

o_ Man!

Kelli Connell

Natalie Krick

About the Artists

Kelli Connell's work investigates sexuality, gender, identity, and photographer/sitter relationships. Her work is in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, J. Paul Getty Museum, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Museum of Fine Arts Houston, and Museum of Contemporary Photography, among others. Publications of her work include *Kelli Connell: Pictures for Charis* (Aperture), *Kelli Connell: Double Life* (DECODE Books), *PhotoWork: Forty Photographers on Process and Practice* (Aperture) and *Photo Art: The New World of Photography* (Aperture). Connell has received fellowships from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, MacDowell, and The Center for Creative Photography. Kelli Connell lives in Chicago where she teaches at Columbia College Chicago.

Natalie Krick is a Seattle-based artist whose work investigates visual perception and pleasure through complicating the act of looking. She holds a BFA from the School of Visual Arts and an MFA from Columbia College Chicago. In 2015 Krick was a recipient of an Individual Photographer's Fellowship from the Aaron Siskind Foundation for her project *Natural Deceptions*. In 2017 *Natural Deceptions* was published by Skylark Editions and Krick was awarded the Aperture Portfolio Prize. Krick's work has recently been exhibited at SF Camerawork, The Museum of Contemporary Photography, Aperture Foundation, The Museum of Sex, and Blue Sky Gallery. Her photographs have been highlighted in several international publications including *BOMB*, *The New Yorker*, *Vogue Italia*, *PDN*, *Aperture*, and *Vrij Nederland*.

I. Introduction

o_ Man!

Kelli Connell and Natalie Krick

In *o_ Man!*, Kelli Connell and Natalie Krick use collage, reappropriation, and wordplay as subversive tools to interrogate photography's past.

In 1955, Edward Steichen organized *The Family of Man* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Steichen, photographer for *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair* and director of the photography department at MoMA, ambitiously sought to describe universal aspects of human experience. The exhibition was an unprecedented success, even as scholars, writers, and artists quickly critiqued its Western-centric and sentimental narrative.

Connell and Krick expand this long legacy of critical-looking by reinterpreting Steichen's images, and photographs and original language from *The Family of Man* catalog. *o_ Man!* challenges the male dominated history of photography and raises questions of patriarchal authority, power, and bodily autonomy vital to our political time.

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II. *The Family of Man*

***The Family of Man*, 1955**

The Family of Man was an ambitious exhibition produced and first shown at the Museum of Modern Art (January 24-May 8, 1955). In the words of its creator, Edward Steichen, the exhibition aimed to be "a mirror of the essential oneness of mankind throughout the world." It comprised 503 photographs by 273 photographers from 68 countries, selected from 2 million submissions. The exhibited photographs grouped thematically around themes such as love, children, and death, presented celebrated twentieth-century photographers alongside lesser-known artists. The aesthetics of mass-circulation photo-magazines such as *LIFE* greatly influenced the exhibition's innovative installation and visual design.

MoMA's International Circulating Exhibitions Program, with funding from the United States Information Agency, toured the exhibition to forty-eight countries. The exhibition normalized Western narratives and amid the tensions of the early Cold War, promoted a globalized, harmonious family built upon America's economic and social ideals and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).

Edward Steichen

The Family of Man's creator Edward Steichen was a key figure in the **Photo-Secession** movement, an aerial photographer during World War I, the director of the Naval Aviation Photographic Unit in World War II, and later chief photographer for *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair*, and director of the department of photography at the Museum of Modern Art from 1947-62. Through all these roles, Steichen had a unique influence on future directions in photography and promoted the medium as both an expressive art form and a means of mass communication.

Public Reception Then

At a time when most American museums still considered photography a lesser art, *The Family of Man* solidified MoMA as a cultural taste-maker for photography. The exhibition toured the world until 1965, attracting more than 9 million visitors, and was eventually permanently installed at Clervaux Castle, Luxembourg. The accompanying catalog sold more than 5 million copies by 1978, and remains in print today.

Critical Reception Today

Today, contemporary writers, critics, historians, and artists are still reckoning with the legacy of this milestone exhibition and the implication of the **patriarchal** authorial voice represented by Steichen. By re-visiting and re-interpreting *The Family of Man*, Kelli Connell and Natalie Krick encourage us to examine its original historical and political contradictions and question the consequences of privileged authorships in our image-saturated world today.

