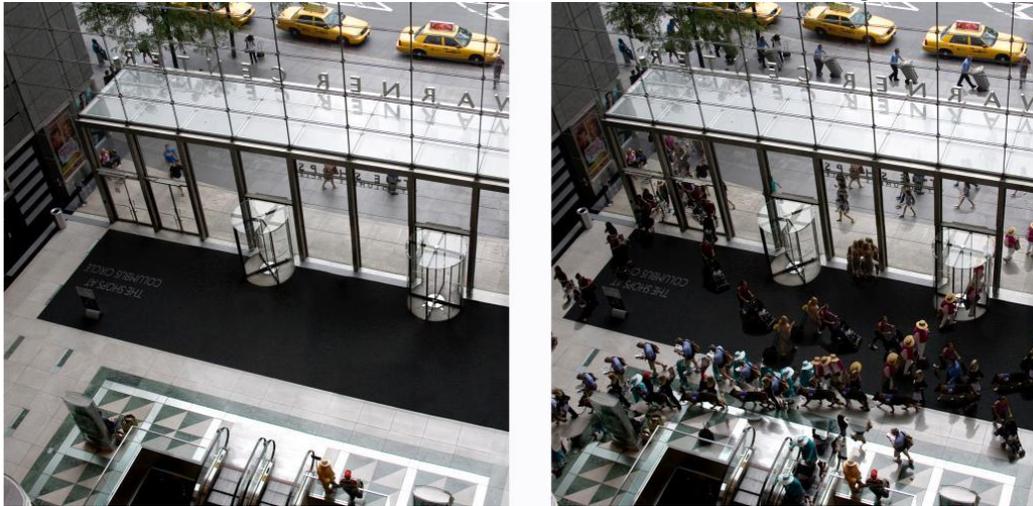


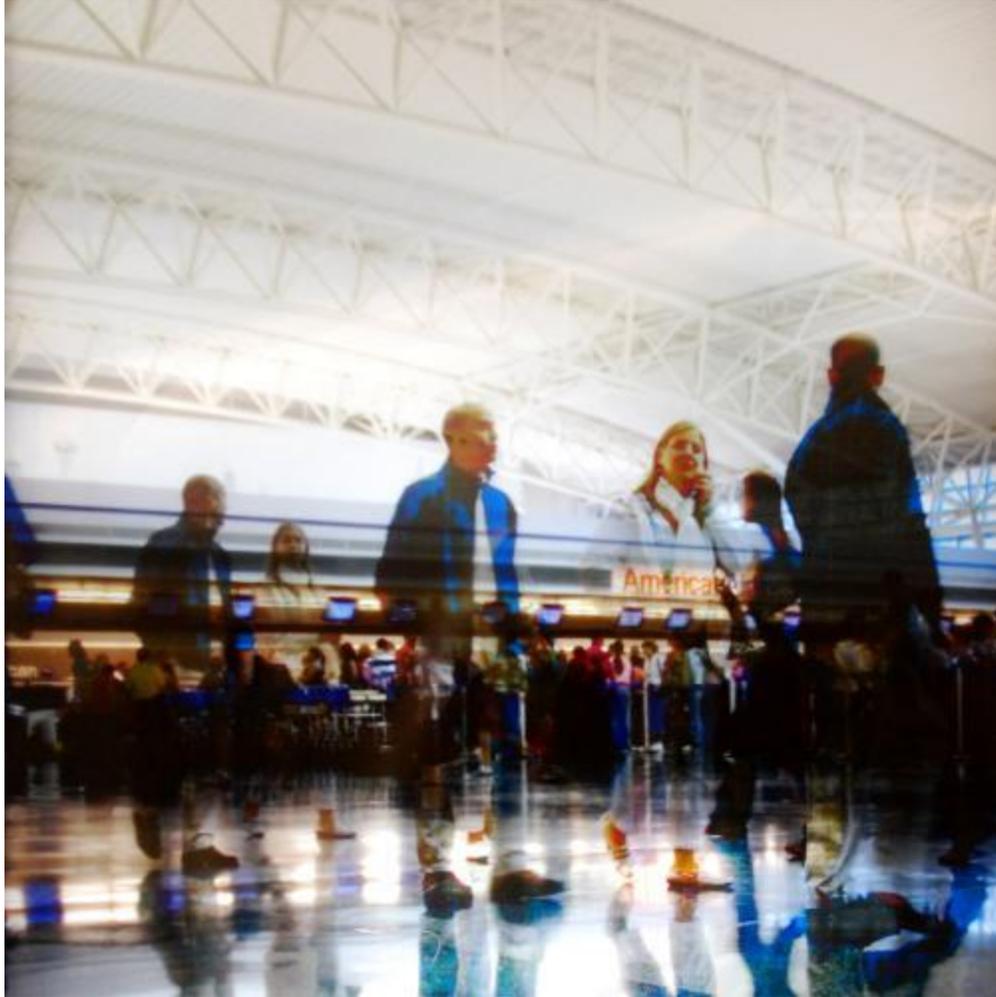
## FROM STILL TO MOVING: AN ALMOST INDISTINGUISHABLE MOMENT

