photographs for press

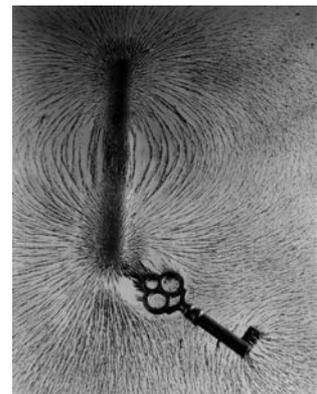
Bouncing Ball Time Exposure, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1958-61
10,2'' x 12,3''
Gelatin silver process, signed by the artist
Printed later in the 1970s-1980s



Interference Pattern, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1958-61
10,8'' x 12,6''
Gelatin silver process, signed by the artist
Printed later in the 1970s-1980s



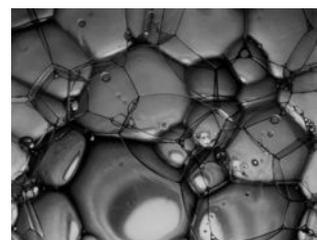
Magnetism with Key, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1958-61
9,7'' x 13,2''
Gelatin silver process, signed by the artist
Printed later in the 1970s-1980s



Parabolic Mirror, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1958-61
10,6'' x 13,6''
Gelatin silver process, signed by the artist
Printed later in the 1970s-1980s



Soap Bubbles, New York, 1945-46
10,6'' x 13,5''
Gelatin silver process, signed by the artist
Printed later in the 1970s-1980s



©Berenice Abbott/Commerce Graphics/Courtesy Les Douches La Galerie

Berenice Abbott

Born in 1898 in Springfield, Ohio, USA

Died in 1991 in Monson, Maine, USA

A Twentieth Century artist of limitless imagination, Berenice Abbott, devoted her life to photography. She began her own photographic career in 1923 as an apprentice to her friend, Man Ray, in his Paris studio. It was while with Man Ray she first became aware of the French master, Eugène Atget, an event that would have far reaching consequences in her life.

Abbott established her own portrait studio in 1926, where she made compelling photographs of the celebrated writers and artists of the day, including the only the only Twentieth Century portrait of Atget, who died a short time after he posed for her. In 1928 Abbott acquired Atget's prints and negatives, began a second career of forty years of hard work and established his reputation as one of foremost photographic artists of his time.

In 1929 Abbott returned to New York City and saw America with a fresh and enriched perspective and began to photograph the rapidly evolving urban landscape of a city in transition. This ten-year project, often self financed, resulted in the monumental and widely acclaimed documentary project she later called "Changing New York." Her captivating photographs of new bridges and skyscrapers, replacing older structures, as well as the juxtaposition of evolving modes of transportation with those of the past and crowded street scenes evoke an exciting combination of objectivity and impassioned realism that is key to the timeless quality of her art.

Abbott didn't restrict her activities to New York City and was also a keen observer of the American scene. As early as 1932 she traveled throughout New England and along the East Coast documenting certain cities, as they existed before the Civil War. In the mid-1930s she was active in the Midwest and south and in the early 1950s documented US Route 1 from Fort Kent, Maine to Key West, Florida. Later in the 1960s she documented Maine from a new standpoint, as a full time resident.

In 1939, Abbott's first book, Changing New York was published. In the years that followed, her name would appear on a dozen other books, as well as countless magazine articles and essays. At the same time she became a creative inventor, securing half a dozen patents, and began her explorations in scientific photography. At the time she said, "Photography fits in with the speed of our time... It is a realistic medium appropriate to a realistic and scientific age."

After solitary work for two decades, in 1958 she undertook her most remarkable project, to photograph scientific phenomena for the Physical Sciences Study Committee at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Easily her most creative and innovative work, these aesthetically elegant photographs of swinging pendulums, bouncing balls, and wave patterns lend understandable reality to the many complex concepts of physical science.

Though Abbott continued to take photographs for over two decades, her scientific images were a perfect achievement with which to conclude a remarkable career.

Raphaël Dallaporta, *Fragile*

Raphaël Dallaporta's photography requires hard concentration along with a certain familiarity. The viewer understands that apparently unrelated rationales inherent in series like *Antipersonnel*, *Domestic Slavery*, *Ruins*, or *Fragile* connect in the end with a common line of thinking and introspection.

Indeed, the presence of the human, captured and seen for itself, haunts the universe of this artist. The human element is not simply a convenient accessory for documentary photography ; it's also one of the recurring features of Dallaporta's work. Each image hidden behind a certain conceptualisation reveals a strong humanity. His work functions as a kind of guarantor of the real. If photographing for him is putting a subject aside, disassociating it from its context, he does so to make the viewer react. His body of work, instead of manipulating the real, exposes all of its vulnerable fragility.

