

Artist Statement

Drawing on the cultural and political history of the image, my work deals with notions of power and empathy and the limits of language and representation. In the photographs for my forthcoming book, *The Nature of Imitation*, I examine living birds using large-format color film and film manipulations, studio props, and sculptural techniques to consider the connection between a physical, living thing and a picture. In detailed photographs modeled on natural history drawings, the work strives to evoke the delicate experience of holding a bird by turning to traditions of landscape representation from Renaissance frescoes and tapestries, the early history of photography, and Modernist painting and sculpture. Mining my interest in art as dialogue with other systems of meaning, I collaborated with scientists, ecologists, and naturalists for access to their subjects, wild birds caught for banding and release and those captive in labs, and to institute a parallel methodology for their use. The work engages both scientific and aesthetic discourses, addressing the classical problems of mimesis, the ethics of control over nature and pictorial subject, and the conditions of photography.

My increasing interest in analyzing the process of picture-making has led me into the realm of pinhole cameras, photograms, paper negatives, and other light-sensitive materials, also examining their intersection with digital technology and output. Following the thread of a previous project that used *The Divine Comedy* of medieval poet Dante Alighieri as a prompt and intertext for making pictures in contemporary Italy, I have continued to explore the textuality of exile, and consider how the picture-making process preserves a link to a communal past through its reinvention. Much of my production also responds to my background as a documentary photographer in fields of conflict, where the deeply-felt role of witness often clashed with the aesthetics of the resulting images, which were weighed down by the exigencies of the narrative and photojournalistic codes, themselves traceable to history painting. Dislocating these codes, a more recent series called *Post-Photography* uses pinhole cameras sent via post and other parcel service to create exposures on photographic paper or film of a parcel's transit. I wish for these cameras, which I deliver to post offices in my area, and address to P.O. boxes, or friends and family, to serve as proxies for the author's movements, and to subvert, spy, penetrate, and gain access to the mundane, or quietly sublime, institutional spaces of their transit. The word camera etymologically refers to a room, and I mean for the image-objects to carry the sense of a body in a closed space, quietly passing the time, observing, and gathering information. Their visual vocabulary almost accidentally evokes the Soviet Constructivists, with their expressive freedom and

utopian optimism, and forms another dialogue with the narrative of history. To briefly elaborate on technique, I create parcels, loaded with film or paper, which contain a small aperture near the address, and receive exposures on the light-sensitive material loaded inside the parcel. I uncover the pinholes when mailing them, and cover them at pickup. The black-and-white photographs are unique objects, at a scale of 11x14 to 20x24 inches, while the color photographs are made on sheets of film, which I scan and print, generally large. Like surveillance drones or stories in their retelling, these operator-less cameras take independent journeys and produce images with a formal vocabulary inherent in the camera's optics and the chemical life of light-sensitive materials.