

its claim in urban intellectual culture. Controversial history can happen. And at times, both traditional historical societies and the general public appear even more receptive to debate and dialogue than many academics and intellectuals might imagine.

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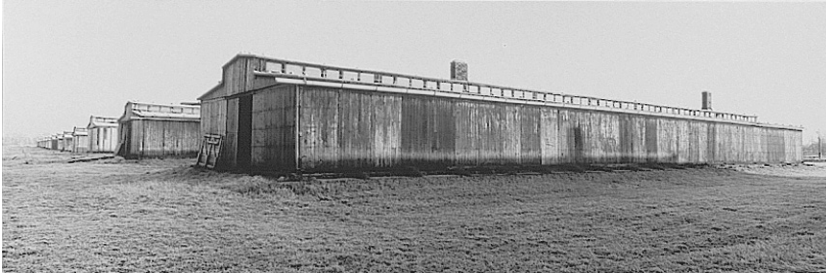
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**The Space of Silence and Facing Death: Portraits from Cambodia's Killing Fields.** CANADIAN MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY. Ottawa, Ontario. 6 October 2000–14 January 2001.

The unifying theme of *The Space of Silence* and *Facing Death: Portraits from Cambodia's Killing Fields*, two concurrent exhibitions at the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, is an exploration of acts of genocide, but the unequivocal subtext of both exhibitions is the communicative power of the photographic image. Photographs transcend language. Their images seep into parts of the mind that words cannot penetrate, and they resonate more profoundly than any utterance. In concert with these capabilities are immense responsibilities – not only of authorship, but also of dissemination. How and where photographs are circulated and exhibited are as important as the content of the images themselves. These parameters are even more pressing in the context of these two exhibitions, as the subject matter is so acutely heart-wrenching as to risk overwhelming the viewer entirely, and thereby run contrary to the artists' or curators' desires to elicit social change, either through empathy and compassion, or through anger and grief.

*The Space of Silence*, organized by the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, features installations by Jack Burman, Isaac Applebaum, and Alfredo Jaar. Burman and Applebaum, both Canadian artists, explore the incidents and aftermath of the Holocaust, while Jaar, a Chilean born artist now living in the United States, addresses the massacres in Rwanda during 1994. All three artists confront issues of representation specific to photography. Their installations consider photographic images as proof, that is, imbued with an ability to tell truths and to expose lies.

Jack Burman's installation, "*Remain Silent*": *Auschwitz-Birkenau*, employs as its title a translation of "Verhalte dich ruhig," the Nazi orders stencilled in black letters on the inner walls of the concentration camp's latrines. For Burman, the call to "remain silent" becomes a metaphor for memory, and in the quiet contemplation of the landscape and ruins of Auschwitz-Birkenau, there is an opportunity to feel the magnitude of the spirits lost to this place. By way of serenely beautiful panoramic photographs exhibited alongside



**Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography (CMCP).** Jack Burman from the installation “*Remain Silent,*” *Auschwitz-Birkenau 1994–1997.*

Lent by the artist.

historical views and documents from the same spaces, Burman seeks to capture the profound hush of loss. Silence itself becomes a piece in the exhibition, a ghost-like presence dwelling inside the gallery space.

Isaac Applebaum investigates the ways in which photographs serve as the tangible confirmation of events or circumstances in his installation entitled *Man Makes Himself*. In this work, Applebaum juxtaposes two small books, one composed of photocopied student’s notes from lectures by Alberta teacher Jim Keegstra, and the other containing photographs of the death camps, with captions in German, Hebrew, and English. Books such as the latter were prepared following the liberation of Bergen-Belsen, to be given to the survivors as substantiation of what had happened. Applebaum inherited a copy from his parents. The book is an astonishing archival document, as it is almost unimaginable that someone had the presence of mind following the abominable tragedy of Holocaust to produce such a document to bear witness. Viewed alongside this record of the past, the student’s transcriptions expose horrific fictions taught by Keegstra, namely, his denial of the Holocaust. The student’s book is likewise an archival document, an attestation to Keegstra’s falsehoods, and, by consequence, serves to underscore the awful truth of what he sought to denounce.

On opposing walls of the room housing the books, Applebaum installed two groups of black-and-white photographic portraits. The first is a number of large close-ups of the faces of Asian men and women. The portraits are reminiscent of taxonomic studies, with almost expressionless faces in classic portrait stances isolated on white ground. Facing these images are black-and-white photographs of Caucasian men, captured mid-gesture, with visible traces of their movements. The relationship of the photographs to the book parts is a bit perplexing, due to the strength of the focus on archival documents surrounding the Holocaust. The curator of *The Space of Silence* proposes that, with these photographs, Applebaum articulates issues surrounding the power

of the individual's own memories over reductivist homogeneity; however, as the thrust of the installation is unbalanced by a juxtaposition that is not fully resolved, it would have been stronger without them.

