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# ARTS & LIFE

SATURDAY MAY 23 | 2009 | ARTS EDITOR MAGGIE LANGRICK 604.605.2601 | MLANGRICK@VANCOUVERSUN.COM

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WEEKEND EXTRA

## VIEWFINDER



B. Wurtz's *Untitled (container)* illustrates the limits of photography as documentation.

# NEW DIMENSIONS in photography

Flat images become 3-D objects in Presentation House Gallery exhibition

**PHOT(O)BJECTS**  
To June 7  
Presentation House Gallery  
333 Chesterfield Ave.  
North Vancouver  
Open Wednesday to Sunday

BY KEVIN GRIFFIN  
VANCOUVER SUN

What is a photograph? Although most people think of a photograph as a duplicate of the visible world, it isn't. First of all, and most obviously, a photograph is a two-dimensional abstraction of three dimensions. At best, the photographic image is a resemblance of the visible rather than an exact copy.

At Presentation House Gallery in North Vancouver, a challenging exhibition treats the photograph as both more and less than a two-dimensional image. Titled *phot(o)jects*, the exhibition features numerous unusual hybrids of sculpture and photography, photographs of photographs and photographs turned into garbage. Although most are contemporary, some works date back to the early 1970s.

The exhibition is organized by Bob Nickas, a New York-based art writer and curatorial adviser to P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Centre in Long Island City. The works in the exhibition reflect the choices of someone with a wide-ranging, open-ended view of art and photography.

"No matter what form art may take, the opening of what we know — or thought we knew — about painting or sculpture or photography, is directly related to what artists have always done: make us

look at the world in ways we hadn't, and in doing so allow us to reorient ourselves, and to get pleasurably lost from time to time," Nickas says in *phot(o)jects* program notes.

"Photography has to be understood as an extended experiment, one that began with the invention of the medium over two hundred years ago, and, as evidenced by the works in this exhibition, it continues to this day."

Among the works in the exhibition is *Untitled (container)* by B. Wurtz, which illustrates the limits of photography as documentation. Hanging on the wall, is a framed photograph seen from below of a cylindrical object against the sky.

It's a dramatic image that looks monumental and architectural. Sitting in front of the photograph is the actual metallic cylinder. The arrangement made me look both up at image and down at the actual object on which it was based.

There are several works by Turner Prize-winner Wolfgang Tillmans including *paper drop (New York)*. It's a C-print showing the edge of a piece of photo paper looped like a water droplet resting on its side.

The pearly greys, browns and black shading in the interior of the paper droplet give it such depth I found myself switching back and forth between seeing a water droplet and a piece of paper shaped like a water droplet. *paper drop* is displayed as an object in the most straightforward, unassuming fashion: it's stuck to the wall with four strips of horizontal clear plastic tape.

*Los Angeles Times, Wednesday, November 14, 2007* by Carter Mull is an abstract image of circles, dots and squiggly lines covered with regions of colour of red, green, yellow,

purple and mauve.

Even though the print is a dense network of information with no discernable pattern, I thought I could read words or make out images, but each time I tried to focus on what I thought I was perceiving, it disappeared.

Jennifer Bolande's *Appliance House* is a marvel of a modernist photo object. She's created a lightbox in the shape of New York's Lever House, the former headquarters of Lever Brothers which manufactured brand name products such as Sunlight and Lifebuoy soaps.

The floors and windows of the vertical office tower are the horizontal strips of negative film strips; the frames are the interiors of an appliance store in alternating green and blue. The corporate grid is reinforced by the shape and marks on the 35 mm negatives including the sprocket holes and writing that includes the name of the film used in the art work's construction: KODAK SAFETY FILM 5079.

I particularly liked Alan Belcher's series of photographs of weapons mounted on canvas covering suitcases.

One side of *Grenade Carry-On* depicts a grenade and the other, a bomb. When I saw them I laughed and then felt guilty, like I'd committed a thought crime by not taking the images seriously as potential terrorist threats.

Oh, how times have changed. Since the events of 9/11, an ideological cordon sanitaire around some subjects has declared them off-limits to everything — including art. Belcher's threatening suitcases were made in 1987 and 1988 and recall a very different era when anything to do with travel wasn't so full of anxiety and dread.





