PAPER LIGHT
CLAUDIA SMIGROD

ALPER INITIATIVE FOR WASHINGTON ART
PAPER LIGHT
PHOTOGRAPHS BY CLAUDIA SMIGROD

Curated by Wendy A. Grossman

January 29 – May 22, 2022

American University Museum
at the Katzen Arts Center
Washington, DC
When the American artist Man Ray stumbled upon the camera-less technique of the photogram while working in his Paris apartment darkroom in 1921, the results were heralded as “a new method for realizing the artistic possibilities of photography.” These eponymously christened Rayographs—comprised of random objects placed on photosensitive paper and exposed to light—resurrected a long-abandoned early nineteenth-century technique that predated the formal invention of photography as such. The resultant novel images reinvested the photogram’s qualities with new relevance as an avant-garde art form capturing the Dada and Surrealist ethos of the times.

Claudia Smigrod follows in the footsteps of Man Ray and other afficionados of the photogram who share the compulsion to “paint with light.” With her inventive darkroom experiments that hover in the liminal space between abstraction and representation, she takes the photogram into new realms that defy easy categorization. Organic forms from nature and inorganic manmade objects are transformed into mesmerizing, luminous, and deceptively complex images seemingly radiating light from within enigmatic forms. However, unlike the irrational juxtapositions of incongruous found objects in Man Ray’s revolutionary Rayographs, Smigrod’s darkroom experiments manifest a studied deliberation in content and form. Indeed, the serial nature and cohesive aesthetic of her projects undertaken over the course of the past decade reflect her extended and rigorous darkroom inquiry, exploring the potential of some of the most basic photographic elements: light, chemistry, and paper. The photographer’s embrace of the random effects of chemistry introduces elements of chance into the equation in her candescent prints.
With these interventions, Smigrod joins a dedicated group of artists belonging to what art critic Lyle Rexer coined the antiquarian avant-garde. She, like others in this cohort—such as Kunié Sugiura, Susan Derges, Adam Fuss, and the recently deceased Floris Neusüss—is returning to the medium’s origins and exploring what photography is in its basic form. Affirming the materiality of the unique photographic print, they defy the hegemony today of the ubiquitous and infinitely reproducible digital image. The contemporary photogram, Rexer asserts, “is predominately a field for the exploration of process and metaphor.” Smigrod’s enterprise perfectly encapsulates this characterization. Blending her interest in content and process, she finds inspiration in the materiality of her medium and the darkroom alchemy that produces often surprising results.

The artist’s conceptual underpinning is the reinterpretation of photographic truth, the stretching of boundaries from the original to the newly invented, in defiance of notions of the photograph as an unmediated representation. Indeed, the ethereal appearance of these photograms defies the one-to-one scale and direct correspondence between the original object and its imprinted image. The serial nature of Paper Light implies repetition and experimentation with exactitude, underscoring the conceptual aims of the project. While the repetition might imply that Smigrod is making a typology of some similar object, the marked distinction between individual prints belies this implication. The works within each discrete series are, however, intended to function as a harmonious unit, as reflected in the grid-like structures in which they have been configured for this exhibition. Beyond the variations of the size and scale of the objects represented, color and texture combine to create rhythm without duplication from image to image. In this sense, the photograms are like antonyms, defining one another by their differences. Like a scientist in the laboratory or a painter with a monochromatic palette, she explores the chemical interactions of photography without a camera and within the limits of the black and white darkroom.

Although titling her entire series under the rubric of Paper Light, Smigrod offers viewers no titles to individual prints that would allude to potential image content. Instead, she simply numbers the images to differentiate them. Randomly assigned, the numbers lend a scientific tone to the series that carries over to both her process and the resulting work. A paper light, of course, could also signal a kind of lantern. Reflective and incandescent, but ultimately flammable, paper can only become light in its destruction. This sense of contingency is embedded in the project, as well as the dual meaning of the word “light.” Light has the heavy responsibility of rendering all things visible, but it also connotes a sense of buoyancy, weightlessness, and grace.
Along the bottom edge of many works, streaks or flares of light appear like a horizon line of brushstrokes. Smigrod, who likens each sheet of sensitized paper to a canvas, manipulates the paper during the developing process, allowing the chemistry to pool along with the natural rippling of the sheet. Occasional thumbprints along these lightened edges draw a parallel between silver nitrate and mediums used for painting and drawing, like black paint or charcoal. More than a trace of the artist’s presence, the thumbprints act as a signal to the viewer, reminding us that photographs are not spotless windows to another time but objects to behold in the present. Moreover, it reflects the photographer’s defiance of rules and embrace of the accidental that result in innovation.

