

(continued from overleaf)

that has created artificial intelligence, as Siri would attest to, it is possible to question whether humans will one day be the biological innovators of perception. What will the machines see through us? The nostalgic click of the shutter may humanize technology but it does little to dispel the disquiet instilled by the all-seeing digital eye. Rubenzahl's prints are spinning mandalas that give us a chance to meditate on the instigation of perception and the temporal strategies that we use to frame it.

<sup>1</sup> K.C. Cole, *The Universe and the Teacup: The Mathematics of Truth and Beauty*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1998. 193.

## Images

Front: *Eclipse #9*, 2014, screenprint, 20" x 20"

Interior: *Eclipse #7*, 2014, screenprint, 20" x 30"

## Artist Bio

**Ian Rubenzahl** is a Toronto-based artist and has been a member of Open Studio since 2011. A graduate of York University and Emily Carr College of Art and Design, he has exhibited in Canada, Italy and Germany.

## Author Bio

**Stuart Reid** is Director/Curator of Rodman Hall Art Centre at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario. From 2009 through 2011, he was Executive Director of the MacKenzie Art Gallery in Regina, one of Western Canada's premiere venues for contemporary art. He has also served as Director/Curator of the Tom Thomson Art Gallery in Owen Sound (2001-2009), was Curator of the Art Gallery of Mississauga (1992-2001), and Associate Curator at the Ontario Crafts Council (1990-92). In 2002, Reid attended the prestigious MLI (Museum Leadership Institute) at the Getty Leadership Institute hosted by the J. Paul Getty Trust at the University of California at Berkeley. He is the author of over 60 exhibition catalogues and several books. He is the recipient of two Ontario Association of Art Galleries Curatorial Writing Awards (2013, 2015). He is an elected member of IKT International Association of Curators of Contemporary Art, Liechtenstein.

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# IAN RUBENZAHL HOW TO ECLIPSE A PHOTOGRAPH



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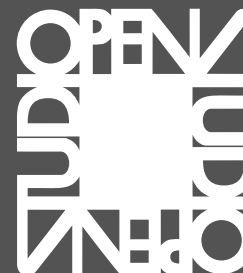
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## Ian Rubenzahl: *How to Eclipse a Photograph*

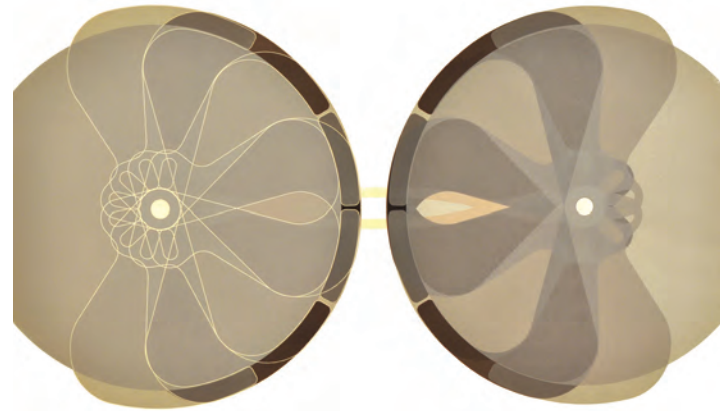
By Stuart Reid

A particular reference frame defines a particular world where things move together, tell time according to the same clocks, are ruled by the same forces. Normally, we take our reference frame for granted; we mistake it for "reality."

—K.C. Cole<sup>1</sup>

As the owner of a new iPhone 6, I am eager to experiment with the latest 8-megapixel iSight camera with 1.5µ pixels, autofocus with focus pixels, f/2.2 aperture, True Tone flash, five-element lens, hybrid IR filter, backside illumination sensor, sapphire crystal lens cover, auto image stabilization, auto High Definition Resolution, face detection, exposure control, panorama (up to 43 megapixels) and burst modes, tap to focus function, photo geotagging and a timer mode. All these fascinating gizmos, yet, I am still charmed by the fact that when I push the button to take a photo, this latest technological marvel emits a reassuring "click" that sounds just like an old-fashioned camera. The sound mimics the whirring of the blades of a shutter closing together followed by an almost perceptible gasp as it clicks shut. The length of this sound, at one time, directly related to the time that the camera opened its eye to the world, capturing a glimpse of present reality, translating it into recorded stillness that would be filed and referred to for many years to come.

