

**I'M HERE FOR YOU  
WILL NOLAN**



*You've Clouded My Judgement*, 2015, Inkjet Print, Perspex, 78 x 53 cm

**CACSA  
14 PORTER STREET  
PARKSIDE SA  
OPEN DATES  
4 DEC — 7 FEB  
SUMMER CLOSURE  
18 DEC — 11 JAN**

***I'm Here For You*  
(you are here for me)**  
— Mimi Kelly, 2015

In John Dewey's 1934 book *Art as Experience*, the author argues for an understanding of art where the experience of making is given equal significance to the material outcome<sup>1</sup>. Dewey's emphasis on the creative process does not take away from the value of the art object itself though. Instead, he identifies the importance of the dialectical processes of making/experimenting being brought forth in the object. Through this, he argues that the artist and the viewer are then able to engage in a more critically meaningful dialogue; one that takes into consideration the artist's resolve as part of the work's critical and cultural intent, as well as the material form it takes shape in. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, nearing on a century later, the core message of *Art as Experience* is both under threat – with the rise of an autonomous commodity in a global market, and the ubiquity of digital imagery – but also more deeply understood and

appreciated than ever. In the latest works of Will Nolan, indication of the individual meaningfulness of the experiential process of art making and critique, is writ large. Each image exhibited in *I'm Here For You* while seemingly distinct, in its own way in fact works to demonstrate a particularly detailed questioning, testing and experimenting with the medium of photography and photography as critique. This particular 'satellite' approach consequently, helps each artwork stand alone as its own concise conceptual 'proposal' of sorts, yet also function as a relaxed but cohesive revealing of various facets of the methods, techniques and approaches to photography today. Collectively, *I'm Here For You* also emphasizes the important place and role of the artist in this very process. The following discussions on key artworks from the exhibition therefore, helps provide greater insight into both the exhibition as a whole, as well as the individual technical, conceptual and aesthetic world of each of the specific works discussed.

<sup>1</sup> John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 1934, (Perigee Books: New York, 2005).

*You've Clouded My Judgement* zeros in on the mid section of a naked feminine body. The pose, one hand gently resting on the hip and stomach, drawing the eye to the groin, is reminiscent the classical figural pose in Western art of the Venus Pudica<sup>2</sup>. Both demure and provocative, the fragmented section seems to function as a synecdoche for woman-as-seduction. While clearly sexual, the image is also strangely distant in its synthetic anonymity. Adding to this sensibility, is the fact that the photograph is pixelated – further suggesting it has been taken (from the internet perhaps?), and blown up to the point where this exacting form of voyeurism falls back in on itself – as the image starts to breakdown. The work then, functions to reveal both the paradox of photography in the age of the internet, and its complex ethics. On the one hand, the sheer proliferation of imagery through mass media and new technologies offers an unnerving level of 'ease-of-access' to it. On the other hand however, the more one become absorbed by it – 'projecting' oneself into the constellation-of-pixels that is the digital photograph – the more

the reality of one's distance from it is in fact highlighted – both physically and psychologically. Nolan's layering of orange Perspex over the photograph in the display of the artwork, further plays into the enigma of closeness/distance in relation to photography as a mass-product. Indeed, the 'warming' of the image through the amber-glow of the filter, adds to the erotic tone and allurements of the work. It also is indicative of the ease of image manipulation and 'improvement' through advanced image editing software through to Instagram filters. Intriguingly also, in black and white photography one of the uses of an orange filter is to improve diffusion through haze and fog. The title of this work however, dryly suggests otherwise. Proximity to the image is indeed filtered, clouded and made distant. Nolan's strategic abstracting of the digital image demonstrates the ease of found photography to become re-appropriated – filtered through the imaginary narrative and meaning projected onto it – pointing to the fact that at its core it will forever remain, in and of itself, a digital world of pure simulation.