A photographer and teacher interested in all kinds of photographic techniques and printing processes, Smigrod created each project in distinct immersive periods over the last decade. Both informed by and in defiance of the technical precision of the black and white process, she embraces the so-called flaws that can occur while making photographs, thereby reimagining the photogram in inventive ways.

Although Paper Light is comprised of discrete units, the artist’s engagement with individual series often overlapped, allowing her to bring new insights into each of them as they evolved over time. Similar to a primer, the overarching project is divided into chapters, each seemingly disparate in appearance, but complementary when read as a whole.
The photograms in the *Under Study* Series (pages 28–31) represent the genesis of Smigrod’s *Paper Light* project. Teaching on a study abroad program in Cortona, Italy in 2010, the photographer gathered unusual leaves at the Giardino dei Semplici in Florence for the purpose of making photograms. She then turned a darkroom mishap with the chemicals from failure to chance discovery. The result was abstracted, spectral images like *Coccoloba pubescens VI* (2013) formed by happenstance and serendipitous twists of fate. Subsequently working with equally oversized samplings from the US Botanical Gardens in Washington, DC and neighborhood yards, Smigrod launched her newly embraced alchemic approach to the photographic medium.

Like William Henry Fox Talbot’s “photogenic drawings” of leaves and Anna Atkins’s cyanotype photograms of British algae from a century and half earlier, these photograms present x-ray-like images of a range of botanical specimen in which the leaves’ intricate veining and serrated edges are evident. Her images in this series link light-sensitive qualities of...
photography to the photosynthesis of plants, replicating what Carol Armstrong sees as a foundational intersection between botany and photography going back to the earliest experiments in the medium. “There seems to have been, at least at the beginning,” Armstrong argues, “some sort of organic, reflexive connection between an interest in the very structure of photosynthesizing plants and the investigation of the possibilities of the nature-based observation of nature that photography offered.” However, unlike her predecessors, Smigrod manifests not a typological interest in botanical specimen but rather an explicitly formal concern, playing on the scale of unusually large leaves filling the space of the oversized prints and the serendipity of unforeseen chemical interactions. These works defy the transience of nature, making indelible impressions on the paper surface. The interplay between evanescence and temporality result in a seemingly paradoxical body of work suspended between representational and abstract. The felicitous and unexpected outcomes of these darkroom experiments provided the impetus for the artist’s further exploration with the photogram.
PAPER LIGHT REDUX (2014–2016)

Depicting one of the most basic geometric shapes, the Paper Light Series (2015) (pages 32-35) features orbs within a dark firmament, each photograph differentiated by solarized spots of gold or flashes of white. Created from organic materials, these spherical forms define their blackened environment, an ecosystem riddled with atmospheric interruptions. Some are seemingly illuminated from within, as if one has placed the photograph over a flashlight, allowing the light to shine through and reveal the fibers of paper. Others show circles that have been eclipsed and occluded by layers of chemical interactions, like distant celestial bodies or the light visible on the retina after closing one’s eyes.

There is a completeness and resolution to the circles within Smigrod’s frames. Like the spherical forms that appear in the modernist abstractions of László Moholy-Nagy or Berenice Abbott’s stop-action renderings of rubber balls midair, the graphic appearance of a lightened circle upon a dark field has both an aesthetic appeal and a sort of scientific authority. Paper Light #3 shows an orb that is mottled with spots of white and gray, surrounded by a halo or darkened limb. The diagonal lines that move across its surface give it a sense of not only volume but also motion, spinning like a mass in orbit. Its edges are not crisp and clearly defined against the black space, but grooved and jagged, in a constant state of developing and dissolving. The contrasting effects of ethereal weightlessness, scabbed textures, mass, and density are entirely Smigrod’s construction.

The harmonious balance of circular forms within the frame extends to the composition and scale of each vertical 14 x 11 inch gelatin silver print. While the sizes of the orbs vary, they are in careful proportion to the darkened fields around them. With its broad diameter, the details across the surface of Paper Light #2 are clearly visible, whereas the diminished size and blur of the orb in Paper Light #9 could suggest that it is at a great distance. Similarly, the location of the circle within the frame is of great importance. Not centered within the rectangle but hovering in the upper register, the placement calls to mind the experience of looking up at the full moon, a streetlamp far above one’s head, or through the skylight of the Pantheon.
Embracing the one-to-one scale of the photogram, Smigrod employed articles of children’s clothing to redefine the textural surfaces of fabric and form (pages 36–41). The materials are seemingly dyed by chemical interactions, making the miniature apparel such as the dress in *Sleeveless Dress With Organdy Netting* (2020) appear almost burned and preserved. Light and chemistry interact to create a three-toned object that exists only in this inventive form.

