



## ESSAY

# DIGITAL APPERCEPTION

## ANDREY BOGUSH

LIZ SALES



It was a hard thing to undo this knot.  
 The rainbow shines, but only in the thought  
 Of him that looks. Yet not in that alone,  
 For who makes rainbows by invention?  
 And many standing round a waterfall.  
 See one bow each, yet not the same to all.  
 But each a hand's breadth further than the next.  
 The sun on falling waters writes the text.  
 Which yet is in the eye or in the thought.  
 It was a hard thing to undo this knot.

- Gerard Manley Hopkins



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Andrey Bogush's use of computer-generated 3-D objects and Adobe Photoshop-based screen grabs help to reshape our understanding of what it means to make and look at photographs. These highly technical images are, under the surface, born out of an interest in exploring Gestalt theory, particularly the idea that we instinctively perceive a physical, psychological, or symbolic configuration in its entirety differently than we see its individual parts. This is exemplified in the bare artificiality of his digital image manipulation, a strategy that draws attention to both the human and photographic perceptual processes as well as to the key differences between them.

In Photoshop, the color picker is a basic tool that provides a pop-up window containing image-relevant areas of a color spectrum. The user can visually select a numerically defined color by clicking on any available pixel. In Bogush's *Color Picker* series these pop-up windows, with their computer-generated color palettes, disrupt the photographs they so succinctly define, a decision that highlights the space between the image we see and the code that allows us to see it. According to the artist, he is "looking for some stability between the pixel and the recognizable image, and the condition in-between." In psychology, apperception is described as the process by which an individual perceives new experiences in relation to past experiences; its focus is on how that knowledge is individually assimilated to form a new whole. To those literate in photographic processes, this series demonstrates its own construction and allows us to integrate the fundamentals of Bogush's decision-making rubric into our overall understanding of his images. But this experience of apperception varies wildly between those inside and those outside of the photography community. By including the color picker graphic in these images, Bogush says that he is "in a sense, making [his] work for photographers, or at least for people who are aware of pixels and layers."

For his series *Rainbow*, Bogush digitally overlaid a wide variety of subjects with primary rainbow gradients to address one of the major differences between ocular vision and photographic vision. A rainbow, in both physical and mythical terms, is defined by its singularity. It is, as elucidated by author Richard Whelan, "an optical phenomenon so complex that each eye of any single observer receives the light of a slightly different wavelength from a given raindrop at any given moment — so that each eye actually sees a different rainbow. And, as each drop falls, the particular wavelength of the light as it reaches the observer's eye changes constantly." In Bogush's rainbow gradient overlays, this singular phenomenon has a more constant existence, with each color occupying a specific and stationary place on the original photographic image, in perpetuity.

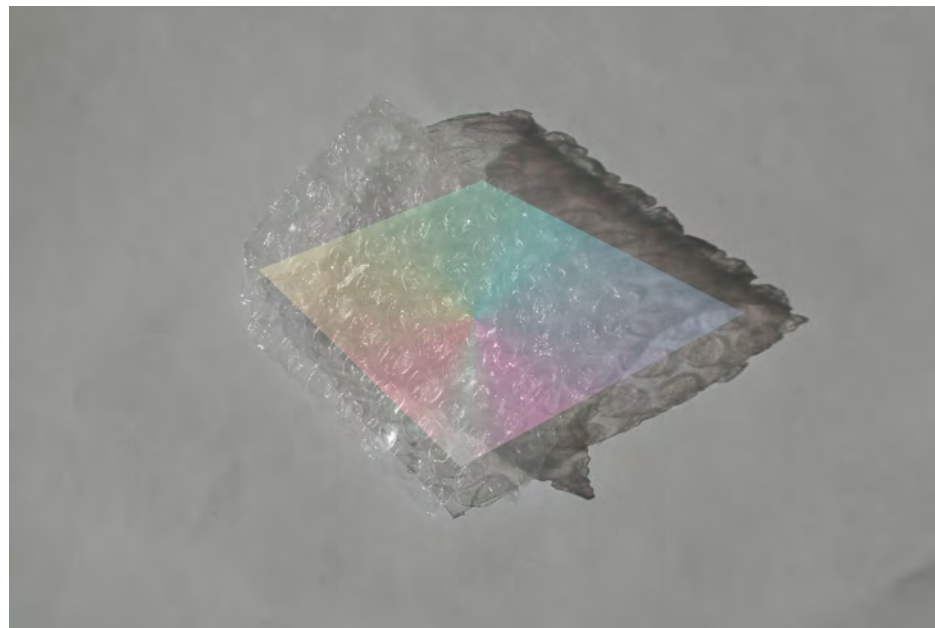
For Bogush, this experiential difference encompasses more than visual perception. For him, the work also separates the sacred from the profane. Bogush explains that having a rainbow captured in a photograph "is something very decisive. Rainbows are secularized in the images. There is nothing divine in them anymore." Regardless, his images do still allow the rainbow to function as a unifying phenomenon. "The rainbow becomes a device to connect all the elements in the image, to flatten the image and [its] layers. The other colors in the image are connected to each other through the rainbow. And images within the series are unified through this device."

