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1 ♦ Installing the Photography Galleries — The Met’s photograph exhibition galleries are full! Two exhibitions from the Department of Photographs, *Cruel Radiance: Photography, 1940s–1960s* and *Alter Egos | Projected Selves*, opened together on November 22, in time to be enjoyed by the public over the Thanksgiving holiday. In addition, numerous photographs, bound volumes, and time-based media artworks are included in the special exhibitions *Surrealism Beyond Borders* (open until January 30, 2022) and in the newly opened *Before We Could Fly: An Afrofuturist Period Room*. We hope to welcome many of you to the galleries this holiday season and through early spring to see these remarkable installations in person. Each of these displays contains artworks that presented the conservators in the Department of Photograph Conservation with a distinct set of challenges and opportunities based on their non-traditional formats and variable display possibilities. We invite you to read on as the conservators share details about a few of these specific works of art that are now on view.

2 ♦ Variable Display Decisions — Whether an artwork is a photograph, a sculpture, or a video, conservators work with curators, exhibition designers, media and installation staff, mount makers, and the artists themselves to decide how an artwork will be displayed to the public. A matted photograph requires decisions about mat color, format, and frame, but what

happens when displayed artworks require decisions that go beyond these more traditional considerations? In the current exhibition *Alter Egos | Projected Selves*, a video by Grace Ndiritu and a sculpture created by Justine Cooper required complex decision-making and cross-departmental collaboration in their installation.

The Nightingale is a single-channel video by Grace Ndiritu created in 2003. In this piece, as described by curator Stephen Pinson, the artist “used a simple piece of fabric in a trance-like video performance to expose superficial stereotypes and cultural misperceptions between East and West . . . Ndiritu manipulates the textile through a rapid-fire succession of references: blindfold, hijab, headscarf, burka, veil, bandanna, turban, noose, gag.” The video also features the song “Allah Addu Jam” by Baaba Maal. *The Nightingale* has a running time of approximately seven minutes and plays continuously on a loop.

As with much video art, the way *The Nightingale* is displayed varies from exhibition to exhibition (see illustrations, p. 2). Ndiritu is amenable to using different types and sizes of equipment to show the video depending on the context. Since 2003, the artwork has been on view at several venues, including The Met—as a large-scale video projection, on a flatscreen



plasma television, and on a cathode ray tube (CRT) television. Early in the planning of *Alter Egos | Projected Selves*, staff from conservation, curatorial, exhibition design, and media and installation began conversations about how to display the piece within this new exhibition. The group explored several equipment options, including CRT televisions and a flatscreen monitor that could feature the video in its original 4:3 aspect ratio. Thinking about how much of the equipment would be visible to visitors, they also considered options of wall mounting or pedestal mounting as well as internal and external speakers.

The Met acquired *The Nightingale* in 2009 before it had hired a conservator dedicated to time-based media. As a result, a condition report had not been written for the multiple DVDs and the exhibition video file provided by the artist. Conservation needed to recommend which exhibition version to use for *Alter Egos | Projected Selves*, so Jonathan Farbowitz, Associate Conservator of Time-Based Media, worked with former Adrienne Arsht Museum Seminar (MuSe) Summer Intern Kayla Henry-Griffin to analyze and compare the video components in The Met's collection. They discovered that files created from the exhibition DVDs presented occasional stuttering of the image and audio and ultimately decided that the most recent exhibition file, provided in 2014, was the preferred option for exhibition.

The monitor and BrightSign media player were installed in the gallery by the media and installation team. With the video and audio of the artwork playing properly, final adjustments were

made to the monitor brightness, image size, and volume level of the audio, with final approval by Curator Stephen Pinson and Research Assistant Virginia McBride. All the specific equipment used and the decision-making for installing this artwork will be documented in an iteration report written by Jonathan. This documentation will live with the artwork in perpetuity so that future conservators and curators can use the 2021 iteration of *The Nightingale* as a reference point, understanding not only the decisions that were made, but the reasoning behind them, to guide future installations of this artwork.