Both diaphanous and densely woven materials leave their imprints, vestiges of clothing once worn. Indeed, the ghostly pieces of disembodied apparel suggest societal relics. They are inhabited here and, like *Sleeveless Sundress* (2020), animated through light and chemistry.
OPACITY/TRANSLUCENCY
(2019–2020)

As implied in the titles of these two series (pages 42–45), Smigrod found inspiration in exploring the polar opposites of opacity and translucency in objects she encountered. In both series, she plays with light and space in situating the object within the picture frame.

Employing opaque structures that deny the passage of light, Smigrod created photograms in which defined outlines and planar surfaces combine to create seemingly flat forms bearing little resemblance to their original dimensionality. As evident in *Etruscan Urn III* (2019), chemical interactions reglaze their surfaces creating alternative formations.

Following on her experiment with opacity, Smigrod took on an investigation of translucence in the *Translucency Series*, in which dense glass vessels and random chemical redistribution produce hypnotic images. The residual light echoing through glass prisms, such as in *Vase With Smoke* (2019), floats within the smoky murkiness of the gray environment. Evoking the ocular effect of light entering the eye (similar to the camera’s aperture), these images allude to light’s prismatic movements on veiled surfaces.
Vase With Smoke from the series Opacity/Translucency, 2019.
Destruction and the degradation of the original image are at the heart of the Time and Space Series (pages 46–47). Smigrod’s improvisational approach to image making is evident in her employment of whatever is at hand that sparked her imagination. The imprint of the tonally reversed original image is then further altered or marred by a deliberate “painting in” with residual chemistry.

The photographer’s fascination with architectural structures surfaces in this series. Enlarged vintage lanternslides are presented in their inverse, the segments of which are taped together in a manner clearly making no effort to hide the process. Smigrod then disrupted the development process to manipulate the image in unexpected ways. Thus altering geographic accuracy, she rendered eerie re-drawings of specific locations. In Lorain Carnegie Bridge (2020), for example, a chemically produced climatic doom descends upon the scene, cutting across it a diagonal. The pairing of inverted neutral tones with the hyper-distressed chemical seen in photograms such as Pulaski Skyway (2020) alludes to Earth’s increasingly frequent atmospheric interruptions.

Other works in this series illustrate the photographer’s interest in dynamic dialogues between image and text, a construct she would pursue further in her subsequent Conversations Series. The bleeding together of the recto and verso of the source materials supplied by printed matter or instructional sewing patterns largely renders the original objects unrecognizable, transformed through light and the chemical process.
CONVERSATIONS (2014–2021)

In this ongoing investigation, Smigrod explores the perpetual conversation between text and images printed in mass media (pages 48–53). Drawing on various source material including magazines, sewing pattern books, newspapers, and art history publications, she anticipates the results formed by the random combination of the recto and verso of a printed page when collapsed in a single image, akin to holding a magazine page up to the sun or over a lightbox. Paper fibers diffuse beams of light, while the inversion of text and image produce illegible alphabets that compete with inverted illustrations.

This layering of elements triggers a series of associations to various forms of communication, compelling viewers to decipher the resulting image, creating a “conversation” between the disparate forms of imagery and between Smigrod and her viewer/reader. In Part Two (2019), a rectangular image hovers within a darkened field, jagged edges along the right-hand side a sign that source material has been torn from a bound volume. A halftone image of a man’s face and hand, overlayed with numerous blocks of text, dissolve and resolve across the page. In the darkened area of the man’s forehead, snippets of legible type. “Need for action,” “negative speculations,” “prepare for the worst,”—could be an ominous, coded message to the future, while a band of ochre across the man’s eyes conjures images of censorship.

