



ARTIST

Laura Heyman

TITLE

Blondine Herard, Polycarpe Racine, Mariod Herard, Daschmine Herard, December

DATE

2009

DIMENSIONS

50 in H x 40 in W

MEDIUM

Inkjet Prints

CATALOGUE NUMBER

2011.006

CURRENT LOCATION

Warehouse

LAURA HEYMAN

GENDER

Female

LIGHT WORK RELATIONSHIP

Light Work Grant, 2006

Other, 2009

Mid-career Artist Grant/Main Gallery, 2010

Lecturer, 2010

Light Work Grant, 2013

LIGHT WORK PUBLICATIONS

Contact Sheet 142

Contact Sheet 158

BIOGRAPHY

Laura Heyman is an associate professor of photography in Syracuse University's College of Visual and Performing Arts. Her work has been exhibited at such venues as Ampersand International Arts, San Francisco, CA; Deutsches Polen-Institut, Darmstadt, Germany; Senko Studio, Viborg, Denmark; and The National Portrait Gallery, London. Her most recent curatorial project, *Who's Afraid of America*, featuring the work of Justyna Badach, Larry Clark, Cheryl Dunn, Latoya Ruby Frazier, Zoe Strauss, and Tobin Yelland, was exhibited at Wonderland Art Space, in Copenhagen, Denmark.