The shutter of the traditional camera is essentially a louvered passageway for light to pass through to expose film, recording perceived visual spatial reality into a two-dimensional archive. It is a series of interlocking blades that slide to define an aperture. The speed of that shutter, in tandem with the size of the iris or aperture, is one of the tools that can be played with in the art of photography. This ingenious device is called the iris mechanism, acknowledging its mechanical similarity to the human eye. How fitting that the aperture defines the space between the light-filled exterior world and the dark black box that is our interior consciousness. In reading our



visual surroundings through the marvel of the human eye, we perceive the present moment. The sound of that "click" of the camera denotes a particular duration in time that frames our awareness, our perception of "now." The specious present is the moment in which what we see defines our present, apart from the obvious past or the future. That fleeting moment of presence migrates through time as a chain of moments, a recurring pattern of sequential clicks.

The title of Ian Rubenzahl's exhibition, *How to Eclipse a Photograph*, is a paradoxical statement that alludes to the artist's ruminations on the mechanics of glimpsing reality within evanescent time. Culled from his ongoing printmaking practice at Open Studio in Toronto, the bulk of the work in this show was completed in 2014. The exhibition features several editions of screenprints utilizing imagery inspired by the parts of a camera's shutter.

In 1995, for an exhibition called *History & Other Stories* at George Brown House in Toronto, Rubenzahl created sculptural enlargements of the components of the traditional camera shutter. There is profundity in such a macro/micro flip in scale—the tiny louvers of a shutter transformed into a much larger scale take on a sinister potential to make much larger slices, like the blade of a guillotine. The large metal pieces are graceful shapes that mirror one another while interlocking with a lobster claw-like action; they reduce the aperture and seal off light. When examined on an enlarged scale, the component parts begin to reference other repetitive, interrelated shapes

from nature, alluding to modes of growth and transformation. The centrifugal curling forms of seashells or the variegated accordion-like back of an armadillo come to mind. In his series of prints, Rubenzahl plays with the circular perfection of the shutter components recognizing the beauty inherent in such simple geometric perfection. The micro components of the shutter become celestial bodies, turning, occluding one another in rotation and eclipse.

The motion suggested by the essentially circular shapes in Rubenzahl's print series reminds one of the complex geometric drawings created by the children's toy called Spirograph. Through interlocking gear-like spinning plastic discs and wheels, one would insert a coloured pencil, turning the wheel and generating ornate patterns. The simple circular motion revealed the visual pleasures of symmetry and mathematical precision. Rubenzahl's prints likewise depict complex amalgamations of the aperture's components in partial closure; the elegantly shaped parts create engaging geometry, a collision of moments.

Rubenzahl uses a muted palette of inks, colours both hot and cool, in depicting the shifting orbs created by the shutter components in motion. The artist devised each suite of prints so that the shapes within the single frame match up, creating an endless chain of interlocking units. Negating the significance of the single print, the artist chooses to install the entire edition in larger grid patterns that create impact from scale and repetition. Analogous to the complexity of capturing the specious present, these installations speak of perception as a sequence of single instances only visible within a larger whole.

Utilizing the "slow" art of printmaking in a world of instant digital copying, Rubenzahl draws attention to the act of making. He contrasts human biology with the machine through the organic engineering of mechanical shapes into aesthetic strategies. The pattern in his work spirals out into larger permutations, building new meaning and deeper resonance, far beyond the singular instigating shape. Shifting the frame of reference to a macro version, we glimpse the power of collective perspective. From this particular moment in time, in an age

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