Instructions On Page 9 brings new life to a 1930s knitting pattern book cover that has been folded and frayed over time, combining the striking graphic cover image with advertisements for yarn printed on the reverse of the page. Text appears normally and as a mirror image, forcing the reader to decipher what the source material may have been. Smigrod returns printed materials to their intermediary forms of negative images and typeset blocks, celebrating the aesthetic of the printing process.
LETTER PRESS: PROOF PRINT AND EVERY THING (2020–2021)

The Letter Press Series (pages 54–59)—comprised of the subset groupings Proof Print and Every Thing (2021)—provides an apt bookend to Smigrod’s Paper Light project. Long intrigued by the viscous consistency of printing ink, she made a set of photograms derived from paper positives and negatives and then ran them through a letterpress. Printing two-word phrases over the directionally and tonally reversed images, she created two distinctive sets of sequential monotypes. The monotype—a print that employs ink to create a unique image—is used in these series as the printmaking equivalent of the photogram. Smigrod’s fortuitous encounter with Leonardo da Vinci’s notebooks while working in Italy inspired the idea of inscribing mental notations into her practice. Addressing concepts of text and image interplay, form, harmony, destruction, and photographic truth, these works encapsulate the nature of the photographer’s creative endeavors.

The confounding relationship between image and illegible text/recto and verso in her previous series is replaced with complexities of a different nature in both projects. In Proof Print, for example, the underlying source images, such as the detail of Bronzino’s Portrait of Eleanor of Toledo, are partially obscured by the words PROOF PRINT emblazoned in bold typeface directly on the face of the photogram. Tinting but not completely obfuscating the painting, the words imprinted in semi-transparent red ink reference the printmaking process and the single master image. The source reproduction of Bronzino’s portrait, like all other images in this series, was drawn from a discarded book of Italian Renaissance paintings, which Smigrod then photographically re-“painted” through various techniques. The remainder of the works in this series were similarly rendered, except for the final imprint over a distorted transfer of Sebastiano del Piombo’s Pieta, which is the single piece in this series overlaid with the words FALSE TRUTH. It is also the only work inscribed in opaque gold ink, a precious material that completely obfuscates the image.
behind it, hinting at themes of veracity and transparency. Paintings by Renaissance masters such as da Vinci, Raphael, Michelangelo, and Titian are thus transformed into a conceptual photographic narrative, mediated by the photographer’s imaginative manipulation of the creative tools she has mastered.

Perhaps nothing better characterizes Smigrod’s Every Thing series than “objects that dream and talk in their sleep,” Tristan Tzara’s century-old description of Man Ray’s Rayographs.5 The images underlying the words EVERY THING printed in bold red type are paper negatives of an array of random objects the photographer captured with a primitive pinhole camera. These largely undecipherable objects appear as floating fossils, providing evidence of their existence. The outlier in this group is the photogram in the center of the grid where an orb-like object seemingly emits a beam of light through a haze. The words superimposed over this single print are, appropriately enough, DREAM LIGHT.

Although each discrete project in Smigrod’s Paper Light Series has its own raison d’etre, there is a cohesion to her enterprise. Evident in the entire body of work is the photographer’s unique vision: she sees things not as they are but what they can become. In translating various materials into photograms, she thinks about their opacity or translucence, considering any appropriately sized object as simply a transmitter or reflector of light. Far
from being the subject of the photograph, the selected objects serve a metaphoric function. The work is quiet, mesmerizing, and nostalgic, an interior world within itself, bearing scant evidence of the social upheaval occurring over the course of the decade in which these bodies of work evolved. Although the series reflects the reclusive environment in which the artist immerses herself during the various residencies, her work is about the meditative, necessary balm that art can provide a chaotic world.

By turns captivating and confounding, the images that comprise *Paper Light* explore the inherent ambiguity of photography and the twofold ability of light to both conceal and reveal. They also challenge the viewer to see objects in new ways. Brought together, the cumulative impact of Smigrod’s photograms is otherworldly, like a new kind of glittering constellation. Not quite abstract, but not representational either, the critical subject becomes the image produced and the medium of photography itself.

With these endeavors, Smigrod turns the photogram’s subversive potential to undermine photography’s pretensions to high art on its head. Rather than embracing the iconoclastic possibilities that attracted members of the early twentieth-century avant-garde to this creative form, her approach harks further back to William Henry Fox Talbot’s earliest experiments with the “art of fixing a shadow.” Smigrod has orchestrated one-of-a-kind artifacts in which the physical intervention and the hand of the artist are manifest, giving each unique print its distinctive aural quality and affirming the photogram as a vehicle for aesthetic delectation. With process and metaphor as their shared underlying central concerns, these works exemplify the renaissance of the photogram at the hands of the twenty-first century’s antiquarian avant-garde.