ESSAYS

The Light Work Grants in Photography program, founded in 1973, was designed to encourage the creation of new photographic work and scholarship in the Central New York community. Each year three grants are awarded to photographers, critics, or photo-historians who reside within a fifty-mile radius of Syracuse, NY. The Light Work Grants in Photography program is one of the longest-running photography fellowships in the United States. Light Work congratulates the recipients of the Thirty-Second Annual Light Work Grants in Photography: Laura Heyman, Thilde Jensen, and Rishi Singhal. Laura Heyman (Syracuse, NY) submitted work from her series *The Photographer's Wife*, which presents a female subject gazing intimately at the camera, suggesting an artist making images of their lover. However, Heyman performs the role of both photographer and subject, further complicating the already tricky relationship between artist and model. In making use of this visual trope, she appropriates the male gaze and examines the history of images made by male artists of their wives and lovers, specifically referencing portraits of Georgia O'Keefe, Eleanor Callahan, and Edith Gowin, while playing with various photographic conventions, such as travel and sensual imagery. Heyman is an assistant professor in the College of Visual and Performing Arts at Syracuse University, teaching courses in photography and critical theory. Her work has been shown internationally including recent exhibitions at the Deutsch Polen Institute in Darmstadt, Germany; and Ampersand International Arts in San Francisco, CA. Thilde Jensen (Truxton, NY) submitted work from her series *Human Canaries*. The images are a personal account of the life she has lived with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity, and the people she has met who suffer the same condition. People with this sensitivity have been dubbed "human canaries," and they are the casualties of what Jensen calls a "ubiquitous synthetic chemical culture." Jensen became so sensitive to chemicals in the air that she could not be in traffic, read a book, or sit next to someone wearing perfume. She was forced to wear a gas mask when entering banks, supermarkets, and doctor's offices. She left her life in New York City, her husband, and her career, and moved to the country where she lives in a tent away from regular chemicals such as laundry detergents, pesticides, and exhaust. Before developing Multiple Chemical Sensitivity, Jensen worked as an editorial photographer for numerous magazines, including *Newsweek*, *Details*, and *Blender*, among others. Her work has been exhibited internationally, and featured in articles in *Doubletake/Points of Entry* and *I.D. Magazine*. Rishi Singhal (Ithaca, NY) has traveled the world photographing his series *Condition of Urbanity* since 2004. His work explores the natural and built environments, and their interrelationship. He is particularly interested in certain transient zones within urban environments, where the inherent dualities of subsistence constantly refer to the transforming world order, both physically and metaphorically. Singhal photographed this series first in Western Europe, and then in New Delhi, India, followed by Central New York. He has photographed rapidly growing cities with booming economies, as well as cities struggling under loss of jobs to offshore agencies, urban and social planning failures, and industry closure. Singhal received his MFA in Art Photography from Syracuse University's College of Visual and Performing Arts. His work has been exhibited internationally, including exhibitions in China and India. Light Work would like to congratulate all of the winners of the Thirty-Second Annual Grants in Photography, and extend a special thank you to our judges: Lonnie Graham, Lisa Robinson, and Marni Shindelman. Lonnie Graham participated in Light Work's Artist-in-Residence program in 2000. He was named Pennsylvania State Artist of the Year in 2005. He is currently a professor of visual and integrative arts at Pennsylvania State University, and an instructor of special programs at the Barnes Foundation. Lisa Robinson participated in Light Work's Artist-in-Residence program in February 2006. She lives in Jackson Heights, NY, has been photographing snowscapes since 2003. She looks for man-made, singular objects blanketed in heavy layers of snow. Marni Shindelman is an assistant professor of art and an associate of the Susan B. Anthony Institute for Gender and Women's Studies at the University of Rochester. Her work ranges from printmaking to photographic imagery to sculpted soap. It incorporates found hypertexts, medical myths, and news events with icons of the banal. Jessica Heckman In 2009 Laura Heyman was one of thirty artists, academics, and writers invited to participate in the *Ghetto Biennale in Port-au-Prince, Haiti*. The Biennale was being organized by a group of artists who wanted to pose a series of questions about culture, class, and the globalization of art. Heyman is an associate professor of photography in the College of Visual and Performing Arts at Syracuse University and we have worked with her on a number of projects over the years. Heyman needed support to participate in the Biennale and presented us a proposal to consider. We decided to support the project through our Endowment Fund for mid-career artists and in September 2009 awarded her a grant to participate in the Biennale. Her goal for the project was to examine whether an artist from the first world can photograph within the third world without voyeurism or objectification. Following the example of artists like Mike Disfarmer, James Van Der Zee, and Seydou Keita, she decided to create a simple outdoor studio and make portraits of Haitian subjects with an 8x10 camera. Heyman arrived in Port-au-Prince on November 28, 2009 with one assistant and a few contacts, and returned to the US on December 5. Because she returned just before the semester break we barely had time to catch up with her about the project when a 7.0 magnitude earthquake struck Haiti on January 12, 2010, causing widespread destruction and loss of life. In the process of trying to get in touch with the artists and people she met during her visit, Heyman almost immediately decided she needed to return to Haiti to offer what assistance she could, and to continue with the portrait project. We offered her more support and she made two more trips to Haiti in March and May 2010. This exhibition and catalogue contain a selection of the portraits made during her three visits. Much of Heyman's previous work was conceptually based and grounded in the role of artist as provocateur, exploring the terrain between visual clues and cultural context. For a number of years, her work has been informed by the question, how do you unload the baggage of the history of photography in the process of critique and creation? Given the world history of colonialism, manifest destiny, and cultural exploitation it has long been debated if a person from one culture can represent people from another culture without jaundiced results. Heyman was freighted with this intellectual baggage when she began the project but from almost the first portrait she attempted, these trepidations gave way to the surprising things that can happen when space is created for genuine discourse to take place. To begin that dialogue she had an extended conversation with each person photographed. This brief but important connection was enough to allow the person sitting for their portrait the opportunity to claim their space and become an active participant in the image making process. For the most part the people Heyman photographed were not concerned with where she was from or why she was taking the pictures, they were interested in posing and creating a presence for the camera that was astute and self-aware. Some of the people who posed were timid, others were expressive and animated, some clowned for the camera, and others posed like it was family portrait day at Sears. Heyman used her skills as an artist to create a set-up that was refined and professional, but the sitters controlled how they were represented within these parameters. Portraiture is one of the oldest forms of photography and the one that feels the most familiar

