COLUMBUS DISPATCH
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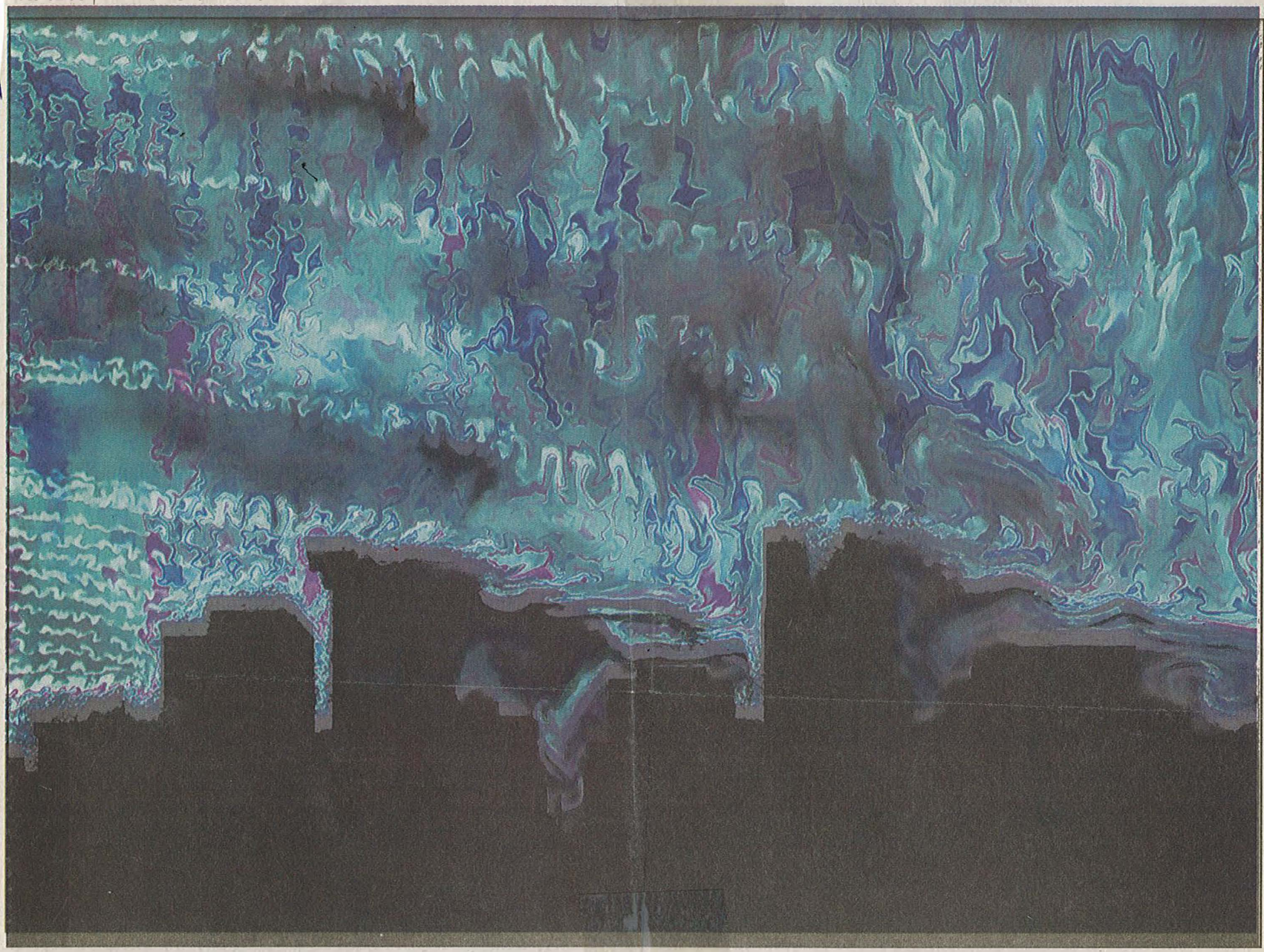
MAY-21-2006

EXHIBIT | ALTERED STATES



Columbus Dispatch May 21, 2006

Truth re-imagined

Photo techniques result in new, unexpected realities

By Christopher A. Yates
FOR THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Photographs always tell the truth — or maybe not.

"Altered States," at the Ohio Arts Council's Riffe Gallery, challenges notions of the meaning and function of the photographic image.