### Endnotes


3. Rexer, 130.
If you are lucky enough to have held a daguerreotype in your hand, you will remember the way it changes as you tilt it left and right: the negative and positive switch places while the surface reflects your own face in the highlights of its subject’s image. It seems ironic that daguerreotypes, invented nearly 200 years ago at the dawn of photography, achieved such immaculate detail and permanence. Meanwhile, photography as an art form gave rise to other, less precise processes: cyanotypes, Van Dyke brown prints, and the use of paper negatives all brought a more impressionistic sensibility to the medium. In this context, why do we turn, as photographers and viewers, to the photogram?

As a historian studying cultures of Buddhism, my understanding of its philosophy invariably informs the way I view photographs, especially photograms. For me, the works in Paper Light will forever be caught up in questions about the essence of the objects they reference. If I did not know otherwise, I would think that my mother, Claudia Smigrod, had Buddhist concepts in mind when she first started producing these explosions of form, shade, and texture. Questioning the essence of not only objects, but photographic materials themselves, seems to be at the heart of her process: how, for example, are her ostensibly monochrome prints so colorful? Why do the images change in character when they are exposed to light, even after a chemical fixer has been applied to stop the development process? If a photogram is essentially an object’s shadow recorded in silver gelatin, why do so many of these objects appear to glow?
In one Buddhist teaching on the dharmadhātu (a notoriously untranslatable term describing the truth that leads to enlightenment), the reader of the text is asked to ponder a series of observations:

A lamp placed in a pot is not perceptible. The dharmadhātu placed in the pot of afflictions is not seen.

Whenever you make holes in the pot, the nature of light appears in that direction.

When the pot is broken with the diamond of samādhi, it shines to the limits of space.¹

Samādhi, the state of concentration that meditators hope to achieve and which is necessary for enlightenment, seems to me not so different from the mindset that active and curious viewers bring to looking at photographs. The sensation it produces in breaking open the “pot of afflictions” is also not far from the goal of any artist: to show the viewer something that produces a transcendent thought.

In these photographs, we see jars, we see objects with holes in them, and we see infinite expressions of the role of light. There are even pictures that look like planets and stars. My mother’s fascination with light is apparent in her recollection of an image that helped inspire this series: a man standing on a frozen lake, watching fish swim beneath the ice. “How is this possible?” my mother asked. “Where is the light source?”

Looking at these works, it would seem there are as many answers as there are pictures, or pairs of eyes to view them, or perhaps (to follow the Buddhist penchant for numerical exaggeration) as many nervous synapses as operate in the process of asking such a question.

But Buddhism also teaches that objects, and people, have no true essence, no thing that separates them (on the level of existence) from anything else. This is considered one of the most difficult of Buddhist concepts to truly grasp, and again, the texts use analogy to help us along by pointing out the barriers to our understanding:

Although the sun and moon are stainless, they are blocked by the five obstacles, such as clouds, mist, smoke, eclipses, and dust.
Ocular Effect IX from the series Opacity/Translucency, 2019.
In the same way, the mind of clear light becomes blocked by the five obstructions: desire, enmity, laziness, agitation, and doubt.

When a fireproof garment, stained by various stains, is placed in fire, the stains are burned but the garment is not.

In the same way, the mind of clear light is stained by desire. The stains are burned by the fire of wisdom; just that clear light is not.²

These lines, written centuries before the conception of photography, nonetheless anticipate and even problematize the art form’s function to record the existence of an object, person, or place.

They also resonate with any number of other philosophical theories of truth that so frequently reference light and human vision: phrases like “seeing the light of day” and “clear-minded” testify to how closely we link these concepts in even everyday conversation. Plato’s
Allegory of the Cave practically screams out for comparison here, not least because it was composed around the same time that Buddhism was first developing in South Asia (5th - 4th century BCE). In Plato’s story, prisoners in a cave face a wall on which they can see only the shadows of objects projected by the sun or a fire, believing the shadows to be objects in and of themselves. Only philosophers, freed from the metaphorical cave to turn and face the light source, can perceive the reality of the world. Today we live in a photographic era in which we can easily imagine ourselves as both prisoner and philosopher. Imagine yourself inside a camera (or camera obscura, the room-sized equivalent) and you are essentially inside Plato’s cave, seeing the world projected upside down in mesmerizing detail. Leave this illusory space and you are back on firm ground, a reality that is known but somehow less compelling than the images inside the box. Photographers do us the favor of recording those images, and while it is difficult to accuse such artists of laziness, we can make a clear case that (in the Buddhist sense) their aim of recording reality suffers from the other four delusions: the desire to reach artistic greatness, an enmity toward less realistic depictions of the world, the agitation that comes with ambition, and the doubt inherent in acts of reproduction.