The photograph *Centrefold* captures a two-page magazine spread depicting a piece of elegantly crumpled white paper, almost bow-like in shape, against a white background. This two-dimensional re-photographing (Nolan's image) of a three-dimensional form (the magazine) presenting a two-dimensional image (the photograph of paper) of a three-dimensional object (the paper – which itself has transformed from a flat surface to a sculptured on) wryly draws attention to the ongoing dynamic that exists in relation to the medium of photography as a two-dimensional rendering of three-dimensional space. It is this wavering between flatness and the illusion of form/depth nevertheless, which in fact imbues the work with a curious level of tension. In Christian Metz writing on photography, he notes that one of the differences between (still) photography and moving image is that the size of the *lexis* – the 'socialized unit of reading, of reception' – of photography, is greater than that of moving image<sup>3</sup>. To quote Metz: 'the photographic *lexis* has no fixed duration (= temporal size): it depends, rather, on the spectator... whereas the timing of the cinematic *lexis* is determined in advance by the filmmaker.'<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the ability to linger on the photograph for an undefined, limitless amount of time, to

interact with it in a more intimate way, in Metz's terms means that photography lends itself particularly to the ability to be fetishistically engaged with. *Centrefold* therefore, sits within an artistic lineage of engagement with the sculptural qualities of objects, and the desire to render truthfully its form, but also to amplify its objective verisimilitude – to draw attention to nuance and detail, bring greater depth and weight and infuse the photographic space with gravitas – from Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre's photographs of marble statues and plaster casts in the early to mid nineteenth-hundreds, to Edward Western's capsicum series and Robert Mapplethorpe's distinctive black and white studies of flowers and bodies. Like *You've Clouded My Judgement*, the title *Centrefold* is also humorously suggestive. Instead of the curves of flesh usually associated with centrefolds, Nolan has selected and distilled his subject matter down to a minimal collection of pale shapes and tones. The encouragement for attentiveness towards the image however, is not lost. Indeed the subtle pinkish tone given to the photograph brings a sensuality to the object – transform it from mere paper, to a marble-like sculpture of quietly alluring surfaces, folds and contours.

<sup>2</sup> Essentially, the "modest venus" – despite the very objective being to draw attention to what is 'modestly' not being displayed.

<sup>3</sup> Christian Metz, 'Photography and Fetish', October, Vol. 34 (Autumn, 1985), pp. 81–90.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.





Detail: *Centrefold*, 2015, Inkjet Print, 104 x 84 cm



The black and white diptych work ***Be Like a Capsicum*** functions as a direct nod to Edward Weston's famous 1930 photograph *Pepper No. 30*<sup>5</sup>. It also plays similarly with the concept of form, as well as space, time and interpretation as paramount to the photographic process. In the left-hand image, the end of a bulb-release cable rests atop a wooden stool. In the right-hand image, the artist sits with his back to the camera, his body roughly forming the shape of a capsicum. In his right hand, he too holds a bulb-release – the tautness of his arm indicating the tension that comes with squeezing the bulb to manually release the camera shutter. In this performative work, Nolan exists at once as artist, subject and object – purposefully imbedding himself not only in the photographic process but the historic language and technique of photography itself. Despite this, the left-hand image is clearly void of the artist's presence. It also exists as a sort of technical anomaly, a logical 'glitch' in that the bulb-release is clearly not being used to capture the image. The play-off between the two images then provokes a questioning of the closeness and labour-intensiveness of the hands-on analogue

processes (which was Western's domain and specialty), and a certain distance that now comes with the ease of digital photography. The image also, is far from being a self-portrait in the traditional sense. The artist is there – his shape, flesh and form – but he is transformed into matter more suggestive than just that. Essentially, ***Be Like a Capsicum*** depicts the artist 'hiding in plain sight' – a state of being-and-not-being part of the work. This is ultimately symbolic of the status of all photographers, who while they exist as the directors of representation/information, must always, ultimately relinquish their imagery to the world of interpretation. Nolan thus at once enacts control over the image and its conceptual direction, but also reveals the ambiguity, malleability and fluid interpretability of photography as a cultural product. Like Weston's famous *Pepper*, where the photographer sought to stretch the very dimensions of the object through a six-minute exposure and surround illumination so that the work becomes profoundly, unpredictably more than just a 'pepper' for the viewer, Nolan also pushes for a purposeful and playful interaction with this very phenomenon of photography, and the artist's role within it.