Fragile returns to the issue of antipersonnel mines - subjects connected to humans and their deviations but presented out of context, in their actual size on a black background. *Fragile* is directly linked to the human body with its accidents in life and death. Domestic accidents, homicides, sudden deaths, overdoses, suicides, death in undetermined circumstances - all these human parts displayed like hard to recognize cuts of butcher meat. These disquieting images raise more questions for us than any pictures of war and conflict.

And this is the profound force of Raphaël Dallaporta : knowing how to transcend an ordinary subject and transform it into a reflection on the poetic possibilities of photography. In the series *Fragile* the first viewing can be unbearable. Dallaporta shows the inevitable imperatives of reality - especially those concerning our own death in a context defined by a terrifying, inflicted accident - in order to project it into a more aesthetic, philosophical realm. This is a body of work, coherent and complete, that exposes itself, leading the viewer towards a contemplative stance and a gazing inwards. Yet, the work is objective and doesn't connect the displayed images to any point in time.

The viewer, nonetheless, quickly understands that each of these prints, displayed like an anatomical plate, has a specific, terrifying story attached to it. In most of these images, natural death doesn't exist ; rather death comes from an accident, a murder, or drama. There are two exceptions to the irreality of these photographs - *Suicide*, a torso of a man whose chest is framed by the camera and where the viewer slowly notices a mouth, almost peaceful, and a fragment of the face. And the *Four Humors* in large scale format, Saturn's rings or ellipses in space, a reference to Hippocrates, and yet directly linked to human nature.

Each series is a long, collaborative work including specialists in the field. As for the *Fragile*, Raphaël Dallaporta regularly worked with a team of doctors and consultants in the departments of pathological anatomy and legal medicine at the Raymond Poincaré Hospital for over five years. This work is so unique that it enables a better understanding of the body's fragility. It allows the viewer to see the vulnerability from the inside and to think about the nature and power of such photography. Raphaël Dallaporta gets as close to his subject as possible and yet manages to create a distance so that the emerging, latent image dominates what the viewer sees. The print wants to see and to make seen human organs separate and separated from the body and its mortality, stripped of the usual romanticism, in order to explore their universe as if discovering a still virgin world.

This body of work also seeks to reveal the unexpected but fascinating relationship between human body parts, made objective and yet mysteriously transformed by Dallaporta's vision, and exploration of a new system of seeing stretched to the limits to an almost formal abstractionism.

Even more than the preceding series, *Fragile* divulges the concerns of the photographer. Attentive, serious, and open he seems to roam about, salvaging the ambiguities and absurdities of our contemporary world. And yet, he has often recorded everything that belongs to the unspoken or to the refusal even to see. For if his images seem outside of familiar contexts, they decompose the distress and solitude of the human predicament deceived by the system and close friends and/or family. They recount better than anyone what we hide ; they isolate and frame a situation not through stylistic voyeurism, but rather by a certain ability to identify - a trait innate to original talent and curious minds.

So, in spite of the apparent, almost clinical rigour, and in any case rigorous in both his photographic compositions and in his refusal of the anecdotal, each of these photographs through the emotional content, almost comparable to a powerful shock, triggers our imagination and sends us back to our own humanity.

Thus is the challenge for us to reflect and consider these pictures, so fragile, as food for thought, and as revelatory of the human experience.

Françoise Docquiert.

Fragile (Selection)

Royalty free photographs for press

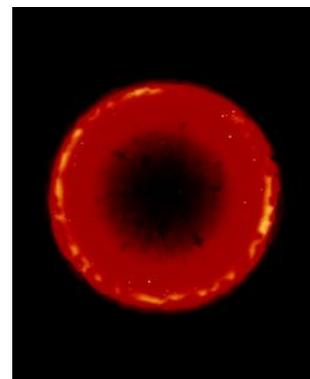
Blood, 2010

Dye destruction print (Ilfochrome)

Realised by Choi

47,2'' x 59''

Mounted on aluminium, framed with black wood and glass



XII Murder

Plate XII a. Dura mater, 2011

Dye transfer

15,7'' x 19,7''

From a portfolio of eight photographs, limited edition in three copies

Eight image is signed and numbered by the photographer



II Murder

Plate II a. Sternum, 2011

Dye transfer

15,7'' x 19,7''