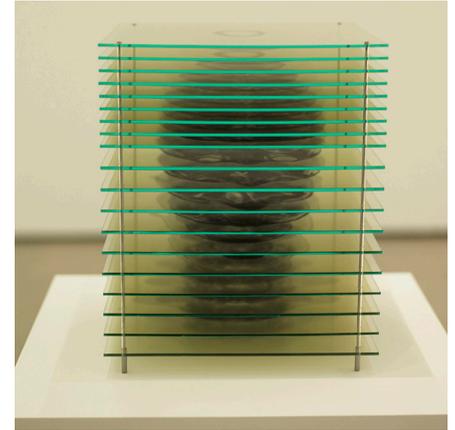
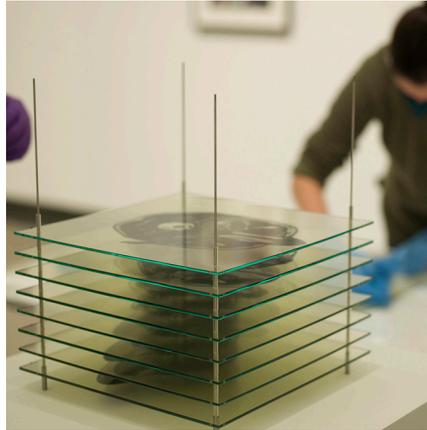
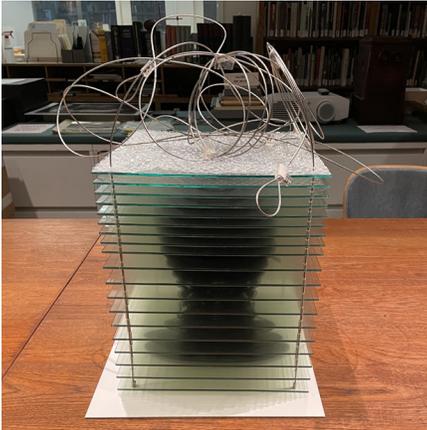
Justine Cooper's *Trap – self portrait* is intended to be seen from different angles and invites the viewer to move around the artwork to discover its deconstructed three-dimensional shape from various viewpoints. The artwork consists of nineteen plexiglass sheets arranged one on top of the other with spacing between each layer that decreases towards the top (see illustrations, p. 3). The bottom of each layer has a clear print-out of a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan of the artist's head adhered to it. When properly spaced, the layers combine to create a three-dimensional representation of the artist. To achieve this, Cooper carefully placed small plastic spacers in between the layers and threaded four stainless-steel cords through holes in the corners of the layers and spacers, providing stability and holding all the pieces together. The artwork was intended to hang from the ceiling from the four steel cords. This structure presented a challenge for the team of curators, conservators, designers, and mount makers planning the object's first installation at The Met. The intent

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Images: ♦ **Left:** *The Nightingale* as displayed on a mounted plasma television in the 2009 Met exhibition *The Essential Art of African Textiles: Design Without End*. Credit: Anna Kellen ♦ **Center:** *The Nightingale* as displayed on a cathode ray tube television on a pedestal in the 2014 Met exhibition *Now You See It: Photography and Concealment*. Credit: Paul Lachenaier ♦ **Right:** *The Nightingale* as displayed in *Alter Egos | Projected Selves* currently on view at The Met. The work is shown on a flatscreen monitor with a 4:3 aspect ratio between two other artworks. Credit: Jonathan Farbowitz



to hang the artwork from the ceiling had to be rethought with the roughly 20-foot ceilings in the Joyce and Robert Menschel Hall for Modern Photography. If suspended to hang at eye level as intended, the lightweight artwork would be prone to swinging with even the lightest of breezes, potentially causing harm to itself as well as the viewers. While assessing the object's condition, Assistant Conservator Diana Díaz Cañas realized that none of the spacing and hanging elements are permanently attached to each other. Only the stainless-steel cords maintain the object's unity, evoking the spinal cord in the human body, providing support and distancing, but remaining flexible.

Communication with the artist clarified two important points. First, it is ideal to present the object without visual obstacles and preferably without stanchions, and second, the stainless-steel cords are not integral to the artwork and may be replaced with another material that keeps the components in the proper configuration.

After discussions with objects conservator Kendra Roth, conservation preparator Matthew Cumbie, and curator Stephen Pinson, it was decided that four thin stainless-steel rods would replace the cords, maintaining the same structure but adding stability to the object. Instead of hanging the artwork, it is now displayed in *Alter Egos | Projected Selves* on a weighted pedestal, facilitating the artist's preferred presentation without using physical barriers. This solution provided the safest option for this exhibition while fulfilling the artist's vision of her work.