In contrast to the other works exhibited, ***Photogram II*** steps back to a much early of photographic technique, the photogram. The photogram itself is a photographic process that sidesteps the use of a camera in the creation of an image. Instead, objects are placed directly onto photographic paper/light sensitive material, and exposed to light. The process results in a final image where the layered variation in tone that is produced – 'sculpting with light' – is both creatively distinct to the object's being used to do so, but also conveys to quote Barbara Tannenbaum a 'literal fact: the actual physical presence of the object or the light recorded directly on to the paper.'<sup>6</sup> To an extent, ***Photogram II*** links to ***Centrefold*** through its direct consideration of form and shape. Yet the work almost seems to move in a different direction. Instead of bringing greater attention to the surface, tactile qualities of material (i.e. paper), the objects used to create the photogram

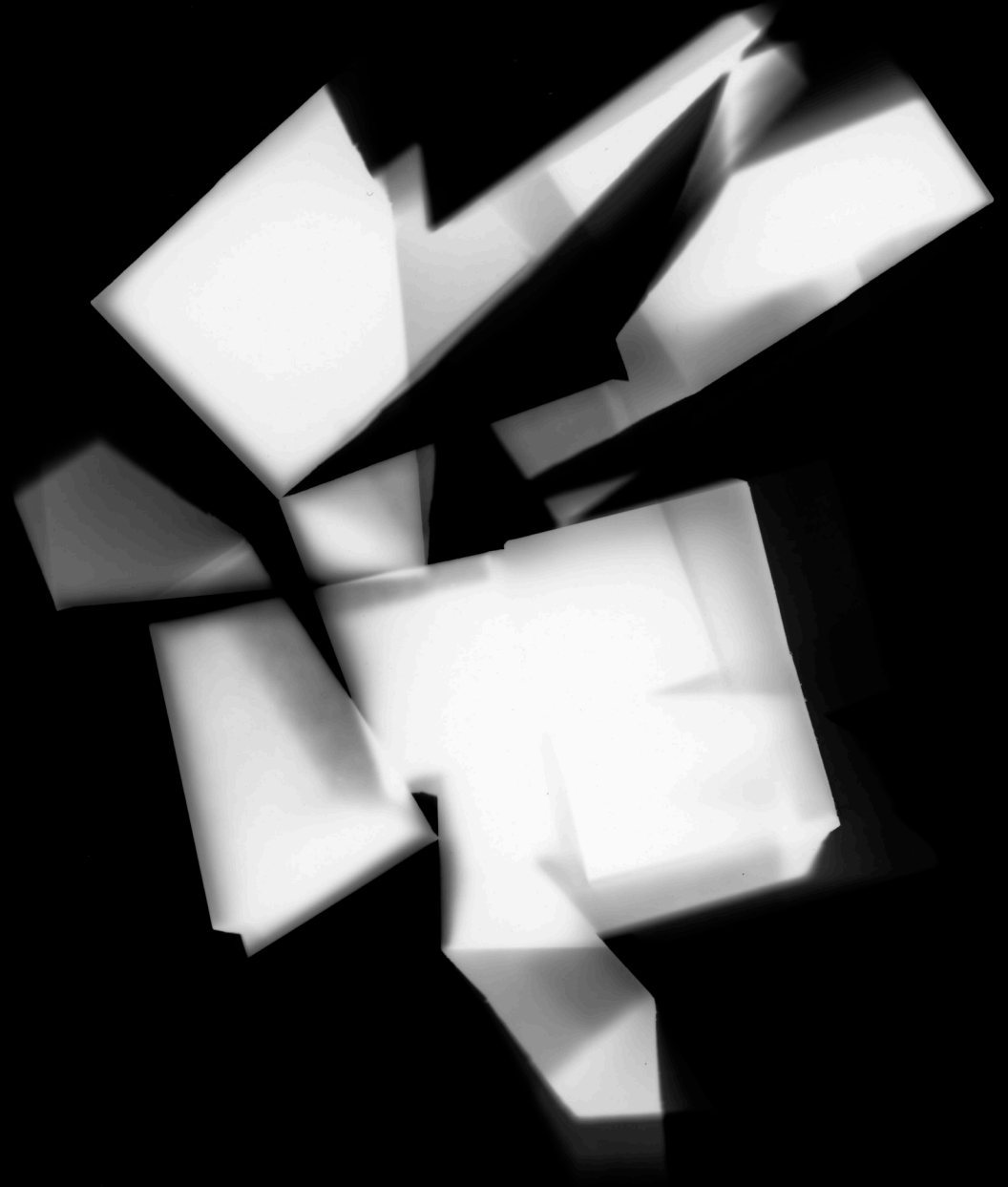
become an 'invisible' tool in the creation of abstracted layering of tone and shape. This then, becomes a 'stripping back' of photography to pure light and shadow. As a truly analogue and 'bespoke' process, it sits at the other end of the spectrum to ***You've Clouded My Judgement*** (a found, digital image) – but also strangely follows a similar logic. Both are concerned with the trace of information, visually asking, what can forensically 'exposed' and hence 'discovered' within each image? Interestingly also, ***Photogram II*** is not a direct contact print – which photograms are – but has been blown up 'enhanced' like ***Centrefold*** to further emphasise its bold, architectural quality. ***Photogram II*** therefore, discloses well the broad scope of Nolan's technical interest, skills and creative questioning, and also the connecting link – the elucidating on the latitude of photography as method and technique – that weaves throughout each work exhibited in *I'm Here For You*.

