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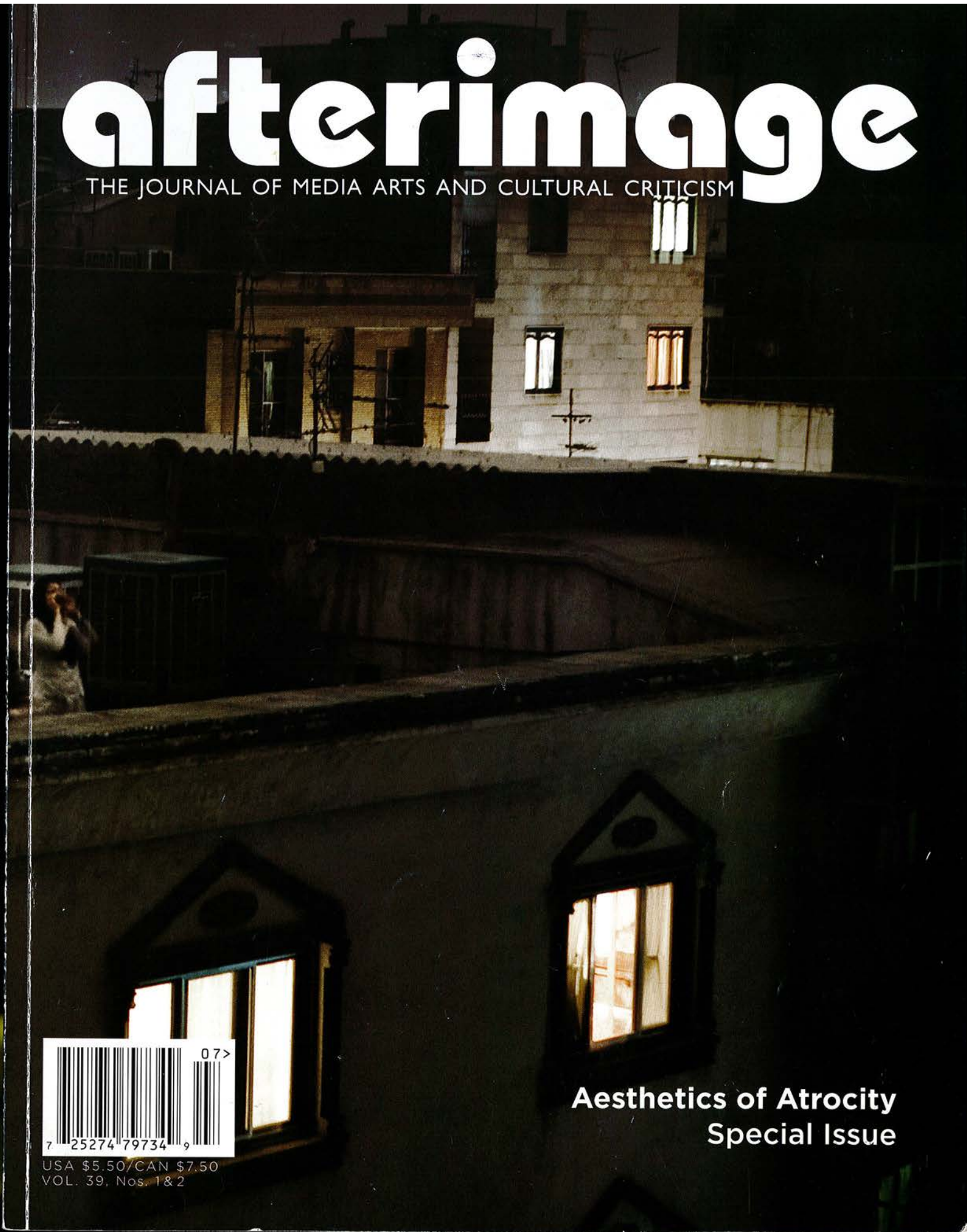
THE JOURNAL OF MEDIA ARTS AND CULTURAL CRITICISM



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AFTERIMAGE PROVIDES A FORUM FOR THE DISCUSSION & ANALYSIS OF PHOTOGRAPHY, INDEPENDENT FILM AND VIDEO, ALTERNATIVE PUBLISHING, MULTIMEDIA, AND RELATED FIELDS.

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Untitled photograph (2009) by Pietro Masturzo; courtesy the artist

life; what we see instead is a domestic living space with the blurred shape of a refrigerator visible behind a darkened figure. Kristina's gold-painted nails, an outline of her gold hoop earring, and her vibrant red-sleeved shoulder are evident as Kristina prepares for what could be a night out. Her face, obscured in shadow, reveals the only hint of the danger she faces in her line of work.