Even a cell phone camera maintains the basic structure of the first cameras built in 1839: light enters through a small aperture (the lens) and is recorded, albeit digitally today. Somewhat characteristically, my mother has eschewed the technical advancements of the last several hundred years and done away with the camera altogether. Instead, the vagaries and whims of the darkroom become her medium.
Through this process, she has produced images that recall the scripture’s teaching analogy: clouds, mists, smoke, eclipses, and dust. These shapes, which manifest differently throughout the work but are always translucent, luminant, and insistent, bring to mind a concept from one of the many Spiritualist traditions inspired by Buddhism: the Theosophist theory of “thought-forms.” In 1905, Annie Besant and C.W. Leadbeater described the existence of thought-forms as a heretofore invisible phenomenon that bridged religion and science:

All students of the occult are acquainted with the idea of the elemental essence, that strange half-intelligent life which surrounds us in all directions, vivifying the matter of the mental and astral planes. This matter thus animated responds very readily to the influence of human thought, and every impulse sent out, either from the mental body or from the astral body of man, immediately clothes itself in a temporary vehicle of this vitalised matter. Such a thought or impulse becomes for the time a kind of living creature, the thought force being the soul, and the vivified matter the body.\(^3\)

The text was accompanied by illustrations of thought-forms that range from amorphous, nebulaic skeins of color to more defined, improbable combinations of shapes such as a thimble-like object whose tip resembles a brain. They look remarkably like my mother’s photograms.

Yet Besant and Leadbeater called thought-forms “elemental essences,” an idea that the Buddhist scriptures reject as both nonsensical and misguided. Where, then, are we to believe that the physical and inspirational light of these photographs emanates from? It is as if in the nurturing chemical bath of the darkroom, a distillation of elements, of thought-forms—of clear light—has taken place.

Endnotes

2 Lopez, 467–468.


Paper Light #23 from the series Paper Light, 2015.

Paper Light #14 from the series Paper Light, 2015.

Vessels With Veiled Curtain VI from the series Opacity/Translucency, 2020.


OPACITY/TRANSLUCENCY SERIES
Fossilized Urn from the series Opacity/Translucency, 2019.
Carrying Case from the series Opacity/Translucency, 2019.
Top, from left: *Ocular Effect V, Ocular Effect VI, Ocular Effect IV* from the series *Opacity/Translucency*, 2019.

Pyramid Study from the series Time and Space, 2020.
Terms of Sale from the series Conversations, 2019.
From the series Conversations.
Some Time from the series Conversations, 2019.
A Worrisome Sign from the series Conversations, 2020.
Untitled (100 Heads) from the series Conversations, 2019.
Every Thing from the series Letter Press, 2021.
Every Thing from the series Letter Press, 2021.
Every Thing from the series Letter Press, 2021.
CLAUDIA SMIGROD

CLAUDIA SMIGROD is Professor Emeritus, Corcoran College of Art & Design, Washington, DC, where she taught from 1982 to 2016. Currently, she is the Edwin P. Conquest ’14 Chair at Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, Virginia (2016-present). Additionally, she has been a Visiting Professor, University of Georgia Studies Abroad Program, Cortona, Italy, (1999-2019), Visiting Assistant Professor, Swarthmore College, (2003), and served as Photography Juror, Fulbright Program, Institute of International Education Graduate Program, (2015-2016 & 2017-2018.) The recipient of numerous awards and fellowships, she has held a number of artist residencies, including the Virginia Center for Contemporary Art, Amherst, Virginia (2014, 2019, and 2021), and Auvillar, France (August 2016.) Smigrod was the 2017 Slow Exposures Artist-in-Residence, Zebulon, Georgia. Her solo exhibition Paradigm Shift was featured at the Orlando Museum of Art (2011.) Smigrod’s photographs are included in the collections of the National Gallery of Art, Library of Congress, Smithsonian American Art Museum, National Museum of Women in the Arts, Chrysler Museum, The Polaroid Collection, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Comune di Cortona (Italy), Greenville County Museum of Art, American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center, Georgia Power, and The United States Information Agency, among others.