<sup>5</sup> See: [edward-weston.com/edward-weston/](http://edward-weston.com/edward-weston/)

<sup>6</sup> Barbara Tannenbaum, Adam Fuss: Photograms, Akron Art Museum, 1992 n.p.

**Me, You, Others** extends on Nolan's interest in the process of 'distilling down' information and concepts through the photographic process. In creating this minimal triptych work, Nolan has taken the concept of the digital image as currency – an indicator of social status seen in photo postings on Facebook, Instagram etc. breaking it down into a quasi form of 'statistical information'. This he has in turn reproduced in each image, as a singular algorithm line of white against black. Today, as is all too well known, imagery has become a currency of an individual's social 'worth' via the number of likes, views, clicks etc. one receives online. **Me, You, Others** in a sense links conceptually to **You've Clouded My Judgement**, in that it also considers, albeit far more abstractly, the ethics, application and use of online/digital imagery. The low-fi Xerox reproduction of the work also bringing a certain feeling of rapid turn-over of mass-information. The artist's ongoing concern for how we consume imagery in the twenty-first century, in **Me, You, Others** therefore takes a slightly more dark turn conceptually than the other exhibited works. Indeed, it would seem that the more digital imagery saturates the online space, the more 'it' in fact disappears, reduced to a digital bartering tool in a system where emphasis is not on the content of the image so much, as on its ramification on status, social hierarchy and significantly our 'virtual importance'. While the politics of **Me, You, Others** might be understated, the work helps subtly and creatively draw our attention back to how we do discuss and engage with the subject, and its broader social and cultural ramifications.

In conclusion, *I'm Here For You* follows the very logic that its title suggests. Collectively, each work is formulated as an meticulous and refined offering, a distilled questioning, from the artist to you/us/the audience concerning not only the place of photography today, but what might be at stake as we reconcile photography's move into the realm of the digital, its ethics, its shift in value, as well as how we reflect on its history and the artist's place in the act of creation. Key to this questioning is that the audience is also invited to be part of it. Dewey's urging of our consideration of the experiential process of the artist is hence revealed to indeed be of fundamental value for the shared experience of critical dialogue through art. *I'm Here For You* as a carefully considered aesthetic proposal then, can just as much be appreciated as: *you are here for me.*



*Photogram II*, 2015, Inkjet Print, 131 x 104 cm



*Be Like a Capsicum*, 2015, Inkjet Print, 84 x 166 cm



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All artworks featured in this exhibition can be viewed on this website under Exhibitions.