

Ansen Seale: Blood Lines

Sala Diaz

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Consider the frustration of a photographer who yearns to break free of the limits of his chosen medium. While the figure of the body is available to the lens, the life that flows through it seems impenetrable. By its nature, photography remains locked in a two-dimensional realm-or does it? *Blood Lines* documents Ansen Seale's attempt to pry apart photography's traditional perspective and grasp at life's mysteries.

Numbers possess similar mysteries, such as the yet undiscovered pattern of prime numbers. Driven by curiosity and equipped with formidable knowledge of photography, digital technology and computers, Seale played the role of the mad scientist to create some of the work on display at Sala Diaz. The artist invited a nurse over to draw his blood, which he then used as ink to render part of the series *Blood Lines*. Using a centrifuge, Seale harvested his red blood cells and mixed them with acrylic medium to make screen prints.

Seale, of course, must know that the use of blood automatically dramatizes the work, steeping it with references to AIDS, violence and politics. Yet the artist's methodical, controlled application contrasts with messy spills of blood from news footage and gore film-scar bombs, gunshot wounds and the like. The blood/ink in Seale's prints appears as a light, rusty red with a slight sheen. Through careful image selection and a meticulous process, Seale exercises restraint, as if the resultant image actually charts quantifiable scientific results.

Euler's Numbers is a good example of this. Appropriated from the Internet, what appears to be an exquisite forest of strange trees is actually a collection of graphic representations of a naturally occurring logarithm named after Swiss mathematician Leonhard Euler. Looking at the minute blots that compose each tree, I see quirky compositions of faces, strange eyes and mouths-a discovery reminiscent of finding the man in the moon but through a striking, numbers-infused design.

The screen-printing process allows Seale's blood to bleed just slightly out of the image's parameters. The effect counterbalances an initial controlling hand. *Circleman*, a line print from one of Seale's older photographs, shows a man's seated shadow, spot-lit over a chair.



Ansen Seale, *Temporal Form no. 10*, 2006
Digital slitscan photograph
16 x 16 inches

This visual ruse contains fascinating psychological references to the ego-the shadow self on a stage, present yet absent. The piece grounds the infinite, ethereal quality of the mind and soul with the corporeal body.

The e-Pan, a camera Seale invented for his commercial work, spins on a fixed pedestal to shoot panoramic frames of his subjects. For a series of nudes, Seale turned off the rotating motor. In a reversal of the time/space index we are accustomed to in photography ("say cheese"), the photographic subject must move in front of the lens to record anything of visual interest. The artist placed a nude model on a rolling cart, draped in black against a black background, turned her around and pushed her past the clicking lens.

Seale is present in these photographs like a magician, managing to stay absent yet continually present in the physical manipulation of

the subject. Though the prints are in color, they appear black and white. The morphing and stretching of the figure references Surrealism, but Seale links his technical approach to Cubism because of the alternative attempt to document a subject's three dimensions through a two-dimensional medium.

Despite the visual drama of the human body, standout work in the show involved the quiet ambiguity of numbers. Seale created prints that represent, as titled: *e*, the natural number, to 1 million places; The irrational number π , to 100,000 places All primes to 27826,384 mapped in a spiral. Tiny dots that fill the frame of his digital prints appear grey and as remote and mystifying as the stars that speckle the night sky. In this work, Seale gets closest not to solving any of life's mysteries, but to sharing his sense of awe about the universe. It is a credit to his capability and knowledge that he can trot out this arcane information-so often only hidden away in the minds of geniuses and machines-and make it tangible, exposing viewers to its almost unfathomable existence.