Alan Belcher's *Grenade Carry-On*: These threatening suitcases were made in 1987 and 1988 and recall a very different era

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See It

## Phot(o)bjects: To the Frame, and Well Beyond

PRESENTATION HOUSE GALLERY, VANCOUVER APR 10 TO JUN 7 2009



Any exhibition that brings the reclusive [Alan Belcher](#) back into the art scene is a welcome exhibition indeed. For those with short memories, the Canadian-born Belcher stormed the photo and art worlds in the 1980s and 1990s with photo-wrapped sculptural works that broke all the boundaries between sculpture and photography.

In his show "Phot(o)bjects", the respected New York curator Bob Nickas delves further and reaches back to similar initiatives that date from the early 1970s. The end result is a magnum opus that charts the curious and near-constant intersection of photography and three-dimensional aspirations. Twenty artists are featured, including [Rachel Harrison](#), [Louise Lawler](#), [Jennifer Bolande](#), [Roe Ethridge](#), [Trisha Donnelly](#) and [Wolfgang Tillmans](#). Together, they offer evidence of an ongoing restlessness with the image that has shaped the nature of contemporary art. (333 Chesterfield Ave, North Vancouver BC)


[www.presentationhousegall.com](http://www.presentationhousegall.com)

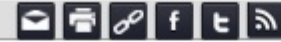


Jennifer Bolande *Plywood Curtain* 2007–8 Installation view Courtesy of the artist

THE NEXT 7 DAYS: **EVENTS (6)** + **OPENINGS (5)** + **DEADLINES (5)** + **CLOSINGS (6)**

- DIRECTORY //
- GALLERY TOURS //
- EVENTS //
- EXHIBITIONS //
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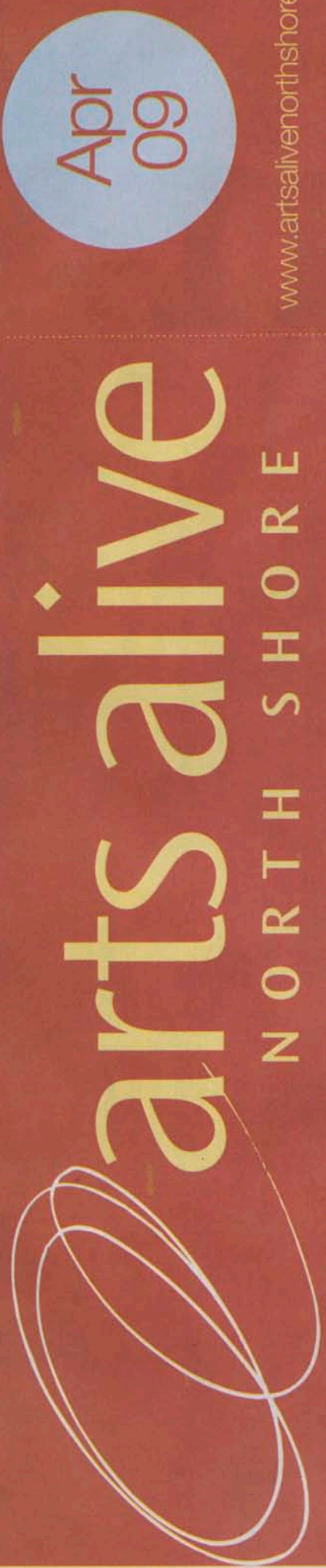
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Gil Blank, *Untitled*, no date, chromogenic "o-type" print

The Apartment curator and opera singer **Lee Plested** accompanied me to the **Presentation House Gallery** to check out the unfortunately titled *Phot(o)bjects* exhibition. I mention Plested not only because of his fabulous gallery companionship but also because his comments on the exhibit made me rethink what I might have easily dismissed. The exhibition was guest-curated by PS1's **Bob Nickas** and it includes work by **Wolfgang Tillmans**, **Walead Beshty**, and **Annette Kelm**, among many others. The exhibition includes trends in contemporary photography-based art that usually do not interest me, but Plested's keen eye made me stop and consider both the work and the curation more closely. One piece that ended up catching my attention was **Alan Belcher's** tire swing: a tire wrapped in canvas on which a photo of a tire had been printed. It seems a little gimmicky, but the effect heightened my sense of the tire. The photographic representation made me look and consider the object more closely. **Louise Lawler** had photographs of **Andy Warhol's** silver balloons, elegantly installed nearly at ceiling-level. The special thing about Nickas's curation is, even if the premises are simplistic, the way he organizes the spaces; the juxtapositions he creates between the works are subtle and thoughtful.