3 ♦ Researching Printing Techniques — A significant aspect of conservation work involves making decisions about how to safely display artworks. There are rarely concrete answers in these scenarios, so the conservator must learn as much as possible about the characteristics of the various materials comprising the artwork: how do they age, how do they interact with each other, and what are their vulnerabilities during exhibition? Years of caring for and exhibiting common types of photographs, like albumen and gelatin silver prints, have contributed to a vast body of knowledge about their behavior based on both research and experience across the field of photograph conservation. When faced with a new type of artwork, there is no experience or research to consult, making it difficult to give an informed recommendation for safe display.

When the Department of Photographs acquired *Afropunk Odalisque*, by Lyle Ashton Harris earlier in 2021, Met photograph conservators realized that they knew very little about the printing process used to make it. Often used for commercial signs and billboards, dye sublimation on aluminum is touted as incredibly stable with light exposure and exterior weather conditions. While these attributes sound promising, conservators are concerned with longevity over a much longer period of time, so test samples were acquired from the same printer, Griffin Editions, and conservators Diana Díaz Cañas and Katie Sanderson carried out physical and light-exposure tests. While these provided some valuable preliminary information, there was still a lack of real-world observations and experience.

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Images: ♦ **Left:** *Trap - self portrait* during examination to determine display parameters. Credit: Stephen Pinson
♦ **Center:** *Trap - self portrait* shown partially installed with the plexiglass sheets held in place by the newly constructed stainless-steel rods. Credit: Aleya Lehmann ♦ **Right:** *Trap - self portrait*, on its pedestal, installation complete. Credit: Aleya Lehmann

During preparations for *Before Yesterday We Could Fly: An Afrofuturist Period Room*, which opened to the public in November 2021, Diana Díaz Cañas learned that the curators hoped to include two newly acquired artworks by Tourmaline, *Morning Cloak* and *Summer Azure*—both dye sublimation on aluminum printed by Griffin Editions. Originally scheduled to run for two years, the installation is about eight times longer than a typical photography exhibition. Even with some positive early tests on samples, there was concern that this would be too much light exposure for these works, so in addition to the collection prints, exhibition copies were acquired just for this period of display and will be destroyed after deinstallation. Though not employed frequently at The Met, exhibition copies can be a useful way to present an installation according to an artist's or curator's vision if the display parameters fall too far outside of conservation recommendations. The decision to use exhibition copies to represent the Tourmaline photographs during this installation ensures that the newly acquired artworks will not be over-exposed in their first years

at The Met, and it provides a valuable opportunity to study these prints during and after a lengthy display period.

Katie Sanderson conducted color measurements using a spectrophotometer on the collection prints and exhibition copies when they arrived at the Museum; they will be measured again after the first year of exhibition and during the subsequent display period, and then again after they come down from view. The comparison of the displayed prints against those kept in storage, which will also be measured, will provide quantifiable data indicating how this relatively new printing process behaves during exhibition. Samples of the destroyed exhibition copies can then be tested in the lab to deepen our knowledge even further. This research will help to inform future exhibition practices for dye sublimation prints on aluminum at The Met as well as other institutions worldwide. We look forward to sharing our findings in the future!



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Images: ♦ **Left:** An installation view of *Before Yesterday We Could Fly: An Afrofuturist Period Room*, featuring two exhibition copies by Tourmaline. ♦ **Right, above:** Tourmaline (American, b. 1983), *Summer Azure*, 2020. Dye sublimation print, 30 1/2 × 30 in. Purchase, Lila Acheson Wallace Gift, 2021 (TR.224.1.2021). ♦ **Right, below:** Tourmaline (American, b. 1983), *Morning Cloak*, 2020. Dye sublimation print, 30 1/2 × 30 in. Purchase, Lila Acheson Wallace Gift, 2021 (TR.224.2.2021).