and safe as it connects us to our memories of family and friends and helps define our own self-image. There is a power dynamic in every portrait and most of the time the photographer holds the upper hand. It is hard to view portraits made by Richard Avedon and not consider the artist first—recognizing the stark white background, democratic lighting, and dogmatic inclusion of film edges in the image as the artist's signature—before we can consider who is the subject of the picture. Although she might use many of the same tools and techniques as Avedon, her work is more closely related to the portraits of Fazal Sheikh, who was able to cede control of the portrait to his subjects while retaining a clear and consistent quality that favored respect and recognition over heroic gestures. We might always think of portraits as a convincing likeness, but they are never simple representations. They have power, they give power, and they take power. Artists often approach their work with a handful of questions that lead them through a process of creating to find answers that in many cases never materialize. Heyman followed that process and created a series of portraits that are honest and expressive. Since the beginning of this project the context of her pictures has changed and will no doubt shift again as Haiti moves in and out of the news. The images themselves won't change those circumstances but her photographs remind us that if we ask the right questions we might find common ground when we are expecting cultural differences. Jeffrey Hoone Media descriptions of Haiti's history and misfortunes often ignore the aspects of Haitian life that contradict themes of abjection. Similarly, accounts of Haitian art tend to describe its bright color, naïve expressionism, and traces of B-movie voodoo. But when surrealist Andre Breton lectured in Haiti in December 1945, he perceived in Haitian art and culture a vast capacity for social critique and agitation. More than any other place, Breton noted, Haiti carried on the spirit of the French Revolution. He aligned what he called the Haitian spirit not with folk art, but with surrealist confrontation. The 2009 Haitian Ghetto Biennale reverberated with Breton's assessment of Haiti as a place where art and social awareness inevitably nourish each other. The Biennale was organized by Atis-Resistans (the Creole term for Artists' Resistance), a collective of artists from a downtown district of Port-au-Prince known as the Grand Rue, along with ethnographer Myron Beasley, and media artist Leah Gordon. In 2004, a group of these artists was denied visas to visit the United States for an exhibition of their work. In creative retaliation, the Atis-Resistans organized their own international biennale. On their website, the artists asked, "What happens when first world art rubs up against third world art? Does it bleed?" They solicited applications and gave preference to work like Laura Heyman's, which would explore that question and be produced in, not brought into, Haiti. In November 2009, Heyman located a courtyard at the end of one of the Grand Rue's narrow alleys, near a sculptor's studio where finished work fronted stacks of scavenged materials. The area is reminiscent of Beijing's Dashanzi Art District in its effervescent early days, though on a smaller scale. Yet unlike the Chinese site, the Grand Rue will never be gentrified. Even before the 2010 earthquake, Haiti's persistently dismal economy, and the anti-bourgeois mind-set of these artists augured against that sort of transformation. Recognizing that Haitian photo studios often used painted backgrounds, Heyman bought a large piece of patterned cloth to serve as a backdrop. She set up her 8 x 10 Deardorff field camera and let it be known in the neighborhood that she was available to take portraits. The subjects chose their attitudes and attire. Some posed individually, but many chose to be photographed with friends and relatives. Among Heyman's sitters were the artists who initiated the Biennale. In her rudimentary hotel darkroom, Heyman developed the film, made contact prints, and gave photographs to everyone who sat for a portrait. In her last series, *The Photographer's Wife*, Heyman enacted both the role of a male photographer and that of his beloved. Using famous photographs taken by photographers of their wives as inspiration, she imagined herself into the intimate unspoken dialogue of artist and model. In the Haitian series, she worked more as a recorder than actor, yielding the conception of the photograph to the sitters and their ideas of how they wanted to present themselves. Pictured on their own terms, these individuals reveal none of the first world's conventional views or expectations of Haitian citizenry. They are elegant and self-assured. Even after the 2010 earthquake devastated the Grand Rue and they became refugees in one of the Port-au-Prince's many tent cities, Heyman's sitters continued to present themselves to the camera with poise and assurance. When she returned to continue the project in March 2010, Heyman resisted visually editorializing the plight of those she photographed. In effect, the major apparent difference between the pre- and post-earthquake photographs is the backdrop. In addition, Heyman extended her conceptual approach to photographs of American military service men and women stationed in Haiti after the quake. These images are the first in a projected series of portraits she envisions as including many individuals involved in Haitian reconstruction. Heyman's pictures come into focus against a long history of anthropological and ethnographic photographs, in which sitters were not only posed to exemplify the photographer's point of view, but also inexperienced with the settings in which the photographs would ultimately be assessed. The cumulative historical effect of these images, and the wealth of late twentieth century critiques analyzing their use in the justification of inequality, have obligated contemporary photographers to rethink their camera strategies. Heyman's approach is reminiscent of anthropologist Clifford Geertz's notion of local knowledge; like him, she recognizes and makes room for the complex concepts embedded in the outward attitudes and postures that people use to communicate. It is knowingly ironic that title of the series, *Pa Bouje Ankò: Don't Move Again*, refers not only to the Haitians' wish that there be no more earthquakes, but also to their persistent sense of strength and resistance. Mary Warner Marien Mary Warner Marien is a critic and photographic historian. The third edition of her book, *Photography: A Cultural History* was published earlier this year. Light Work awards three grants each year to photographers who reside in Central New York. The 39th annual Light Work Grants in Photography were awarded to Laura Heyman, Jared Landberg, and Janice Levy. This program is a part of Light Work's ongoing effort to provide support and encouragement to artists working in photography. Established in 1975, it is one of the longest-running photography fellowship programs in the country and has supported more than 110 artists. Each recipient receives a \$2,000 award and has their work exhibited at Light Work. With the help of this regional grant, many artists have been able to continue long-term projects, purchase equipment, frame photographs for exhibitions, promote their work, collaborate with others, or otherwise continue their artistic goals. The judges for this year were Christopher Gianunzio (assistant director, Philadelphia Photo Arts Center), Akemi Hiatt (independent curator), and Chuck Mobley (director, SF Camerawork). Laura Heyman submitted a group of photographs from her ongoing series *Pa Bouje Ankò: Don't Move Again*. Interested in longstanding questions around photographic representation, Heyman uses the formal studio portrait to explore embedded hierarchies between photographers, subjects, and viewers. The project, which began in an outdoor portrait studio in the Grand Rue neighborhood of Port-au-Prince, continues to evolve and now includes several populations in the city tied to and affected by development, aid, politics, and reconstruction efforts. Heyman is an associate professor of photography in the Department of Transmedia at Syracuse University. Her work has been exhibited at the Philadelphia Photographic Arts Center, Philadelphia, PA; Deutsches Polen Institute, Darmstadt, Germany; Senko Studio, Viborg, Denmark; Small A Projects, Portland, OR; United Nations, New York, NY; and National Portrait Gallery, London, UK. She is the recipient of a Silver Eye Fellowship. Her most recent curatorial project, *Who's Afraid of America*, was exhibited at Wonderland Art Space in Copenhagen, Denmark. Jared Landberg is captivated by remnants, abandoned structures, overgrown paths, found ephemera, and expansive views. His site-specific photographic projects capture what is left behind in the wake of progress. Past photographic essays have included a nuclear power plant, mental health asylum, and a government munitions base. Landberg received the grant for his photographs of the community of Cortland, NY, and the hydrofracking controversy. The artist plans to create a book of photographs, archival and found photos, maps, and an assortment of texts. Landberg is a photographer and bookbinder based in Syracuse, NY. He has recently exhibited in the Syracuse area at the Everson Museum's *Fit to be Bound* exhibition as well as various local galleries. With a large format camera, natural light and flash, using both black-and-white and color film, he photographs the landscape of Central New York. Through images of place, he historically preserves and