For more information, visit: www.claudiasmigrod.com

Opposite: Stamp Collection (detail) from the series Conversations, 2019.
EDUCATION

George Washington University, MFA, 1978
Thesis: Carbro Printing: Re-Exploring a Vintage Process

College of Ceramics of the State of New York, Alfred University, BFA, With Honors 1971

SELECT SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2017 Slow AIR
Slow Exposures, Zebulon, Georgia

2014 Hopes & Dreams/
Speranza e Sogni
National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, MD

2011 Paradigm Shift
Orlando Museum of Art
Orlando, Florida

2010 Il Giorno del Guidizio
(The Day of Judgment)
Centro Convegni Sant’Agostino, Comune di Cortona, Cortona

2009 The Day of Judgment
University of Central Florida
Orlando, FL

2008 Neighborhood Watch
Corcoran Gallery of Art
Washington, DC

SELECT GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2019 MOSTRA, Opere di
Studenti e Artisti dell’
Università della Georgia
Palazzo Casali, Cortona, Italy

2017 Peep Show
Nelson Gallery
Lexington, VA

2014 Terra Firma, Landscape
Photographs from the
Permanent Collection
Corcoran Gallery of Art
Washington, DC

2013 Washington Art Matters, 1940-1990
American University Museum
Washington, DC

2012 Photography Highlights from the LCVA’s Permanent Collection
Longwood Center for the Visual Arts
Farmville, VA

2009 Text + Image
Nelson Gallery
Lexington, VA

2008 Washington Women in the Arts
Osuna Gallery
Bethesda, MD

2006 Out of Darkness:
The Contemporary Revival of Early Photography
University of Central Florida
Orlando, FL

2005 Outside the Dog
4th Annual ABBA Members Exhibition
Arizona State School of Art, Tempe, AZ

2004 Anonymous Returns,
Washington Project for the Arts/Corcoran
Washington, DC

2003 MOSTRA, Opere di
Studenti e Artisti dell’
Università della Georgia
Palazzo Casali, Cortona, Italy

2002 Secret Gardens
Kathleen Ewing Gallery,
Washington, DC

2001 MOSTRA, Opere di
Studenti e Artisti dell’
Università della Georgia
Palazzo Casali, Cortona, Italy

1999 MOSTRA, Opere di
Studenti e Artisti dell’
Università della Georgia
Palazzo Casali, Cortona, Italy

1998 Collaborative Works: The 1998 Corcoran Faculty Exhibition,
Corcoran Gallery of Art
Washington, DC

1994 Images of Children
National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, MD

1993 From Father to Son
Kathleen Ewing Gallery
Washington, DC

Opposite: Corcoran Gallery of Art (Bierstadt: The Last of the Buffalo), from the series Conversations, 2019.
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<td>Hot Shots: 25 Photographers</td>
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<td>1978</td>
<td>Light Images, A National Photographic Exhibition</td>
<td>Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, VA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Claudia Smigrod and Paul Tillinghast</td>
<td>Intuitiveye Gallery, Washington, DC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>The Nation’s Capital Photographers: An Area Exhibition</td>
<td>Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**EMPLOYMENT**

- 2016-Present: Professor Emeritus, Corcoran College of the Arts & Design, Washington, DC
- 2021: Edwin P. Conquest Visiting Chair of Humanities, Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, VA
- 2019: Visiting Professor of Art, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, VA
- 2019: Visiting Professor of Art Studies Abroad Program in Cortona, Italy, University of Georgia

**ARTIST RESIDENCIES**

- 2021: Virginia Center for the Creative Arts (VCCA), Amherst, VA
- 2017: SlowExposures, Zebulon, Georgia
- 2016: Virginia Center for the Creative Arts (VCCA)/France, Avuillar, France
GRANTS & AWARDS

2019  Jackson-Hope Fund for Faculty Development
      Virginia Military Institute
      Lexington, VA

2016  Enhanced Travel Award
      George Washington University
      Washington, DC

2015–2016
      Luther Rice Undergraduate Fellowship (Faculty Mentor)
      George Washington University
      Washington, DC

2009  Betty Foster Award for Outstanding Creative Research
      Corcoran College of Art + Design

      Faculty Development Grants
      Corcoran College of the Arts & Design
      Washington, DC