4 ♦ **Ways of Giving: Esther and Joe Siegel** — “Truly, I’m fascinated by everything I see!” remarked Esther Siegel from her living room, where she and Joe, her husband of 69 years, graciously answered questions posed to them last week by Katie Sanderson and Georgia Southworth, both Associate Conservators in the Department of Photograph Conservation. This enthusiasm was palpable everywhere in their home. They spoke about their lives, their love of New York and the arts, and their ongoing involvement with our department. Joe, a prolific artist and retired finance professional, and Esther, a practicing psychotherapist, are both lifelong residents of New York City. They grew up during the Great Depression, Esther on the Lower East Side of Manhattan and Joe in the Bronx. They met at City College of New York and went on to earn advanced degrees and to build long and successful careers in the city.

The Siegels are active members and supporters of many arts institutions in New York City, including The Met. Determined to give back to the city and the arts, they established a charitable trust, allowing them to share the financial rewards of their success. Building a relationship over several years with the Department of Photograph Conservation led to the Siegels also establishing a bequest to support our work moving forward. Yet, seeing how immediately and catastrophically the Covid-19 crisis levied its toll on their beloved city, they took the inspired decision to release funds early from their bequest to aid the department now. Not only does this early partial disbursement help our efforts during these uncertain times, but the research undertaken with support from these discretionary funds enhances the preservation and care of The Met’s photograph, book, and time-based media collections. It also allows the conservators the opportunity to share their scholarship across the conservation community and beyond. The sooner best preservation practices are implemented in responsible art collection stewardship, the more long-term benefit they provide. The generous release of a portion of the funds has the potential to improve the care of photography into the future for audiences that extend beyond in-person visitors at the Museum.

During our delightful interview, Joe modestly and repeatedly mentioned how ‘lucky’ he and Esther feel, how the opportunities they’ve had and capitalized upon allow them to give back to the city and the arts and the people they love. “I’d rather donate money than spend it taking taxis,” said Esther. Their abundant love of New York was evident, from Esther’s





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Image: ♦ Esther and Joe Siegel, clearly enjoying a return to The Met on the very first day the Museum reopened to the public on August 29, 2020. Credit: Aleya Lehmann

descriptions of her days as a girl working in a candy factory and leading her friends on escapades that kept them outside, free and independent, to the New York-centric subject matter of Joe's art, to their philanthropy and engagement with cultural institutions across the city.

From a young age, Joe made photographs, working from the feeling that "photography is the capture of memory." He added sculpture, and later, paintings made after his photography, that for decades has documented the people, architecture, and energy of New York. He explained that he would return home from work earlier than Esther and would paint through the early evenings, over time producing a large corpus of art. He no longer actively exhibits his artwork. The collection remains large enough to populate storage spaces in their house in Connecticut, a facility in Westchester County, and a very organized but thoroughly packed storage unit down the hall from their apartment! Joe continues to paint in his studio space in their New York residence. Artwork adorns their home as clear evidence of the thread that weaves through the cloth of their lives. Their collection includes photographs, sculptures, colorful paintings made by their daughter, and countless pieces acquired during their travels together. Collecting art has been a multi-decade act of artistic appreciation, not financial appreciation, explained Joe, "We've always just collected what we love." And then, eloquently summing up the interview, he added, "we're really serious New Yorkers, and we were interested in preserving the character of New York."

We celebrate Esther and Joe, our dear friends, for their contagious enthusiasm and unwavering support. Because of them, each and every member of our department also feels lucky.



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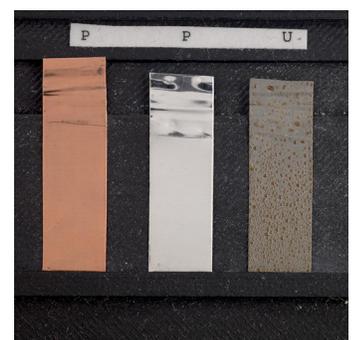
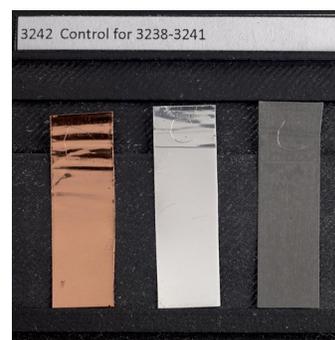
Image: ♦ Esther Siegel and a favorite sculpture that she and her husband Joe acquired on one of their many trips together. Credit: Georgia Southworth



5 ♦ Update from the Fellows — Annette de la Renta Fellow Cat Stephens and Andrew W. Mellon Conservation Fellow Rachel Tabet joined us in September and, as junior fellows, have the liberty to work on several concurrent projects without the need to spend 50% of their time on specialized research as our senior fellows do. Some of these activities take place within our lab, and others are carried out in collaboration with departments across the Museum. Their work includes learning new preventive conservation and collections care practices, advancing conservation treatment skills, and constructing appropriate storage housings and protective enclosures for complex photo-based artworks. In addition, they assist the staff conservators in many day-to-day responsibilities such as exhibition preparation and installation, light level monitoring in the galleries, and climate monitoring in exhibition and storage spaces.