**Cynthia Lawson Jaramillo**

I challenge the traditional definitions of photography and film through work that is situated in that very short moment when still images become moving and therefore not definable as just one or the other.

Furthermore, I argue that in this fast-paced era in which 24 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube each minute, that in-between moment has become almost indistinguishable.





*Fig 1.-3. Details from The Shops, 96 Seconds #1 and The Shops, 96 Seconds #36, 2010, Cynthia Lawson Jaramillo, Archival digital prints, 19in x 13in each.*

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## INTRODUCTION

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Analyses on film and photography often characterize the photograph as a still image and film as a sequence of images. [1] I challenge these notions through work that is situated in that very short moment when still images become moving and therefore not definable as just one or the other.

In this paper I specifically discuss the principal techniques I incorporate into my image-based works, such as digital and physical layering, which push each piece as far away from the “still image” as possible. I question our capacity to perceive slow changes and multiple temporalities through works that explore both. Furthermore, I argue that in this fast-paced era in which 24 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube each minute, we have lost our ability to slow down and perceive small changes.

The work of contemporary artists such as Bill Viola, David Hockney, and Hiroshi Sugimoto offer a framework for my own artworks which I describe as photographic works in motion, which exist more as time-

based media that incorporate photography as a vehicle for the production of images, and less as photographs that pause time.

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## CHALLENGING TIME AND SPACE

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“Time has begun to be experienced as something infinitely elastic, in which the relationship between past, present, and future becomes open to human intervention. Similarly, space is no longer a static field that we traverse over time, but has become a medium to be dismantled and reassembled at will.” [2] The photography work that is here described challenges time and space, and often uses the camera as a tool to create process-intensive work that goes beyond a static framed print mounted on a wall. Specifically, as a time-based artist, I work with photography as a tool (and not necessarily a medium) to create works that push the traditional boundaries of space and time with still images questioning how “still” they actually are. Typically, photography that moves beyond the pausing of time, and instead extends or challenges it is then considered film. Sequences of images are described through the lens of film (and not photography) and are critiqued in that light. Furthermore, seminal works like Chris Marker’s “La Jetée” do not neatly fit into either photography or film. [3]

David Hockney’s photographic collages and composite polaroids from the early 80s were a testing ground for new possibilities in photography and for a lot of the approaches in the era of digital technologies (both in cameras and in software.) His 1983 work “Photographing Annie Leibovitz While She Photographs Me” is both exemplary of this experimentation as well as a criticism on “classic” photographs. The far right side of Hockney’s composition has a small square image that is the photo Leibovitz took of him. This juxtaposition illustrates Hockney’s argument that a “single-eyed photograph” (as he describes Leibovitz’s image) would never have the quality of a painting in “that you can go on and on looking at these pictures.” [4]

Hiroshi Sugimoto’s “Theatres” are a series of images produced by maintaining a long exposure while photographing a theatre during a film screening. The light from the film’s frames light up the space, and the screen is white. This series “runs counter to prevailing conceptions of photography’s relationship to instantaneity and to the photographic image as the record of a brief and transitory moment in time. Here the photograph is, in a literal way, the embodiment of temporal duration – in a manner that has rarely been so since the infancy of the medium – and equally it would seem to demand of the viewer a form of attention that also takes time.” [5] Are works like this one truly still or do they have an extended duration equal to the film captured?