Through his gestalt approach and the digital tools and techniques he uses to employ it, Bogush interrupts the metaphor of the photograph as a window. Here the photograph is not aligning with the eye but with the underlying technology, techniques, and processes we now use to assimilate information. Although a working knowledge of digital imaging technology is key to grasping the scope of this work, even those without such knowledge may appreciate Bogush's images as entry points into a deeper conversation about the overall wonders of perception.

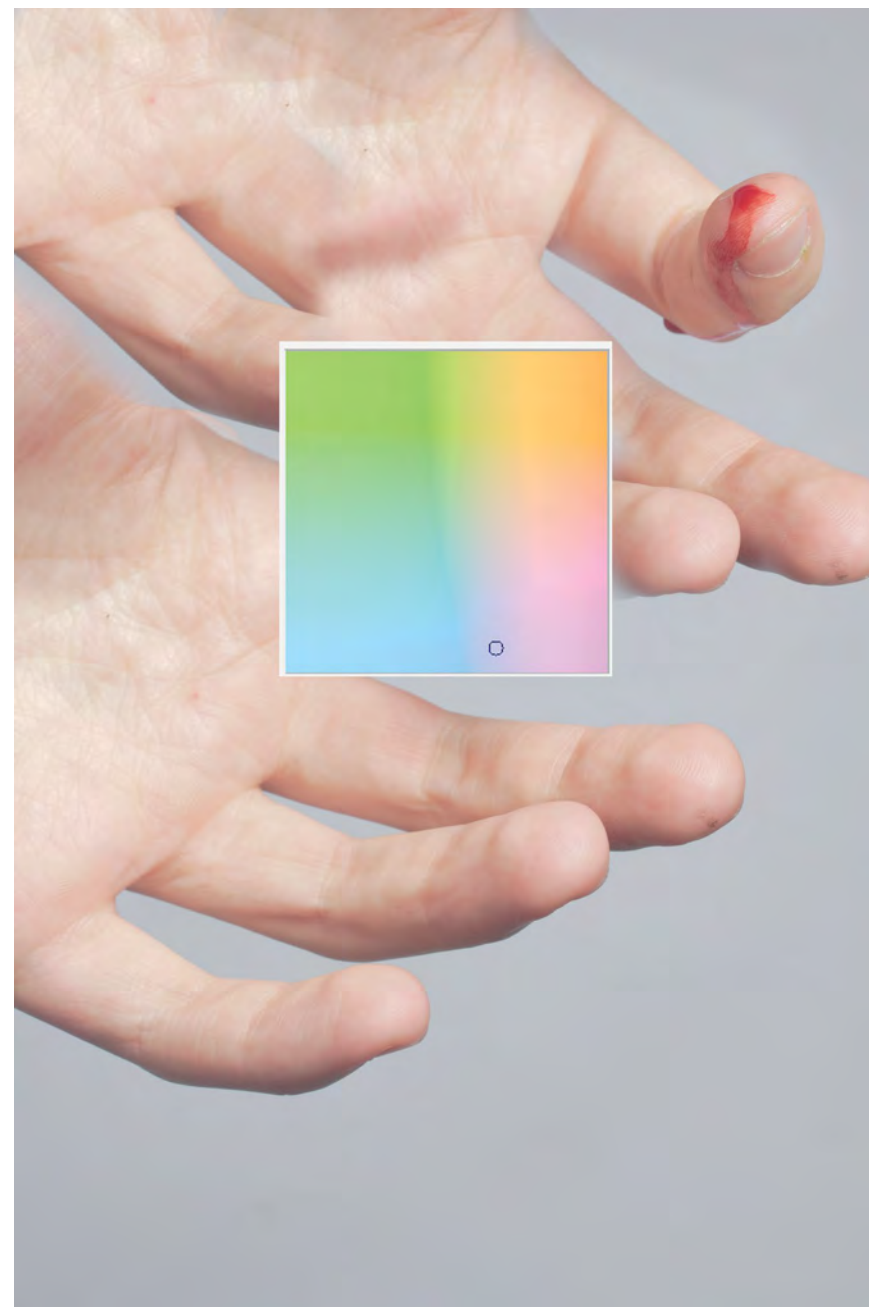
01 *Banana Pyramid*, 201202 *Boat, from Color Pickers*, 201203 *Figure ver. b*, 2012