In Antonio Rosa's series, "No és un joc (Not a game)" (2006), we are offered images of children toiling in fields in Latin America. In one image, a back-lit child armed with a work knife strips sugar cane in a golden-hued field. In another, a child no older than eight wields an absurdly large hoe. It is easy to mistake this image for make-believe, save for the visual clues of the child's dusty arms and legs, and his look of intense focus as he labors. Although aesthetically pleasing, these portrayals communicate a clear message of exploitation and toil.

While the exhibition aims to showcase the enormity of the problem of slavery, most of the exhibition's images illustrate plights outside of North America. Upon entry to the gallery space, the viewer is greeted with a projection of the world map purporting to color-code countries according to their density of slavery. The worst offenders on this map are the usual suspects: China, India, Southeast Asia, Greece, Spain, Eastern Europe, Russia, and the Middle East are all noted for their exploitation of laborers.

There are, however, unfortunately several incongruities to this map. For example, South America is color-coded in the same shade as North America, with both nations coded as "light" in their density of slavery. If the show's approach in considering prison work as slavery is to be followed (legitimized though it may be through state-sanctioned "punishment for crime" allowances), one might expect this color-coding to change substantially, given the millions incarcerated in the United States and forced to work to "pay" for their crimes. The projected map also contains no details on its sources of information for its scale, although gallery literature points to data provided by the United Nations for the number of estimated people enslaved worldwide.

The exhibition also suffers from a lack of clear context in its displays. Although a desk copy of captions is available to viewers interested in learning more, one yearns for more obvious texts to accompany the five slideshow presentations in the gallery: all of the photographs are projected without attributions, save for a white reference number on each image. A text panel could very well have alleviated this issue and allowed for a more enriching experience. As an exhibition that is part of a greater program of information, however, "Contemporary Slavery" offers much to educate, entertain, and perhaps, mobilize.

CYNTHIA FOO *is a freelance writer and researcher living in Toronto, Canada, and Brooklyn, New York.*

A LANDSCAPE OF VIOLENCE

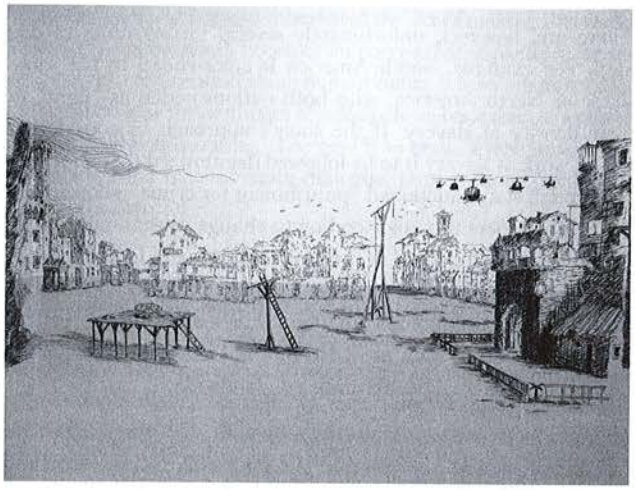
Miseries and Vengeance
By Millie Chen
Albright-Knox Art Gallery
Buffalo, New York
February 18–June 5, 2011

Although the theme for "Surveyor," the recent group exhibition at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, was the "power and indescribable beauty of the natural world in which we live," Millie Chen's installation, "Miseries and Vengeance," is hardly a celebration of the land we have built around ourselves. Taken from the Rutger Kopland poem of the same title, "Surveyor" was intended as a broad interpretation of landscape, but, coincidentally, also became a survey of a highly diverse group of artworks ranging in media and concept, and even showcased texts from the Poetry Collection at the University at Buffalo. Chen provided a broad scope in her site-specific installation as well by connecting work from the seventeenth century to the present day.

For this show, Chen was one of five artists from the region asked not only to present their own work but also to select artwork from the gallery's permanent collection that would create a compelling dialogue when viewed alongside their own. Although Curator Heather Pisanti chose all the other pieces from the contemporary artists on display, each of these five artists was given a space and encouraged to work freely. Chen chose a series of etchings by printmaker Jacques Callot; these were not just a complement to her work but were actually the inspiration for her installation.

