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Marcia Resnick, Conceptions: Vintage Photographs 1974-1976 @Deborah Bell

By [Loring Knoblauch](#) / In [Galleries](#) / October 25, 2016

JTF (just the facts): A total of 21 black and white photographic works, framed in black/white and matted, and hung against white walls the main gallery space and in the office area. The show includes the following:

- 6 diptychs from *Landscape/Loftscape* series, 1976, vintage gelatin silver prints, each 16×20
- 3 prints from *Tahitian Eve* series, 1975, vintage gelatin silver prints, each 11×14
- 3 works from *Landscape Collage* series, 1975, each 8×10
- 2 prints from *See* series, 1974, vintage gelatin silver prints, each 16×20
- 3 works from *See Changes* series, 1974, vintage gelatin silver prints hand colored with gouache, each sized 16×20
- 3 prints from *Landscape* series, 1974/1975, vintage gelatin silver prints, each 16×20
- 1 set of 4 prints, *Two Girls*, 1975, vintage gelatin silver prints, each 8×10

The show was organized in association with Paul M. Hertzmann, Inc., San Francisco.

(Installation shots below.)





Comments/Context: A photographer's early work often contains a heady mix of competing influences. The hot artistic questions and ideas of the time, the work of teachers and fellow students, and the photographer's own still-forming intuitions and impulses all become part of a conscious effort to find and refine a distinct artistic point of view.

Marcia Resnick graduated from CalArts in 1973, and quickly became enmeshed in the burgeoning experimental tide that would later be drawn under the umbrella of photoconceptualism. This exhibit takes us back to that mid-1970s point in her career, when her mind was actively deconstructing photographic perception, from testing the documentary reality of a photograph to unpacking various modes of seeing. While her contributions to this larger movement are perhaps less well known than those of Baldessari, Wegman, Nauman, Cumming, Bochner and others, the works on view here certainly stand up well, their searching cleverness steeped in many of the same intellectual and aesthetic concerns.

Her 1974 series *See* feels particularly prescient from the vantage point of today's photographic world. Stationed at various tourist spots, she made images of other people making images, catching them from behind as they framed their own shots of imposing vistas. At that time, they were a smart investigation of mediated seeing, and of the spatial dimensions between one photographer, the other, and the background scene; with the current ubiquity of smartphone cameras and tourist hordes and the help of photographers like Martin Parr, this kind of conceptual framework has become mainstream. Resnick went on to take this idea further in her series *See Changes* (also from 1974). Starting with a from-the-back picture of fellow student James Welling at the Grand Canyon, she then iteratively unraveled the image, replacing the clouds and canyons with hand painted interlopers and using a double image collage to remove Welling from the image, leaving only a ghosted outline. Each step breaks down the supposed veracity of the image further, to the point that none of its elements can be trusted entirely.

This overt manipulation of the “rules” of landscape construction seems to have been an important spark for Resnick’s works in the next few years. In her *Landscape* series, she took horizon line composition to its logical (and often quietly comic) extreme, making pictures with lumpy mountains driven all the way to the bottom of the frame, deliberately unbalancing the usual proportions. The minimalist landscapes become effectively all sky with just a hint of land at the bottom, subtly odd in their disregard for convention. Her *Landscape Collages* defy bird’s eye views with similar deftness, gathering physical fragments of disparate images into layered conglomerations of land that at first glance seem plausible but dissolve into impossibility upon closer inspection.

This back-and-forth between real and unreal forms the basis of the strongest works in this show, the diptychs from her 1976 *Landscape/Loftscape* series. In each pairing, a photograph from the real world is hung next to its doppelganger, the second image a miniature tabletop construction in Resnick’s studio. Dark mountains are recreated using torn construction paper, a billowing cloud is made of cotton balls, and a landscape dotted with tires is echoed by a sprig of greenery and some circular chocolate jellies. And while her reconstructions are humbly low tech (a grassy scene is recreated in oregano), the ideas behind the pictures are much more sophisticated – all photography is rooted in interpretation, and a recreation of a photograph is no more “real” than the original picture. Each of these pairings creates a moment of upended expectations, their consistent visual wit built on the inherent uncertainties of the medium.

While photography about photography can oftentimes feel off-putting to those outside the bubble, Resnick’s early experiments have warmth and subtle humor, showing off smart thinking without becoming archly self-important. Each successive project on view here seems to build on the last, ultimately setting the intellectual stage for her more performative late 1970s *Re-visions* series, where constructed portraits and scenes of a fictitious adolescent girl opened up even more possibilities for fabricated (but realistic) photographic narrative. In that context, her early works are like a series of thought experiments, each one leading to yet another hard won insight about the underlying structure of picture making.

Collector’s POV: The works in this show are priced between \$3000 and \$7000 for the single prints, either \$5500 and \$7500 for the diptychs, and at \$18000 for the set of four prints. Resnick’s work has little secondary market history, so gallery retail remains the best option for those collectors interested in following up.



Read more about: [Marcia Resnick](#), [Deborah Bell Photographs](#)