Right out of the gate on their first day onsite in the Museum, Cat and Rachel, together with Veronica Diaz Mendez, visiting Photograph and Preventive Conservation Fellow from the National Gallery of Art, had the opportunity to join Alayna Bone, Research Assistant in the Department of Scientific Research to learn how to perform and analyze the results of the [Oddy Test](#) (see illustrations above). This test is one tool employed to determine whether a material, such as cloth intended for use in an exhibition vitrine or packing foam for traveling artworks, could release potentially damaging gases. Materials that fail the Oddy Test should not be employed near or in contact with artworks and are not used in exhibition or storage environments by The Met.

Cat and Rachel learned that the test is finicky and must be performed with great precision and attention to detail. A carefully weighed amount of the material in question is placed in a glass jar with some water and three metal coupons made of lead, silver, and copper. The jars are left in a specialized oven for 28 days at 60 degrees Celsius, and upon removal, the coupons are examined for any sign of corrosion that would indicate some volatile compounds had escaped from the material and had a negative impact on the samples. Alayna had orchestrated the two-day session, so the fellows put their own tests in on Day One and were able to take out some tests Alayna had put in the ovens 28 days earlier, à la Julia Child. A true mentor, Alayna had pre-tested known examples of poor quality and good quality materials so the fellows could readily appreciate the contrasting results. After 28 days, their own samples were removed (see illustrations below), and they received high marks for this first effort!



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Images: ♦ **Left:** Annette de la Renta Fellow Cat Stephens, Andrew W. Mellon Conservation Fellow Rachel Tabet, and visiting Photograph and Preventive Conservation Fellow from the National Gallery of Art, Veronica Diaz Mendez, learning to administer the Oddy Test with Research Assistant Alayna Bone in the Department of Scientific Research. ♦ **Center:** Preparing test coupons in lead, silver, and copper, for the Oddy Test. ♦ **Right:** Rachel Tabet preparing materials for testing. ♦ **Below:** Two details showing the "control" coupons on the left which are aged without any materials present, and the coupons on the right with the lead, far right, having been affected by the materials being tested. Credits: Cat Stephens



Locations and NEW Evening Hours!

The Met Fifth Avenue

Sunday–Tuesday and Thursday: 10 am–5 pm
Friday and Saturday: 10 am–9 pm
Closed Wednesday

The Met Cloisters

Thursday–Tuesday: 10 am–4:30 pm
Closed Wednesday

Current Exhibitions

Surrealism Beyond Borders

October 11, 2021 through January 30, 2022

Before Yesterday We Could Fly: An Afrofuturist Period Room

Ongoing

Cruel Radiance: Photography, 1940s–1960s

November 22, 2021 through May 1, 2022

Alter Egos | Projected Selves

November 22, 2021 through May 1, 2022

Inspiring Walt Disney: The Animation of French Decorative Arts

December 10, 2021 through March 6, 2022

Upcoming Exhibitions

Charles Ray: Figure Ground

January 31 through June 5, 2022

All of the current and upcoming exhibitions listed are on view at The Met Fifth Avenue.

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Image: ♦ Don McCullin (British, b. 1935), *Sheep Going to Slaughter, Early Morning, Near the Caledonian Road, London, 1965*. Gelatin silver print, approx. 9 × 13 3/4 in. Promised Gift of Deborah and Jonathan Klein (SL.23.2021.110). ♦ The most acclaimed British photojournalist of the twentieth century, McCullin established his reputation in the 1960s with his stunning combat photographs of the war in Vietnam. At the start of his now seventy-year career in photography, however, he was also a brilliant documentarian of the streets of London. Here, a surprising study of a modern-day urban shepherd with his sheep on their way to slaughter at the Caledonian Market in London's Borough of Islington. Opened in June 1855 by Prince Albert, the slaughterhouse survived until just after McCullin made his photograph; in 1967 it was redeveloped by the city into the Market Estate, a public housing development of 271 flats and maisonettes. — *Jeff Rosenheim* ♦ On view through May 1, 2022 in *Cruel Radiance: Photography 1940s–1960s*.