The final work in *The Space of Silence* is an installation by Alfredo Jaar entitled *Real Pictures*. The artist travelled to Rwanda following the massacres in the spring and summer of 1994, and shot over 3,000 images during his stay. Jaar has worked with these negatives since that time, producing a number of large installations, including *Waiting* (1998), a single frame view of Hutu refugees projected as large as a movie screen, which appeared in the special exhibition *Crossings* at the National Gallery of Canada. Jaar became concerned that repeating images from the Rwanda series would dilute the magnitude of the events and that the photograph would lose its ability to provoke change. For this reason, he turned to collecting stories from survivors and sought solace in the written word. *Real Pictures* is the result of Jaar's exploration of the power of words over images. In this installation, the photographs are present, but withheld from view. The viewer enters a dark room to behold under spotlights a series of black boxes with descriptive captions printed in white text, each containing a single eight-by-ten photograph. The boxes are arranged like building blocks into formations that evoke tombstones or monuments. In reading the narratives, the viewer constructs the image through the imagination, which is more powerful than any camera. Close examination of the individual boxes reveals that the descriptive texts are repeated over and over, like a chorus. This echoing of words suggests that, ultimately, language can fall prey to the same forces as the image, and that perhaps some tragedies are too profound to be articulated by any one medium on its own. The point is not to succeed in this attempt, but simply to continue to try.

Accompanying *The Space of Silence* is an exhibition organized by the Photographic Resource Center at Boston University, entitled *Facing Death: Portraits from Cambodia's Killing Fields*. This exhibition represents a selection of one hundred large format black-and-white photographs, printed from more than 6,000 negatives discovered by American photojournalists Chris Riley and Doug Niven at the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide, established in the former prison S-1 in Phnom Penh. Riley and Niven founded the Photo Archive Group, a nonprofit organization, as a means to catalogue, clean, and print the negatives that captured the faces of the individuals who were accused of treason and brought to the Cambodian prison for interrogation, torture, forced confession, and, finally, execution. Following their murder, each prisoner's photograph was submitted along with a signed confession in their file to the Khmer Rouge, as evidence that the threat of insurrection had been eliminated. The identity of the prison photographer has been established recently: Nhem Ein, who joined the Khmer Rouge as a ten-year-old child. He was sent to China for training and returned six years later in May 1976, to serve as chief photographer in Tuol Sleng. In an interview with Robin



**Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography (CMCP).** *Untitled* from *Facing Death: Portraits from Cambodia's Killing Fields*. Organized and circulated by the Photographic Resource Center at Boston University, in cooperation with the Photo Archive Group, El Segundo, CA, Chris Riley, Director.

McDowell of the Associated Press, the photographer guessed that he had taken more than 10,000 photographs during his tenure, and understood that if he spoke out in reaction to the injustices of the prison, he too would wind up in front of the camera for processing as a traitor and ultimately would have met the same fate as his photographic subjects. (See Dawne Adam, "The Tuol Sleng Archives and the Cambodian Genocide," *Archivaria* 45 (Spring 1998), p. 17.)

The portraits are haunting commemorations to a frozen moment marking each prisoner for death; of the thousands of individuals sent to S-1, there is only a handful of known survivors. Moreover, as most of the captives shown in the exhibition are relatively young, and the events leading up to the mur-

ders occurred in the very recent past, the fact that each face depicted *should* be that of a living person is all the more profound.

*Facing Death: Portraits from Cambodia's Killing Fields* is troubling on many levels, not only in terms of subject matter, but also in terms of presentation. The original method of dissemination for the discovered negatives was in passport-sized prints stapled to a case file; they were not conceived to be reproduced in large format and framed on a museum wall. Inasmuch as identification photographs are not supposed to be imbued with qualities that separate mere likenesses from portraits, these photographs nonetheless reverberate with the humanity of each individual, because the viewer knows that what *has* happened to them is what is *about* to happen to them – this is their last photograph, akin to a death mask.

Both exhibitions raise important questions not only about the medium of photography, but also about the role of the museum or archive as a space for social commentary. How a community bears witness and by what means this act be disseminated to a greater public is at the heart of the artists' and curators' work. In this way, the two exhibitions at the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography are not static things to be experienced in the gallery and left behind. These images permeate the mind and remain with the viewer.

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**Virtual Exhibition. *Halifax and Its People/1749–1999: Images from Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management.*** NOVA SCOTIA ARCHIVES AND RECORDS MANAGEMENT and NIMBUS PUBLISHING LIMITED. Halifax, 1999. ISBN: 1-55109-292-1 <<http://www.nsarm.ednet.ns.ca/virtualx/halifax>>

In celebration of the 250th anniversary of Halifax as a community, the Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management (NSARM) has produced, in collaboration with Nimbus Publishing Limited, an illustrated history of the city. “Halifax and Its People/1749–1999” is available in two formats: as a 174-page soft-cover catalogue with black-and-white reproductions and in electronic form, the very first virtual exhibition produced for the NSARM Web site. A recent study has shown that forty-eight per cent of Canada’s households are connected to the Internet and that Canadians are the world’s most enthusiastic surfers of Web-sourced information.<sup>1</sup> Archival institutions are striving to

<sup>1</sup> This information was revealed in a new study by accounting and consulting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers, cited in an article by Guy Dixon, “Canadian Internet Use Keeps Climbing,” *The Globe and Mail* (17 November 2000).