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- 04 *Trolley*, 2010
  - 05 *Plastic Wrap*, 2010
  - 06 *Hands*, 2013

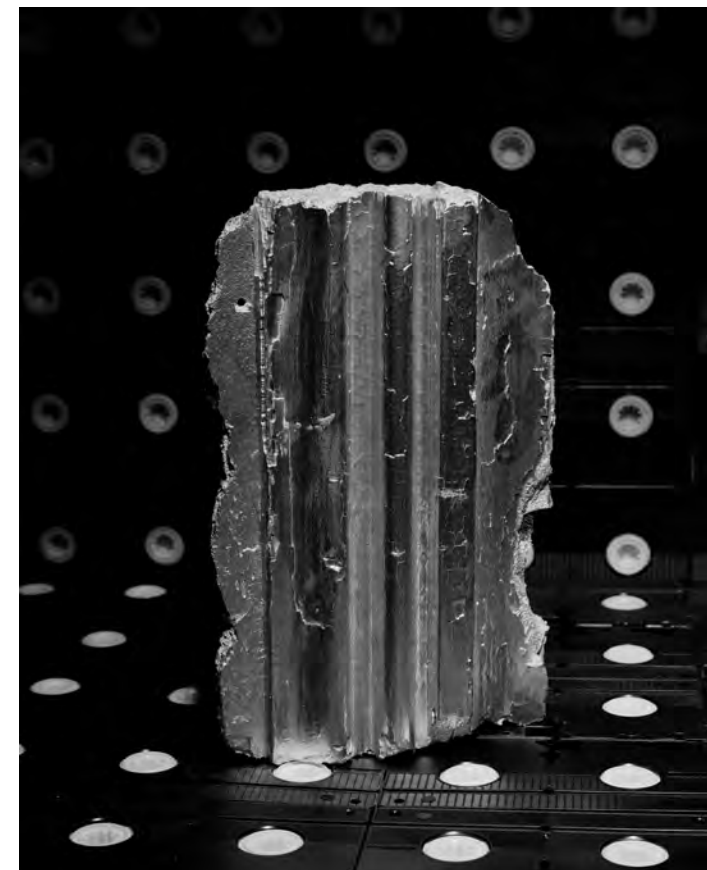


## INTERVIEW

# (PARA)METANOIA DILLON DEWATERS

IN CONVERSATION WITH LIZ SALES

(Para)MetaNoia, the title of Dillon DeWaters' most recent series of photographs, is certainly a fitting description of the artist's work. DeWaters employs a pantheon of references that come to life in stellar, out-of-gamut colors to create what he describes as a sense of the supernatural embedded within the mundane. Here, shapes and colors are detached from their original meaning, eliciting a sense of wonder. By formalizing his highly conscious photographic process and disallowing passivity in the viewer, DeWaters conveys his earnest desire to make contact.





LIZ SALES: What’s been on your mind lately?

DILLON DEWATERS: I’ve been completely obsessed with Italian *giallo* films: Mario Bava, Dario Argento, etc. (*Giallo* is a genre of independently-made, twentieth-century Italian cinema that blends elements of mystery, horror, and eroticism.) In my work, I’m always searching for some kind of otherness, especially in the mundane of the everyday. The supernatural aspects of *giallo* films are what make them unconventional and disturbing; a lot of attention is given to objects. These films aren’t resolved like American films. Superstition and *malocchio* — the curse of the “evil eye” — are prominent, so a passing glance could be the death of you.

I also love the elaborateness of the genre — bright, garish colors that are slightly off, the stylized composition. Intuition is a big part of what I do, so my color choices can be whimsical at times, but, as it happens, I lean towards a palette that is slightly more artificial: aberrant color combinations that go against nature, that do not conform to conventions. I like to use colors that are out of gamut, very bright, sexy colors that cannot be translated or printed exactly. There is this “chance” thing that I like to keep in the mix.

LS: How does that sense of the supernatural or uncanny show up in your still images?

DD: The American poet Jack Spicer wrote, “As things decay, they bring their equivalents into being,” a phrase that I ultimately used to title a series. I think about this idea when I’m making my own work, and I wonder what happens when someone participates in that decay. For example, what happens when you strip an image of everything but color, taking away the recognizable, the shapes, and the subject?