Curators Dennis Harrington, director of the Weston Art Gallery, and Dennis Kiel — associate curator of prints, drawing and photographs at the Cincinnati Museum of Art— have assembled works by 12 regional artists who break down the medium's assumed boundaries. Using various techniques, the exhibitors have constructed new and unexpected realities.

The manipulated images speak to ideas of aesthetic choice: Rather than recording and reproducing a literal truth, each artist pursues a more poetic path.

Barry Anderson's pictures at first look like straightforward photographs of stunning landscapes. But something is amiss; the scenes seem too perfect. Using a computer, Anderson has merged reality with fiction. *Sand, Mountain, Sky*, for example, presents a striking mountain landscape with an equally dramatic desert in the foreground.

David Rosenthal examines the desires and disasters of consumer culture. In *When the World Stopped Turning*, he suggests a consequence to residential development. Near a construction site, a couple stand arm- in- arm looking toward the horizon. "When the world stopped turning, they called their town 'twilight' and lots of people started moving there" is written below the scene. The two people have fulfilled the American dream, but they have also altered the landscape and opened the door to urban sprawl.

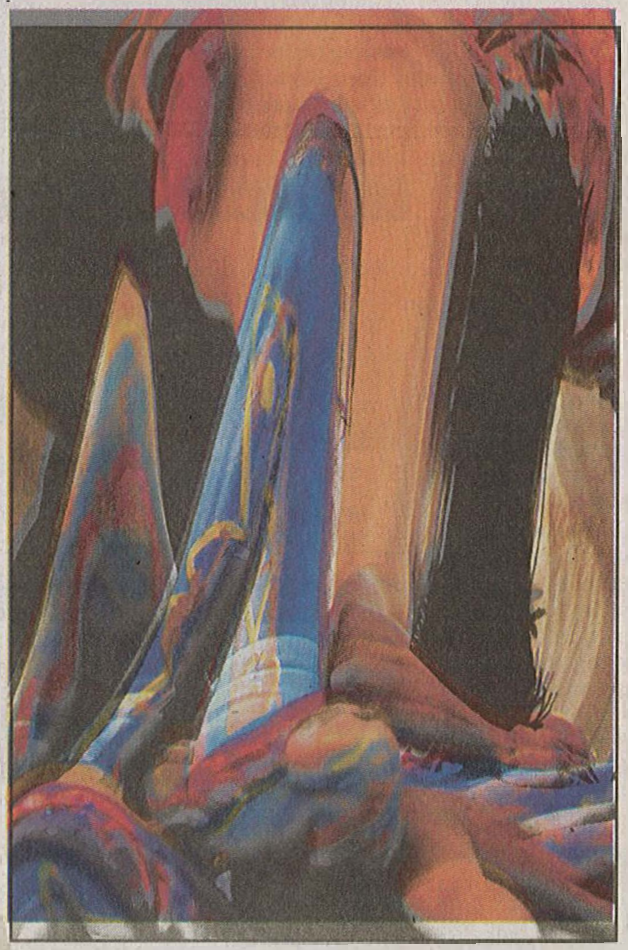
Using computer-generated liquid-flow patterns, Kimberly Burleigh produces fictional scenarios and imagined events. Sometimes magical, sometimes haunting, the results are artificial yet based on scientific principles. In *Cityscape*, vapor flows over tall buildings in what can be seen only as an apocalyptic nightmare.

Photographs are a small but crucial component of Cal Kowal's work. In *Eternal Passage*, images of a ship and an angel attached to blocks of wood point toward the transition between life and death.

Also included are works by Jymi Bolden, Diana Duncan Holmes, Barbara Houghton, Diane Kruer, Guennadi Maslov, Nancy Rexroth, Shawn Scully and Joel Whitaker.

"Altered States" challenges expectations about the nature of photography. Its sampling of regional voices, mainly from Cincinnati, suggests changes under way in the larger art world.

▶ "Altered States" continues through July 9 in the Riffe Gallery, 77 S. High St. Hours: noon to 4 p.m. Sundays, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesdays, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Wednesdays through Fridays and noon to 8 p.m. Saturdays. Call 614-644-9624 or visit www.riffegallery.org.



Anamorphosis Series by Jymi Bolden

EXHIBIT | ALTERED STATES

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Sunday, May 21, 2006

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Any photograph could be in an 'Altered State'

By Jordan Gentile

Because so many art exhibits hide their inadequacies under a veil of obscure themes and unprovable claims, it's always refreshing to find one whose stated purpose is clear. But **Altered States**, the Riffe Gallery's new show, may have gone *too* far in the direction of the accessible, coddling the viewer with a Mickey Mouse theme that wouldn't intrigue even novice art patrons.