From a portfolio of eight photographs, limited edition in three copies

Eight image is signed and numbered by the photographer



©Raphaël Dallaporta/Courtesy Les Douches La Galerie

Raphaël Dallaporta

Born in September 1980 in Dourdan (91), France

Lives and works in Paris

Solo Shows

- 2012 “Raphaël Dallaporta, Observation”, Centre National de l’Audiovisuel, Luxembourg.
“Raphaël Dallaporta, Observation”, Museum für Photographie, Braunschweig.
“Raphaël Dallaporta, Observation”, Musée Nicéphore Niépce, Chalon-sur-Saône.
- 2011 “Grand Organs of Paris”, L. Parker Stephenson Photographs, New York.
“Raphaël Dallaporta, Observation”, Foam Fotografiemuseum, Amsterdam.
“Ruins (Season 1)”, Prix découverte, 42^{ème} Rencontres photographiques d’Arles.
- 2010 “Raphaël Dallaporta, Protocole”, Musée de l’Elysée, Espace Arlaud, Lausanne.
“Raphaël Dallaporta”, Fotohof, Salzburg.
“Domestic Slavery”, New York Photo Festival, New York.
- 2009 “Domestic Slavery”, 13^{ème} Quinzaine Photographique Nantaise, Nantes.
“Vu(es) des Fenêtres”, Maison Pour Tous, Villejuif.
- 2008 “Autopsy”, New York Photo Festival, New York.
“Antipersonnel”, Imaginaid Galerie, Genève.
“Domestic Slavery”, Galerie Fait & Cause, Paris.
- 2007 “Domestic Slavery”, Langhans Galerie, Prague.
- 2006 “Domestic Slavery”, 37^{ème} Rencontres photographiques d’Arles.
“Antipersonnel”, 6^{ème} Mois de la Photographie de Moscou.
- 2005 “Antipersonnel”, Galleria Santa Cecilia, Rome.
- 2004 “Antipersonnel”, 35^{ème} Rencontres Internationales d’Arles.

Group Shows

- 2012 “Survival Techniques”, Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago.
“Imaging History”, FotoMuseum, Antwerp.
- 2012 “Obsessions”, La Filiature, Mulhouse.
“Acquisitions récentes, Musée de l’Elysée”, Paris-Photo, Grand Palais, Paris.
- 2011 “Autour de l’Extrême”, Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris.
- 2010 “Warzone”, Noorderlicht, International Photofestival, Groningen.
“France 14”, Bibliothèque Nationale de France - 41^{ème} Rencontres photographiques d’Arles.
“Grand Organs of Paris”, The AIPAD Photography Show in New-York.
- 2009 “Domestic Slavery”, ECB Prize, European Central Bank, Frankfurt.
“Antipersonnel”, The AIPAD Photography Show in New-York.
- 2008 “Obsessions”, by Stiletto, Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris.
“Silverstein Photography Annual 2008”, Silverstein Gallery, New York.
- 2008 “Pour en finir avec l’esclavage”, Festival d’Aix-en-Provence.
- 2007 “Non tutte le stadi portano a Roma”, Commission for Lazio region, Roma.
- 2006 “Réinventer le visible”, Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris - Kunsthalle Erfurt.
“Conflict”, 6^{ème} Mois de la Photographie de Moscou.
- 2005 “reGeneration : 50 Photographers of tomorrow”, Musée de l’Elysée, Lausanne.
- 2004 “Témoins d’Histoires”, Centre Photographique d’Île-de-France.
- 2003 “Xmas trees”, Séquences Fnac, Galerie Photo Fnac, Paris.

Bibliography

- 2011 “Fragile”, Raphaël Dallaporta, Editions GwinZegal.
- 2010 “Antipersonnel”, Raphaël Dallaporta, Ed. Xavier Barral - Musée de l’Elysée, Lausanne.
- 2009 “Domestic Slavery”, Raphaël Dallaporta - Ondine Millot, Fotodok.
- 2006 “Esclavage domestique”, Raphaël Dallaporta - Ondine Millot, Filigranes Editions.
- 2004 “Front Toward Enemy”, Raphaël Dallaporta, Filigranes Editions.

Exhibition catalogues

- 2012 “Afterwards”, Nathalie Herschdorfer, Thames&Hudson.
“Foam Album 12”, Fotografiemuseum, Amsterdam, Vandejong.
- 2011 “Rencontres photographiques d’Arles 2011”, Actes Sud.
- 2010 “Warzone, The battlefield of peacekeeping”, Noorderlicht, Groningen.
- 2009 “Foam Album 08”, Fotografiemuseum Amsterdam, Vandejong.
- 2008 “New York Photo Festival”, PowerHouse.
- 2007 “Non tutte le stadi portano a Roma”, Zoneattive edizioni.
- 2006 “Rencontres photographiques d’Arles 2006”, Actes Sud.
“6th Photography Month in Moscow”, Photo Biennale.
“Réinventer le visible 1985 - 2005”, Kerber Verlag.
- 2005 “reGeneration : 50 photographers of tomorrow”, Thames&Hudson/Aperture.
- 2004 “Rencontres photographiques d’Arles 2004”, Actes Sud.

Education

- 2002 - 2003 Fabrice, Trévisé.
- 2000 - 2002 Gobelins, l’Ecole de l’image, Paris.
- 1998 - 2000 Université Panthéon-Sorbonne, Paris.

Public Collections

- 2012 Musée Nicéphore Niépce, Chalon-sur-Saône.
- 2011 Foam Fotografiemuseum, Amsterdam.
- 2010 Musée de l’Élysée, Lausanne.
- 2006 Fond National d’Art Contemporain, Paris.
- 2004 Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris.

Awards and grants

- 2011 Foam, Paul Huf Award.
- 2010 Infinity Award : Young Photographer, ICP New York.
- 2009 ECB Prize, European Central Bank : 3^{ème} Prix.