Also, what is color? I’ve been thinking about color as a language. *Giallo* films use color as a way of setting a mood and atmosphere. Combinations of colors elicit certain emotions and reactions, and that is part of what I’m after.

LS: So, you’re interested in the way *giallo* films use color as a language?

DD: Yes, but not just that. Spicer also wrote, “Things do not connect; they correspond. That is how we dead men write to each other.” In *giallo* films, directors use this kind of correspondence — a way of influence — to speak to one another through their work. Mario Bava sees Hitchcock’s *The Man Who Knew Too Much* and makes *The Girl Who Knew Too Much*. Lucio Fulci made *Zombi 2*, which is essentially *Dawn of the Dead II*. He just said, “Screw it — I’m going to make a sequel to this movie.” That style of working is part homage, part dialogue, and part building off someone else’s work to create your own style.

LS: Are there other people in your life that you feel like you’re in conversation with through your work?

DD: Yes, always. Although, I’m not sure I would associate myself with a school of image making. But, in terms of my peers, I feel my work has a dialogue with the work of Garrett Miller, Curtis Hamilton, Bryan Graf, Michael Lundgren, and my wife, Sarah Palmer.

But, I am also still so excited by and reverential of the history of photography — Atkins, Watkins, Rodchenko, Muybridge, Henry Peach Robinson, and others. I could keep going! I’m interested in communicating with people who inspire me but aren’t in my life. How can I communicate with people with whom I can’t literally communicate?

LS: You are director of photography and imaging at Vik Muniz Studio. Has Vik Muniz had an influence on your work as well?

DD: Yes, indeed. It is a real privilege to work with Vik. Ideas of illusion, perception, and fundamental ways of seeing have become much more important agents in my own image making — and that is a very direct influence of [working with] Vik. He has said on a few occasions that photography is a history of blindness — the moment a picture is taken is the moment the mirror lifts, obstructing the view of the photographer — and that we never actually see, in the moment, what we photograph. And, this statement has always led me back to Roland Barthes’ *Camera Lucida*: “Ultimately — or at the limit — in order to see a photograph well, it is best to look away or close your eyes. ‘The necessary condition for an image is sight,’ Janouch told Kafka; and Kafka smiled and replied: ‘We photograph things in order to drive them out of our minds. My stories are a way of shutting my eyes.’”

LS: You also draw inspiration from many non-photographic sources. Your work seems to contain a pantheon of references. What is your relationship to these cultural materials, and how do they all live together in your work?

DD: They really all live together in my work as influence, as an exchange of ideas that seeks to build a correspondence between the tangible and the ephemeral. It is also an excuse to explore scientific concepts, fictional narratives, and other ways to illustrate ideas photographically. The various influences allow me to wear different hats as an artist and help me resist being tied completely to a single genre or methodology.

LS: The references to the supernatural in your work — the reoccurring monolith, for example — seem both earnest and academic. Would you talk about the supernatural allusion you are making and your motivation for doing so?



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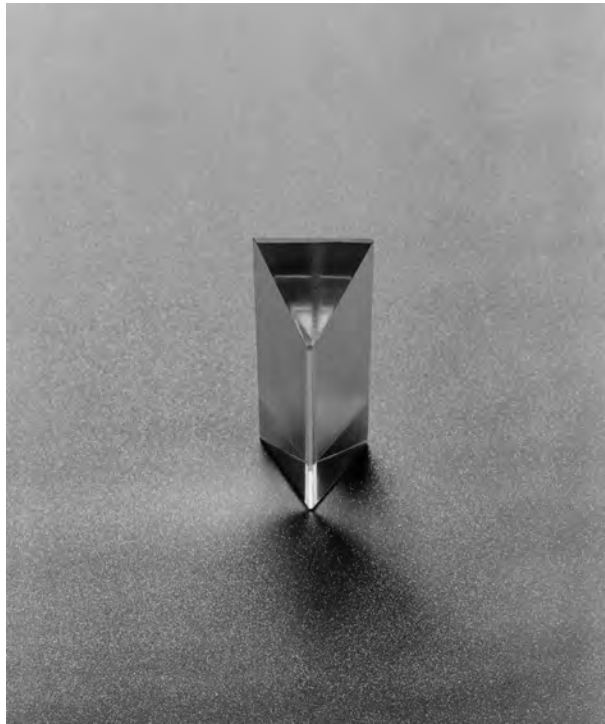
01 *Tile (Part I)*, 2011

02 *Untitled (U-matic Monument)*, 2013

03 *Why/Y*, 2012



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DD: I don't know if what I'm alluding to is supernatural or meta-physical, but ultimately — like in my newest series *(Para)MetaNoia*, which comes directly out of *As Things Decay*... in its relationship to science fiction, color, and language — I am interested in what is beyond one's perception or understanding and the mind's uncanny ability to manufacture images and ideas, to pacify, in a way, cosmogonical and existential matters so that life can have some kind of meaning. To say it differently, I like this romantic notion of "making contact."