You call that ART?

The core observation of this exhibit, as curator Dennis Kiel's introduction informs us, is that photographs have never captured absolute truth. Even in the days of the daguerreotype, "photographers had already begun controlling or altering the finished product by positioning their sitters and selectively planning their compositions."

Add negative manipulation and digital tinkering to the photographer's bag of tricks, and the medium's whole fraudulent history comes into view.

In *Altered States*, Kiel brings together a group of southeastern Ohio and Kentucky artists whose work is supposed to play up this intrinsic artificiality.

The problem is that while Kiel's observations about photography are lucid and indisputable, they're also pretty obvious, aren't they?

Moreover, they're not very helpful to the exhibit. If every photographic image you see is inherently fake—in an "altered state," to use Kiel's terminology—couldn't any photography exhibit change its name to *Altered States* and claim to explore the medium's innate artificiality?

Yes, of course it could. So what's the point of this show? That's a question that frequently nags the viewer as he passes through the Riffe Gallery and gazes upon the hodgepodge of essentially unrelated pieces hanging therein.

In fact, there's only a single artist in the whole show who finds a truly new way to "alter" anything. Her name is Kimberly Burleigh, and her artistic representations of "fluid dynamics"—abstract, computer generated swirls that result from speed, turbulence and other factors converging on a hypothetical plane of water—are as fascinating to look at as the science behind them is difficult to understand.

The rest of the "altering" is either predictably artsy—Guennadi Maslov's sepia-drenched pictures resemble frames from R.E.M.'s "Losing My Religion" video—or just plain moronic, as with Jymi Bolden's fun-house mirror-inspired portraits.

In the absence of a credible unifying theme to inspire them, many artists toss up their hands and follow their own muses.

Naturally, this means a lot of harping on the war in Iraq. While such political showboating occasionally pans out, as with Barbara Houghton's protest-oriented panoramas—which convey a scruffy, Rauschenberg-like vitality—the results are mostly sour and predictable.

But how can you blame the artists? From its very conception, *Altered States* was doomed to be less than the sum of its parts.

INFO:

The Ohio Arts Council will present *Altered States* through July 9 at the Riffe Gallery, 77 S. High St. Hours are Wednesdays-Fridays 10 a.m.-8 p.m., Saturdays noon-8 p.m., Sundays noon-4 p.m. and Tuesdays 10 a.m.-4 p.m. 644-9624.

Hey, is that Michael Stipe? *Guennadi Maslov's "Paola and Anton," part of the Ohio Arts Council's current exhibit at the Riffe Gallery*

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ARTS BRIEFS

Exhibit examines altered states of reality

The Ohio Art Council's Riffe Gallery, located in downtown Columbus, will explore altered states of reality in its latest exhibition May 11-July 9.

"Altered States" features more than 100 works of photographic art by 12 artists from Ohio and Kentucky: Barry Andersen and Diane Kruer of Fort Thomas, Ky.; Barbara Houghton of Alexandria, Ky.; Kimberly Burleigh, Jymi Bolden, Diana Duncan Holmes, Cal Kowal, Guennadi Maslov, Nancy Rexroth and David Rosenthal of Cincinnati; Shawn Scully of Columbus; and Joel Whitaker of Dayton.