Support

To learn more about how you can become involved and support this critical area at The Met, please contact:

Jason Herrick
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Bulletin No. 24 December 2021

Editors: Nora W. Kennedy
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With steadfast commitment and support from our friends, like Esther and Joe Siegel, The Met's Department of Photograph Conservation continues to thrive and be a crucial resource for the preservation of works of art, as well as a vibrant center for research.

Acknowledgements

Surrealism Beyond Borders is made possible by the Barrie A. and Deedee Wigmore Foundation. Additional support is provided by the Placido Arango Fund, the Gail and Parker Gilbert Fund, Alice Cary Brown and W.L. Lyons Brown, the John Pritzker Family Fund, and The International Council of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. This exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities. It is organized by The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Tate Modern. ♦ The catalogue is made possible by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Doris Duke Fund for Publications.

Cruel Radiance: Photography, 1940s–1960s is made possible by The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation, Inc. ♦ The show focuses on recent and promised gifts in celebration of The Met's 150th anniversary in 2020, including suites of acquisitions by Helen Levitt, Robert Frank, Roy DeCarava, Mario De Biasi, Diane Arbus, and Aaron Rose, among others.

Alter Egos | Projected Selves is made possible by Joyce Frank Menschel. ♦ The exhibition presents a selection of works that demonstrate how artists, especially in recent decades, employ themselves as photographic subjects in order to experiment with identity, invent or disrupt narratives, and intervene in the medium itself.

Before Yesterday We Could Fly: An Afrofuturist Period Room is made possible by the Hobson/Lucas Family Foundation and the Director's Fund. Additional support is provided by Art Mentor Foundation Lucerne and the Terra Foundation for American Art. ♦ The Met's quarterly *Bulletin* program is supported in part by the Lila Acheson Wallace Fund for The Metropolitan Museum of Art, established by the cofounder of *Reader's Digest*.

Lead corporate sponsorship for *Inspiring Walt Disney: The Animation of French Decorative Arts* is provided by Morgan Stanley. Additional support is provided by The Florence Gould Foundation, The Danny Kaye and Sylvia Fine Kaye Foundation/French Heritage Society, and Beatrice Stern. The exhibition is organized by The Metropolitan Museum of Art and The Wallace Collection. ♦ The catalogue is made possible by the Diane W. and James E. Burke Fund. Additional support is provided by Irene Roosevelt Aitken and Marilyn and Lawrence Friedland.

Charles Ray: Figure Ground is made possible by the Barrie A. and Deedee Wigmore Foundation. Additional support is provided by the Jane and Robert Carroll Fund, Angela A. Chao and Jim Breyer, Lisa and Steven Tananbaum, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the Diane W. and James E. Burke Fund, and the Gail and Parker Gilbert Fund. ♦ The catalogue is made possible by Lannan Foundation and The Sachs Charitable Foundation.

Image: ♦ Debbie Grossman (American, b. 1977), *Couple at Squaredance*, 2010. Inkjet print, 14 x 10 1/2 in. Purchase, Charina Foundation Inc. Gift, 2011 (2011.423.3). ♦ Appropriating an image of square-dancing women from the Depression-era photographer Russell Lee, Debbie Grossman makes an infinitesimal change: designating the "dancers" as a "couple" in the work's title, she radically reimagines Pie Town, the small community in New Mexico documented by Lee in 1940. Wordplay is only one of Grossman's worldbuilding strategies; women in the photographs are named and given individual identities and their husbands are delicately, digitally tweaked (stubble reduced, jawlines reshaped) to become women and wives; other men are removed altogether. Grossman, who sympathizes with Lee's mythologizing vision of frontier life, fantasized about locating herself "within those pictures and at that time." She remade Pie Town to mirror this vision of fluid gender roles and redefined family: a self-portrait as imagined community. — *Stephen Pinson* ♦ On view through May 1, 2022 in *Alter Egos | Projected Selves*.