Callot's prints come from his most famous series entitled "The Miseries and Misfortunes of War" (1633), which he divided into two categories: "Miseries and Misfortunes" and "Vengeance or Justice?" They were created as a reaction to the atrocities of what became the Thirty Years War. Although the prints are small, they provide detailed narrative scenes of conflict and brutality showing the aggression of both soldiers and civilians.

Chen employed two rooms in the gallery for her installation, the first of which had "Miseries" scrolled delicately above the doorframe in each direction. Upon entering this room, viewers saw Callot's work dramatically spotlit on blood-red, patterned walls. As Chen describes it, the patterns first appear to be mere wallpaper, background to a collection of historic prints; however, the viewer quickly realizes they are not just ornamentation but silhouettes taken from Callot's violent landscapes that have been enlarged and multiplied via drawing and painting. It then becomes obvious that enveloping the walls are scenes of beheadings, hangings, torture, and dead bodies. Chen also punctuated several of the silhouettes with detailed line drawings, dispelling any uncertainty as to the nature of the events being depicted.



In the next room—labeled "Vengeance"—the work became slightly more subtle. The walls were white and light gray and the towns drawn across them appeared almost peaceful at first glance. They could almost be mistaken for a scene from a piece of Toile de Jouy—yet, at the same time, they were eerily stark. Here, Chen abandoned Callot's figures and isolated the trees, rivers, and buildings within his prints. However, along with these seemingly ordinary towns came gallows, nooses, and plumes of smoke from the buildings. Several helicopters hovering above the landscapes decidedly bridged the gap between the seventeenth century and today.

In an unpublished artist statement, Chen explains the installation was produced through a hybrid process that involved digitally scanning and enlarging the prints before drawing from them, which profoundly influenced the artist's understanding and repurposing of the images:

> I came to realize how seismic is the change to our vision when compared to what we could see 400 years ago. . . . My forensic digital investigation of Callot's images revealed markmaking that took me by surprise in its urgency. The closer and more carefully I was able to scrutinize his imagemaking, the more urgently it jumped out at me. This led me to realize that his primary motivation, while certainly not eschewing the aesthetic, was the informational, the informative. This series of works transformed him into an investigative journalist propelled by a strong humanitarian drive.

Much like Chen's 2007 work *wallpaper* in which she papered a nineteenth-century parlor room at the Canadian Cultural Centre in Paris with a pattern of Chinoiserie, in this installation she lured the viewer in with patterns and delicate adornment, only to confront them with uncomfortable aspects of our past and present. Both works combined historical and contemporary images so that we cannot solely see them as commentary on what was. Observing the landscape around us, Chen has given us not only a moment, but a timeline of violence in which we are still involved, one that the landscape bears witness to. By patterning this violence, Chen comments on the ubiquity of aggression and how we cope with it. From a distance, it is possible to dismiss the patterning as mere decoration, but examined closely it becomes the disconcerting motif of history.

KASIA KEELEY *is an artist and printmaker living and working in Buffalo, New York.*

Above
Detail of "Miseries & Vengeance" (2011) by Millie Chen; photograph by Biff Henrich/IMG_INK

STORYTELLING AS INSTALLATION

Angela Blakely and David Lloyd: Never Again—giving voice to survivors of the Rwanda Genocide

Queensland Centre for Photography

Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

June 12–July 11, 2010

Witnessing the pain of others is an experience for which we are never fully prepared—but one we are always at the edge of encountering. An exhibition of Angela Blakely and David Lloyd's photographs at the Queensland Centre for Photography told the latest chapter in the tragic story of Rwanda. The photographers first visited Rwanda from 1994–95 and returned in 2006 and 2008. This exhibition shared stories from survivors of the Rwandan genocide, chronicling their pain. Visitors may have expected to encounter powerful documentary photography. Blakely and Lloyd's work, however, transcends the genre by immersing viewers in an ongoing narrative of daily survival.

Upon entering the gallery, viewers were presented with seven ways of experiencing survivors' stories. The first consisted of four life-size images of women dressed in colorful traditional clothing—each accompanied by didactic panels relating the traumatic experiences that invisibly scarred each woman. After reading the panels, the viewer's gaze would often return to each woman's face, their perspective transformed.

In the same gallery space, seven other images were presented with information panels, each attached in a diptych frame format. The images depicted buildings, leafy laneways, and rooms that appear as benign records. Yet all of these places have stories—dark secrets of massacre, betrayal, and horror—revealed on their text panels. These places, like the faces in the previous series, hide dark pasts of unspeakable acts of atrocity. Blakely and Lloyd present seductive images and then, in a turn