

A photograph exists of my mother and Robert Mapplethorpe. They're standing next to each other, like friends, though they weren't. She's wearing jewelry I pawed as a kid. Her tall hair and his thin tie place the picture in the early '80s. They're holding drinks and smiling. When I first saw this photograph, a month ago, I recognized her stance—sloping shoulders, slightly tucked chin—as one I know from photographs of me. In fact, I recognized the whole scenario. As if my mother at a photography opening hobnobbing with artists exactly prefigures my own life.

You can't think about photography and your mother without considering Roland Barthes. He defines History as the time when his mother was alive *before him*. Mapplethorpe died a few years after this picture was taken. His image recalls Barthes on a photograph of a man condemned to death: "He is dead and he is going to die."¹

Photographs can't help but contend with time. They're memories, they're documents, they're evidence; they're interpretive, yet basic truths can be extracted. My mother once stood next to Robert Mapplethorpe. In 1936, Ellen Auerbach photographed Bertolt Brecht; in 1937, Josef Breitenbach photographed him. Breitenbach's portrait is formal and stiff. In Auerbach's, Brecht is shaving. When you go back far enough, everyone becomes a condemned man.

Vilém Flusser says the linearity of the historical is structurally opposed to the world of images, which he calls magical. It is defined by repetition and signification, rather than causality. "In the historical world, sunrise is the cause of the cock's crowing; in the magical one, sunrise signifies crowing and crowing signifies sunrise."² My mother's friend's art collector brother was friends with Mapplethorpe: causality.

Photographic strategies repeat across history in this magazine, along with personal linkages and shared interests. Auerbach had a commercial photography studio with Grete Stern in Germany between the wars. To belie being Jewish and female, they called themselves ringl + pit. Their work is the fruit of the collaborative space of the studio, like Kate Costello's photographs of women before paintings. Auerbach fled Germany and settled in the United States, where she befriended Eliot Porter. Porter's long-lensed landscapes recall those by Torbjørn Rødland, whose double-exposures resemble Breitenbach's material experimentation. Porter's bird photographs echo the reductive space in Erin Shirreff's reinterpretations of Tony Smith sculptures. Auerbach documented Porter's process for making these pictures: stilts, a jury-rigged car battery...

This issue meanders. Histories intersect and are confused. Photography, showing only one point along a timeline, is an unreliable storyteller. But these slippages make room for signification. The photograph of Mapplethorpe and my mother *means* something.

—Hannah Whitaker

In 1933 both Ellen Auerbach and Josef Breitenbach left the ashes of the chimerical Weimer Republic for friendlier cities. By the 1940s, both were living and working in New York, a city more inimical to their lifestyles and art practices. Auerbach met Eliot Porter in 1940 on an island in Maine, and the two became close friends. Their meeting was an aleatory event, but they had something immediately in common—both were modernists at a time when modernism was beginning to eclipse the pre-war avant-garde.

In 1934, one year after both Auerbach and Breitenbach left Berlin, Porter was introduced to Alfred Steiglitz, who in turn brokered an introduction to Ansel Adams—surrealism (Breitenbach) to f/64 (Adams) in three moves. Modernist Photography had already begun, by the 1940s, to look west for new forms and subjects, and Porter would spend half of his life in New Mexico after a permanent move in 1946.

The American West is the subject of Oronato & Krebs' three-year road trip titled "The Great Unreal," and of Joachim Koester's Barker Ranch photographs. All are Europeans looking at the American West as signifier, evidence, icon, and sibylline subject. The reverse of this may be American artist Collier Schorr photographing in Germany, or her photograph of a contemporary youth silhouetted and wearing a helmet—a stand-in for a Vietnam War casualty. But for all of these artists, the aforementioned photographs and series constitute only a small part of their practice. In aggregate, their various projects exhibit a fluidity common in artists who look to history for style, subject, and method. Consider John Houck's formal exercises of matching computer generated patterns with handmade folds and creases, and the way similar marks are evident in some of his more depictive photographs. For him, historical antecedents provide less of an opportunity to locate subject matter and more of a guide to formal picture making.

In his 2004 article "An Archival Impulse" (*October*, Vol. 110), Hal Foster quotes a few lines from Tacita Dean's own writing concerning Donald Crowhurst's beached trimaran, Teignmouth Electron: "an arrant creature now extinct," and the derelict vessel is "at odds with its function." Dean's impetus for the project was a postcard celebrating Crowhurst and his home port of Teignmouth, but she was driven to author her own images through direct access to her subject, and she traveled to the island of Cayman Brac to photograph Crowhurst's sunbleached and dry-rotting vessel. Foster endeavors to articulate Dean's obsession with Crowhurst as being more than the common artistic phenomenon of fetishizing the customs and tools of others, and he traces, as a practice, the "archival impulse" to the European avant-garde in the late 20s and early 30s.

Formal strategies have formed like clay, then baked and hardened, although they should be thought of less as creative plateaus than peaks and summits for artists to return to. When charted, the connections between the artists in this issue form flowering dendrites, branching out from distinct points or a single stalk. In selecting the works for this issue we mapped out territories, forged connections, and filled in the rest.

Throughout his career Eliot Porter would return, sometimes annually, to photographing birds. Garnering institutional acceptance for his superlative bird portraits was a lifelong pursuit, and when, towards the end of his life, he was asked why the subject was of such personal importance, he replied "Because they fly."

—Matthew Porter

1. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981) 95.
2. Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2000) 9.