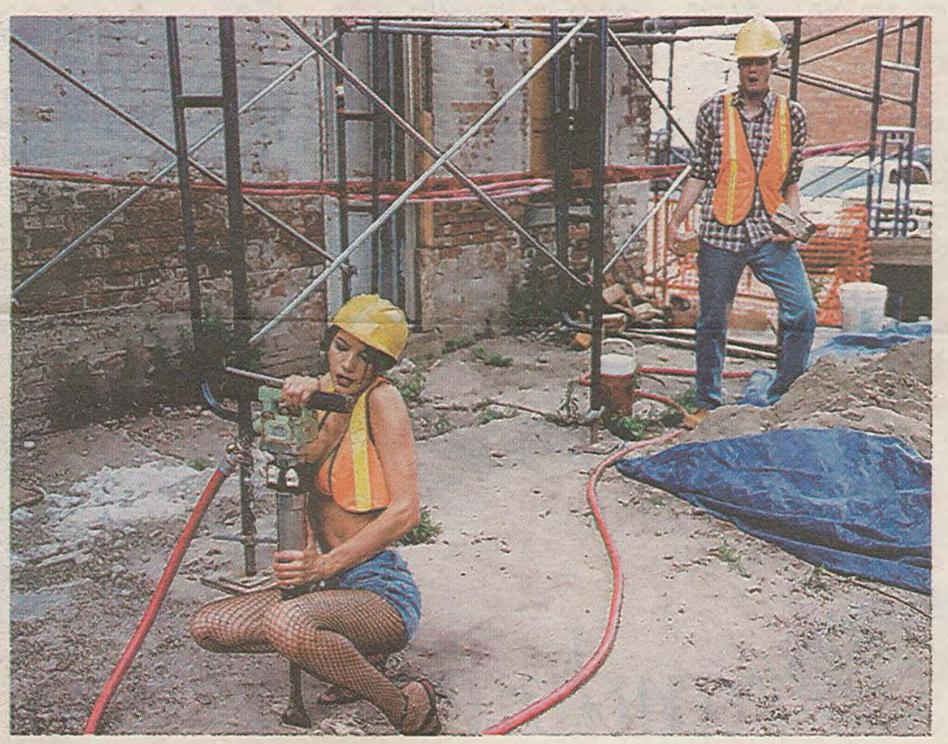
"Altered States" opens May 11 with a reception from 5- 7 p.m. An exhibition tour led by the curators is scheduled from noon to 1 p.m. May 12. Gallery admission and events are free and open to the public.

Gallery hours are 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Tuesday, 10 a.m.-8 p.m. Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, noon-8 p.m. Saturday and noon-4 p.m. Sunday. Admission is free.

For more information, visit www.oac.state.oh.us or www.riffegallery.org, e-mail riffegallery@oac.state.oh.us or call 614-644-9624.

picture IMPERFECT

BY JOHN ROSS



"Private Life (Hard Hammerin')" by David Rosenthal

Of the 12 collections compiled for *Altered States*, the first and most striking is a series of soldiers, arranged in ranks, peering back at viewers with an almost comatose glare.

A closer inspection of the series, hanging just inside the glass at the Ohio Arts Council's Riffe Gallery, reveals instead 20 knock-off G.I. Joes hand-colored with oils by local photographer and Ohio State instructor Shawn Scully in his effort to examine male identity.

"They're mimicking the photos that used to be displayed in store windows on Main Street," Scully said of his *Hero* portraits. "People who lived in town would display pictures of who was fighting in the war."

Because of the darkened background and the dated military garb, the portraits exude a familiar nostalgia. The dead eyes and the fleshy sheen of the cheeks, however, give the sense that these photos can't be trusted.

"I'm really fascinated with historical photographs and what they represent," added Scully. "[There's] this idea that somehow they are going to preserve a memory."

The other 11 artists from Kentucky and Ohio also play upon the canned, celebratory quality of the photograph and what an image represents in today's visual culture.

"We see so many images within a globalized society, where everyone is learning how others live," said Scully. "We look at them and say, 'I think I know what it's like.' Yet you have no experience of the event."

Each of the artists has used modern techniques of manipulation to rethink ordinary themes found in your family photo album. Diana Duncan Holmes' series, *Untitled Babies*, is an embryonic, almost ghoulish deconstruction of the cuddly baby snapshot, while Barry Andersen's seemingly benign landscapes use digital doctoring to couple unrelated skies and fields into seamless prints.

"The show came about from me doing our annual review of artists," said co-curator Dennis Harrington, who first displayed the exhibit at Cincinnati's Weston Art Gallery. "As I was reviewing the work, I saw this connection of images being manipulated. I also saw this link between past and present—between hand manipulation and more current digital processes."

Though the show has received some criticism as being haphazard, its strength lies in the sampling of varied techniques that push the boundaries of the genre.

"With any show like this, it isn't the definitive statement on anything," Harrington added. "You hope you just can show the public a wide breadth of approaches to image-making."

Kimberly Burleigh's *Drain* used digital software, Jymi Bolden's *Anamorphosis Series* used mirrored abstractions, and *Wedding*, by Barbara Houghton, used clever juxtapositions to create meaning.

As a whole, the curator insists that the medium contains more than meets, soothes or threatens the eye.

"Upon its invention, people saw [photography] as an accurate representation of reality," Harrington said. "But even from the earliest moments, there was altering going on, from the way the image was edited to how the photographer manipulated his subjects."

WHAT: "Altered States"
WHEN: Through July 9
WHERE: Riffe Gallery, Downtown
WEB: oac.state.oh.us/riffe

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