LS: This relationship to the supernatural seems to sit somewhere between a detached, theoretical interest and the engaged fascination of a believer.

DD: I think about the immensity of the universe and the diversity of life on this planet. There must be life on other planets. That's part of where my interest in outer space and the supernatural comes from. Perhaps it is almost devotional.

The *giallo* films, in many ways, point to the hypocrisy of Catholicism. I was also raised Catholic — though I was always a skeptic — but every now and again, I hear a little voice that says, "You're going to Hell." It's the inherent negativity and guilt in that religion. But "Hell" and guilt are mixed in with everything else. Our design, human design, is very complex. So, I always end up in a place of questioning. Sometimes, it feels pointless because I'm not a scientist and I don't really understand how things work and why they work that way.

LS: But you've always made an effort to find answers in your own way, through your work.

DD: Yes, because it's that curiosity and drive that keep the work going, keep the work fresh. I know there are no empty propositions. That is why I think about the life of my work. What happens to my work when I'm not there? People want me to tell them about my work, but I'm just as interested in what they have to say.

LS: Well, in that case, I personally feel like your work has a lot to do with process — both processing the information you're taking in from disparate sources and the photographic process itself. For me, it is your commitment to learning that ties these two things together. Would you expand on the roles of process in your creative practice?

DD: Mystery is a very important agent in my work. When process reveals itself in my images, I hope that is being seen as a resting place, a reflected ghost of the unknown, a place that gives pause to the viewer to actively project or contemplate, to establish order or find patterns. Whether it is symbolic, philosophical, existential, or fetishistic, I don't really care; I just like the idea that the images might be striving for some internal coherence, innumerable meanings discovered in the unexplained. This way, anything is possible; limits are broken down with a careful dose of uncertainty.

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04 *Rose Red (Part I)*,  
2012

05 *Prism*, 2012



But, often, process is just a decoy — a red herring intending to both guide and mislead.

Also, if I’m reading H.P. Lovecraft, and also a graphic novel, and watching *giallo* films, and working for Vik Muniz, and talking to you, all those things exist in my mind together. I never used to think about it that way, but it points to a larger question: What are the things that come together to make me who I am?

LS: So, what are the things that come together to make you who you are?

DD: I remember hearing people refer to things as “weird” during my childhood. They would say, “I don’t like that; that’s weird.” And immediately, whatever they were talking about was interesting to me. I wanted to know more about it or try it. I don’t know why. For example, my mom didn’t like the tentacle part of squid, so I wanted to eat it. Maybe it was a form of rebellion; maybe I just wanted to form my own identity, independent of the people around me. When people called things “weird,” it made me curious about them.

LS: It seems like you have a basic impulse to learn.

DD: I came to learning late. Learning was not encouraged in school, and so I didn’t know it was an enjoyable experience until I discovered it later, on my own. I’m a slow reader and researcher. I do everything very methodically. I don’t want to miss anything. There is always something new to discover.

I think that is why I used to love to go out into the world with a camera, without a set plan, to make a picture out of what I came across. I’m doing that in reverse now. The picture is inside me, and I put it out there. But, these pictures are always different than I imagine they’ll be. In the work I’m doing now, light breaks apart in ways I can’t anticipate.

LS: The light experiments you’ve been doing recently have the aesthetic and affect of science fiction films of the 1970s and ’80s. Can you talk more about that work?

DD: Recently, I had a studio visit with the painter Irving Petlin, who described my light experiments as a “bouquet of flowers.” When I was making them, I initially thought of these objects as portraits of the future, but this description worked better. To me, they really are bouquets of flowers but in a futuristic setting, so they become counterweights to the photographic experiments that are the heart of the project. They are the rugs that hold the room together, so to speak.

Ultimately, I strive for my images to have their presence in the past, the present, and the future simultaneously, like a good science fiction novel: set in the future or in another world, but often dealing with the concerns of the time in which it was written.

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06 Antler, 2012



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