Some people have suggested that *Phot(o)bjects* departs for the Presentation House's mandate to exhibit only photography and film, but I wonder how much it marks a departure from what PHG has already started. Last summer's *Male: Work from the Collection of Vince Aletti*, a traveling exhibition from White Columns, also seemed to branch out of the traditional approach to exhibiting photography in the way that the archive was installed in the gallery as a much as an installation than as a series of discrete photographs. Presentation House has been making a series of moves over the past while to rethink how photography and film can be relevant to certain trends in contemporary art, instead of following the exhibition model of an institution like the International Center for Photography. The distinction between contemporary art and photography itself is hackneyed, so kudos to Presentation House director **Reid Shier** for trying to blur those distinctions further.



# arts alive

NORTH SHORE

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Apr  
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## Light opera and objects...



Alan Belcher, Park II, 1987. Color photographs on canvas with tire and chain. Courtesy the Robert J. Shiffler Collection.

### Does a photograph need to be flat?

Presentation House Gallery presents an international group of artists who explore the imaginative sculptural possibilities of the photographic medium.

**phot(o)bjects**  
organized by Bob Nickas  
April 10 to June 7, 2009

Featuring Alan Belcher, Jennifer Bolande, Walead Beshty, Gil Blank, Trisha Donnelly, Roe Ethridge, Guyton Walker, Rachel Harrison, Robert Heinecken, Matt Keegan, Annette Kelm, Carter Mull, Louise Lawler, Torbjorn Rødland, Alex Rose, Sam Samore, Wolfgang Tillmans, Josh Tonsfeldt, Sara VanDerBeek, B. Wurtz.

**Wednesday, April 8, 6:30PM**  
**PANEL DISCUSSION**

with Bob Nickas, Alan Belcher and Jennifer Bolande, moderated by Gil Blank.  
Frederic Lasserre Building, Room 102,  
6333 Memorial Rd, UBC

Presented in collaboration with the Department of Art History, Visual Art and Theory, the Museum of Anthropology, the Interdisciplinary Graduate Program, the Faculty of Arts, and the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery

**Thursday, April 9, 7PM**  
**OPENING RECEPTION**

Presentation House Gallery

Beyond a carrier of an uninterrupted image, what else can a photograph be? This question is at the centre of an exhibition curated for Presentation House Gallery by New York-based independent critic and curator Bob Nickas. *phot(o)bjects* explores the multifaceted ways

artists have and continue to consider the three dimensional possibilities of the photographic medium. Through a broad selection of works dating from the early 1970s, Nickas raises provocative questions about the shifting nature of photography.

*phot(o)bjects* includes many diverse approaches to the theme, such as Alan Belcher's photograph of a playground tire swing wrapped around a tire swing, hung from the ceiling, or Jennifer Bolande's photo of plywood that has been mounted onto plywood as a rippled curtain. Other artists use sculpture as a way to display photographs, as with Rachel Harrison's "combines", or use installations of photographs that take into account both the image and its relation to space, as with Louise Lawler's photographs of Andy Warhol's "silver clouds," hung high up and at tilted angles as if floating in the room.

Another question is inevitably raised: Beyond the camera, how else can a photograph be made? The exhibition includes camera-less works such as Wolfgang Tillmans's "Lighter" series, pictures that are the result of accident, having been bent and crumpled as they came out of the printer. The resulting works, sculptural and revealing the photo's reality as a sheet of paper, are presented in Plexiglas boxes. There are also pictures generated completely in the darkroom, such as those Walead Beshty, made by bending a sheet of photographic paper and exposing sections to various colored lights.