1989  Virginia Prize for the Visual Arts in Photography
      Virginia Commission for the Arts
      Richmond, VA

PERMANENT COLLECTIONS

Antognazzi Ugo, Scultore-Laboratorio
Marmi, Pietrasanta, Italy

Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, VA

Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

Comune di Cortona, Cortona, Italy

George Washington University, Washington, DC

Georgia Power, Atlanta, Georgia

Greenville County Museum of Art, Greenville, SC

Library of Congress, Artist Book Collection, Washington, DC

Longwood College of Art, Farmville, VA

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, DC

Polaroid Collection, Polaroid Corporation, Waltham, MA

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC

United States Information Agency, Washington, DC

UNIVERSITY ARTIST BOOK COLLECTIONS:

Arizona State University, Baylor University, College of William & Mary,
Hollins University, Rochester Institute of Technology, Savannah College of Art & Design,
Swarthmore College, University of Arizona, University of Georgia,
University of Michigan, University of Utah, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee,
Virginia Commonwealth University, and Yale University

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Smigrod, Claudia, Moon Journey, Pyracantha Press, Arizona State University 2012, Permanent Collection:
National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; Yale University; University of Michigan

Smigrod, Claudia, With Respect, The Fisher Company Press, 2016, Permanent Collection:
National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, DC

Library of Congress


Focal Plane Magazine, Process Alternatives, Issue No. 3, Winter 2018

Harder, Arlene F., Learning Place OnLine.com, Altadena, CA, 2003

Warren, Bruce, Photography, West Publishing Company, Minneapolis, MN. 1993

Darkroom Magazine, February 1982, Volume Four, Number Two

The Washington Post Magazine, Neighborhood Watch, June 28, 2009


The Washingtonian, June 1981 and May 1982
I would like to thank Sam Dingman, Jake Dingman and Stacey Smigrod for our collaborative circle of trust, curator Wendy A. Grossman, Kaitlin Booher, Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation, Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, Virginia Military Institute, Washington & Lee University, Jack Rasmussen, the American University Museum and my treasured community of friends for their continued support.

– Claudia Smigrod

Rhubarb Leaf from the series Under Study, 2015.
CONTRIBUTOR BIOGRAPHIES

WENDY A. GROSSMAN, CURATOR

Independent scholar Wendy A. Grossman, PhD is an art historian, writer, educator, and curator affiliated with The Phillips Collection and The University of Maryland, College Park. She has lectured internationally and published widely on topics in the history of photography, twentieth-century European and American Modernisms, the intersections between non-Western and Western art, Dada, Surrealism, contemporary art, and the artist Man Ray. Her essays have appeared in edited volumes, exhibition catalogs, and international journals such as Modernism/modernity, Smithsonian Journal of American Art, Visual Resources, Journal of Surrealism in the Americas, Les Cahiers du Musée national d’art moderne and Photographica. Her publications include the award-winning catalog, Man Ray, African Art and the Modernist Lens (2009), which accompanied the multi-venue exhibition she organized. She is currently an Andrew Mellon Senior Fellow at the Metropolitan Museum of Art advancing her research on the Guadaloupean dancer and model Adrienne Fidelin, the first Black woman to be featured in a major international American fashion magazine. Grossman’s research recovers Fidelin’s overlooked life story within narratives of the Parisian interwar avant-garde, Surrealism, and Man Ray.

KAITLIN BOOHER

Kaitlin Booher is a PhD candidate in art history at Rutgers University. Her dissertation research about fashion photography during the first half of the twentieth century has been supported by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Mellon Foundation, and Rutgers. Kaitlin was a curatorial consultant in the Department of Photographs at the National Gallery of Art and assistant curator of photography and media arts at the Corcoran Gallery of Art. Her exhibitions include Mary Ellen Mark: Ward 81 (with co-curator Gaëlle Morel, Ryerson Image Centre, 2023) and Alex Prager: Face in the Crowd (Corcoran Gallery of Art, 2013).

JAKE DINGMAN

Jake Dingman, PhD, is a historian, teacher, and student of early modern movements. Currently specializing in Asian and Buddhist history, he teaches at Georgetown University. His dissertation, titled “The Unknown Country”: Tibet in the Western Imagination, 1850 - 1950 explored intellectual and material processes that created the modern understanding of Tibet outside of Asia. His research has been supported by the Cosmos Club Foundation and he has presented at conferences around the country, most recently on American art collector Jacques Marchais, founder of the Jacques Marchais Museum of Tibetan Art on Staten Island.
First published in conjunction with the exhibition

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January 29–May 22, 2022
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Alper Initiative for Washington Art
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Sharon Christiansen, Manager, Museum Operations & Visitor Services
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Inside front cover: *Conversations VI* from the series *Conversations*, 2021.

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