Finally, Bill Viola’s “The Quintet of the Astonished” from his series “The Passions” is the perfect work to refer to the power of the still frame (in his case of slow motion video) as well as an expanded sense of time. Viola invites viewers to slow down their internal momentum, to pause and take the time to view his work that also takes time, since each video in this series has been slowed down – both a reference to painting from which the works are inspired as well as a refreshing critique of our moving image-saturated lives.

I have developed two techniques to challenge the before mentioned traditional notions of photography and to position it as a time-based medium (in which images are in between still and moving).

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## LIGHT BOXES

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My works presented through light boxes are spaces captured over time through physically layered and transparent still images. I challenge the notion that “the photograph is thought to extract a moment from the flux of time, to cut out a slice of a time-space continuum and thus to have no duration of its own – in a sense a photography only lasts as long as we are looking at it.” [6] Furthermore, the work challenges the classic notions that in photography one experiences equilibrium of our physical world’s “rhythm.” [7] Instead, each layer may be a time-slice, yet the superposition of images onto one another breaks the neat slicing, and the viewer finds himself or herself in constant motion – moving from one layer to the next as they experience one space over time.

Sequences of images that could be collaged digitally to create one print are instead presented as physically collaged, almost sculptural, backlit objects. A photo shoot (in which I take several photos, spaced at even intervals, from one same location although without a tripod) then translates into several prints on transparent film. I document spaces over time and present these images layered one on top of the other (the most recent in time closest to the front), and with a sheet of acrylic in between. This materiality gives the work a physical depth representing its temporal depth (the longer the total time captured, the thicker the work.) The last (or oldest in time) image is printed on a milky translucent film that allows the passing of light without revealing the light source behind the images.

These works can be described as cubist in that they contain “what was really occurring when Cubists broke up an image into multiple perspectives, thereby presenting, at one moment, a set of views that would normally be viewed successively over a period of time.” [8] More importantly, it is in the relationship between the images (on various layers) that time is produced. [9]

This technique was developed after visiting Tokyo and photographing the rush hour chaos in the large train station Shinagawa. Upon reviewing my images (and frustrated that I did not have a video camera with me) I wanted to be able to represent this experienced motion through the still images and I first superimposed them digitally.

My practice intends to slow viewers’ sense of time by protagonizing the everyday as defined by transient space and make them aware of their own quotidianity. It is my hope that the viewer will reflect on their own existence, and become hyper aware of the small moments from which we now quickly disconnect: the stranger passing by carrying groceries, the voicemail awaiting to be heard, commuters rushing to catch the train. The places captured (airports, train stations, subway platforms, entryways) are spaces which exist solely as transitional spaces – they have no function other than to facilitate the flow of people from one point to another, and it is this flow that heightens the everyday quality of the works.

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## HIDDEN CHOREOGRAPHIES

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In “Hidden Choreographies” (“Pompidou from Above, 6 ½ Seconds” and most recently, “The Shops, 96 Seconds”) I address the concepts of time and space in a single location. In multiple photographs, the repeated (and extracted) presence of figures in each frame demonstrates that these apparently different moments actually happened in the same place and at the same time. The chaos and complexity that one would not necessarily witness when viewing a transient public space, in which nothing seemingly happens, emerges through in the relationship between the images. Although shot in half-second intervals, viewers perceive the resulting piece through the expansion of time in transient public space. As de-

scribed by Michel De Certeau, "The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statements uttered." [10] The urban landscape is continually in motion (via its pedestrians) and it is this motion that this work documents.