documents personal and collective narratives of society. Janice Levy submitted a series of photographs taken in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. While living in Riyadh for ten months the artist taught photography at the largest women's university in the world, Princess Nora bint Abdulrahman University. Saudi Arabia invests in the illusion of wealth and prosperity, but Levy's photographs show something entirely different. Levy says, "In addition to revealing the neglect of the underclass, the photographs reflect my own reaction to living in a nation where isolation causes xenophobia, adherence to Sharia law justifies oppression of women, and an absolute monarchy hides its dictatorial power behind a veneer of paternalism." Levy is a professor of photography in the Department of Media Arts, Sciences and Studies, in the Roy H. Park School of Communications at Ithaca College, Ithaca, NY. She has been a finalist and semi-finalist in the Honickman First Book Award competition, received a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship, and was awarded the prestigious three-year National Kellogg Fellowship Award for Leadership. Publications include "What I See, Who I Am," a feature article about disabled students exploring their world through photography, with the help of photography students at Princess Nora University. Recent exhibitions include Les Yeaux du Monde, Charlottesville, VA; Gallery Notre Dame, Dijon, France; Les Amis du 7, Dijon, France. She was interviewed by NPR's Robin Young for Here and Now where she spoke about her experiences teaching and living in Saudi Arabia. JP Gardner Exhibitions Coordinator Light Work