

How to make a world

Jaron Childs

“... Most of the time, I’m not seeing the photo but rather painting what I think I see. Painting the world as I know it to be.”



marsh, 2014, oil on panel

BY CHRISTOPHER ATKINS

The exhibition title was inspired by this excerpt from *The Crossing*, Cormac McCarthy's 1994 novel of a young man's multiple attempts at heroism.

Memories dim with age. There is no repository for our images. The loved ones who visit us in dreams are strangers. To even see aright is effort. We seek some witness but the world will not provide one. This is the third history. It is the history that each man makes alone out of what is left to him. Bits of wreckage. Some bones. The words of the dead. How make a world of this? How live in that world once made?

As a painter, Childs knows all about the fragility of making a world, which for him is a combination of experiences and time, held together with other bituminous memories. Each of his paintings begins with a photograph. There is an affect, an inexpressible sensation in each snapshot, so how he decides which family event or place to paint is very intuitive. Describing this part of the process, he has said, "I don't see the photograph as an objective record of reality. When I take a picture I'm stepping back from the world, putting myself between it and the viewer. I'm deciding what and how things can be seen."

What is photography if not the framing and capturing of miniature bits and pieces of the world? It represents the photographer's view of how the world should be seen. And one of the reasons for taking photographs is to convert an experience or place into an image, making it less disorienting and more understandable. This all means that photographs have become an invaluable record but also an insurance policy, guaranteeing that what has been photographed can be recalled.



geyser, 2014, oil on panel



that sun looks well enough, 2014, oil on panel

His painting *geyser* captures the dramatic and ancient beauty of Iceland's famous Great Geysir. A tourist lost in thought gingerly walks across wet, gently sloping rocks, parallel to a crepuscular background where other hikers are disappearing into the hazy landscape. A few people will catch the compositional quotes that Childs has borrowed from Henri Cartier-Bresson's *Behind the Gare Saint-Lazare, Paris*. But it's impossible to miss just how precisely he has painted this and other works; it's easy to get lost in the beautiful surfaces, textures and lighting of each image. The photorealistic effects he accomplishes are seductive enough to stand on their own, but the paintings work harder than that.

His paintings *empty out* the original photographs as he endlessly misremembers the information he sees. It sounds ironic to say this, since the paintings have enormous amounts of fine and subtle details, but each iteration loses more of what is real, leaving behind subjective features such as composition and framing. His painting *that sun looks well enough* reads like a slightly overexposed photograph, the waves of Lake Superior rippling quickly from the shore to infinity. The atmosphere in the painting is a fuzzy, soft white noise. As Childs continues to interpret through painting how his camera makes sense of light hitting the digital sensor, he describes this exploration as a leakage from photography into painting, and he embraces the loss of control over the final painting that this leakage implies. And yet there is intimacy, too. The breathing room between each of the 11 paintings in *How to make a world* serves to isolate and emphasize the intimate scale of his work, which can be seen in the specific moments he has captured and the labor poured into each painting.

When scrolling through Facebook or Instagram, it's easy to say, "Yes, these things have happened." The same cannot be said of Childs's paintings. Experiencing nature is one thing. Photographing it is another. And painting it is something different again. Childs is a student of art history and sees such overlapping mediation of the landscape like this: "If we think of Nature as a lecture, as spoken word or text, then the

photograph is a shorthand version of this text. Painting is the manual labor of piecing together the notes that, in some way, interprets the original text." This bricolage is a succinct metaphor for the complex way that Childs fuses the fragments of his paintings, echoing the tenuousness of what Cormac McCarthy called a "third history."

Copies of recorded conversations extend the life of what has been said. Copies of documents make information available to new people in new places and contexts. But no matter how realistic a copy, the process of copying is always one of transformation. So Childs insists he is painting an interpretation rather than capturing, exactly, each of his photographs. He argues, "This only proves just how symbolic painting actually is. Just like my eye, memory wanders and re-writes itself to our taste, flatters us, and looks to an improved narrative. Most of the time, I'm not seeing the photo but rather painting what I think I see. Painting the world as I know it to be."



See Jaron Childs talk about
How to make a world.



How to make a world installation



MINNESOTA ARTISTS EXHIBITION PROGRAM
2400 Third Avenue South
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55404
artsmia.org



INFO ABOUT MAEP
artsmia.org/maep



MAEP ON FACEBOOK
facebook.com/arts.maep



MAEP ON TWITTER
twitter.com/arts_maep



ARTIST'S WEBSITE
jaronchilds.com

RELATED EVENTS

Opening Reception: Thursday, January 16, 7 p.m.
Special Guests: Thursday, March 20, 7 p.m.

This exhibition is presented by the Minnesota Artists Exhibition Program, a curatorial program of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, which features work selected by Minnesota artists. MAEP is made possible in part by generous support from the Jerome Foundation and the McKnight Foundation.