The second body of work in this project is the 36 prints from "The Shops, 96 Seconds #1-36". These works are digitally collaged based on 42 original photographs taken in the span of 96 seconds from inside the Time Warner Center in New York City's Columbus Circle looking down on one of its entrances. The repeated (and extracted) presence of some figures in multiple photographs connects the thirty six prints as a series and demonstrates that these apparently different moments actually happened in the same place and at the same time. This technique has been described as "collapsing the law of physics on the gallery wall" [11] and it is precisely the uncertainty of what is real (and possible in our spatiotemporal frameworks) and what is not that I aim to question.

In this series I am interested in photography as a way to capture moments and, through their representation(s), extend their time. The thirty-six images of the series are digital recreations. Each of forty-two original photographs was studied, from which "actors" like the woman with the seeing-eye dog were identified and digitally removed. Then, a base image was selected and used as a "stage." Positioning the "actors" into several of their moments then composed each image. Each person appears where they were at some point during the photo shoot, but there are clearly overlapping moments. The viewer of the work is challenged to understand if people were digitally placed or repeated, or even if it was a staged documented performance. The resulting thirty-six images are the first of over a billion combinations of these "hidden choreographies" and it is this spatiotemporal transformation that shifts the series from a photo shoot about the everyday to something worth observing, remembering, and capturing. The collaging is what adds time to each print, instead of presenting the moments as "fixed, unmoving events that is the still photograph." [12]

An important process in this work is that these moments are actually not choreographed but found. This particular series was documented because of my interest in the framing devices I saw through the lens (the revolving doors as interfaces between the inside and outside.) Only once the images were in the computer did I select the protagonists of the work and found those moments that make the work interesting. The series is organized very specifically – first the empty stage, then a base stage common to all following images (with some people static), followed by the introduction of each actor – the woman with the straw hat, the janitor pushing a trash bin, the woman with a shopping cart, the tourist reading his guide, etc. Once all actors are introduced, they are combined in a variety of ways creating overlaps of time and space that didn't actually take place, but could have, such as the power mom with the stroller bumping into the blind woman with the seeing-eye dog.

In both "Hidden Choreographies" series, viewers have expressed perceiving contrasting concepts. On the one hand there are those who feel that the repetition of the people walking through emphasizes the quotidian in their actions, and the meaningless of each. Others feel that the repetition, and the extraction of select pedestrians as "actors" gives them a certain protagonism therefore heightening the importance of their everyday activity (walking home, going grocery shopping, meeting up with a friend.) I have been asked if the work is based on a particular piece of film or theatre. Although it is not, I do see a connection with Francois Truffaut's "Day for Night" in its opening scene, in which he is directing a movie and staging an ordinary city scene (pedestrians on a street walking, cars driving). You're seeing a film within a film and are very aware of the staging of pedestrians, cars, and their movements & interactions in public space. The other film to which I see a reference is Jacques Tati's "Play Time" in that it follows one man (potentially the "Man with the Red Suitcase" from my "Pompidou from Above, 6 Seconds") in

spaces of a city and the choreography of that movement in relationship to the built environment. Of my first series, gallerist Christina Ray has written that it has “no start, no finish, and no story. The artist simply stops time, putting a six second hold on the public and then releasing it to dissolve back into individual realities.” [13]

This kind of work, if presented on a timeline (on video or in Flash, for example) would directly reference cinema (short animations, or even the more recent animated gifs) and even Muybridge’s early photographic experiments. It is of interest, however, to challenge definitions of time-based media. Can a work such as this one, that includes moments from across a timeline, and yet is not presented on one, be considered time-based? And as prints, does it fall under the category of still photography?

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## CONCLUSIONS

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In the culture of interruption in which we live, many people have lost the ability to sit still and lend their time to still and slow-moving images. Younger generations are growing up in front of interfaces in which messages from at least four sources are constantly streaming in and fighting for their attention. As an artist I am committed to promote an internal slowing-down of art viewers’ momentum by creating works that contain a duration which require a similar time commitment from the viewer. Digital and physical collaging have served as my principal techniques to create still works that are in constant motion, and which challenge the traditional expectations of photography as a medium that pauses time. My light boxes and printed series exist in the moment in between moving and still images, and my hope is that that moment regains the spotlight and that viewers may be able to be still and really see what is in front of them, one frame at a time.

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