III. Collage and Feminism

For over a century, women artists have used collage as an activist tool to question society and cultural politics, especially socially constructed gender roles. Often **reappropriating** images from ready-made materials such as books and magazines, artists use cutting, re-arranging, juxtaposing, and layering to build new narratives.

Throughout *o_ Man!*, Connell and Krick use physical and digital collage as a subversive tool to complicate and change the original meaning of photographs by Edward Steichen and from *The Family of Man* catalog. By exploring photography's pliability, the artists raise vital questions on authorship, power, and women's rights and representation.



Questions for Looking



Writers, scholars, and artists frequently criticized *The Family of Man* for its sentimental humanistic narrative. Consider the photograph *Maternidad* by Manuel Álvarez Bravo, 1948, reproduced in *The Family of Man* catalog, and how Connell and Krick have reappropriated and altered this photograph.

- How does Connell and Krick's use of fragmentation complicate the original photograph?
- In Connell and Krick's reimagined work, the woman's gaze is isolated in a tight crop and separated from her pregnant body. How do you interpret this separation? How might this new work invite consideration of the photographer/sitter relationship and questions of gaze?
- In Connell and Krick's reinterpretation, they deliberately position areas of black space, which contain the words Japan and USA underneath. How does this make you feel? How might this artistic decision connect with contemporary issues around maternity?



As chief photographer for *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair*, Steichen created fashion and celebrity portraits that glamorized significant figures in popular culture, especially from film and theater. Steichen's portraits were meticulously staged and reflected an acute eye for lighting and design.

Steichen photographed the famous actress Merle Oberon on several occasions, including for the portrait shown here. Born in Bombay to an Anglo-Irish father and mother of European, Ceylonese, and Maori heritage, Oberon protected this personal background throughout her career due to the racial politics of her era and the biases of the Hollywood studio system.

→ In Steichen's original photograph, Merle Oberon's face is juxtaposed alongside a flawless mask, with both represented as objects of beauty. How do Kelli Connell and Natalie Krick disrupt this passivity in their reinterpretation of Steichen's photograph?

→ How does knowing of Merle's personal decisions around her racial identity inform your interpretation of Connell and Krick's piece? How do compositional details, such as the repeating hand held tightly around the white mask, inform your reading?

→ In Connell and Krick's new work, the artists cut apertures into the eyes of the mask originally depicted in Steichen's photograph. How does this make you feel? Does this gesture feel violent, empowering, or both? What are the potential implications here around whiteness, complicity, and seeing?

o_ Man!



Left page, left to right: Edward Steichen, *Merle Oberon*, October 1, 1935. Kelli Connell and Natalie Krick, *Merle (Masked)*, 2024. Right page, top to bottom: Installation view of *The Family of Man*, 1955, Paul Rudolph Institute. Installation wall plan for *o_ Man!* at Silver Eye Center for Photography, 2024.

Questions for Looking

The Family of Man at the Museum of Modern Art in 1955 was especially pioneering in its design, conceived by the architect Paul Rudolph and influenced by Herbert Bayer's principles of **extended field of vision**. Photographs were shown unconventionally—unframed, mounted on boards, and frequently hung from above using wires or poles. The design grouped photographs in thematic sequences and emphasized the narrative message of the exhibition by promoting visual collectivism over individualism.

Connell and Krick's use of collage and layering extends to the unique visual concept they have created for this site-specific presentation of *o_ Man!* at Silver Eye. Consider their unique exhibition design in relationship with the original aesthetics of *The Family of Man*.

→ How does Connell and Krick's exhibition design create multiple modes of seeing and perceiving photographs?

→ How might principles of extended field of vision complicate notions of authorship and agency?

→ The original catalog cover for *The Family of Man* and subsequent editions had a distinctive front cover featuring a mosaic of overlapping squares of varying colors. From the composition of individual works to spacers within frames and vinyl wallpapers, color plays a crucial role in Connell and Krick's installation. What personal associations do you bring to their devised color palette? Why do you think the artists decided to create their own visual vocabulary in this way?

IV. Community Perspectives

Community Perspectives is an ongoing series where people from diverse disciplines and backgrounds respond freely to images in our exhibitions.

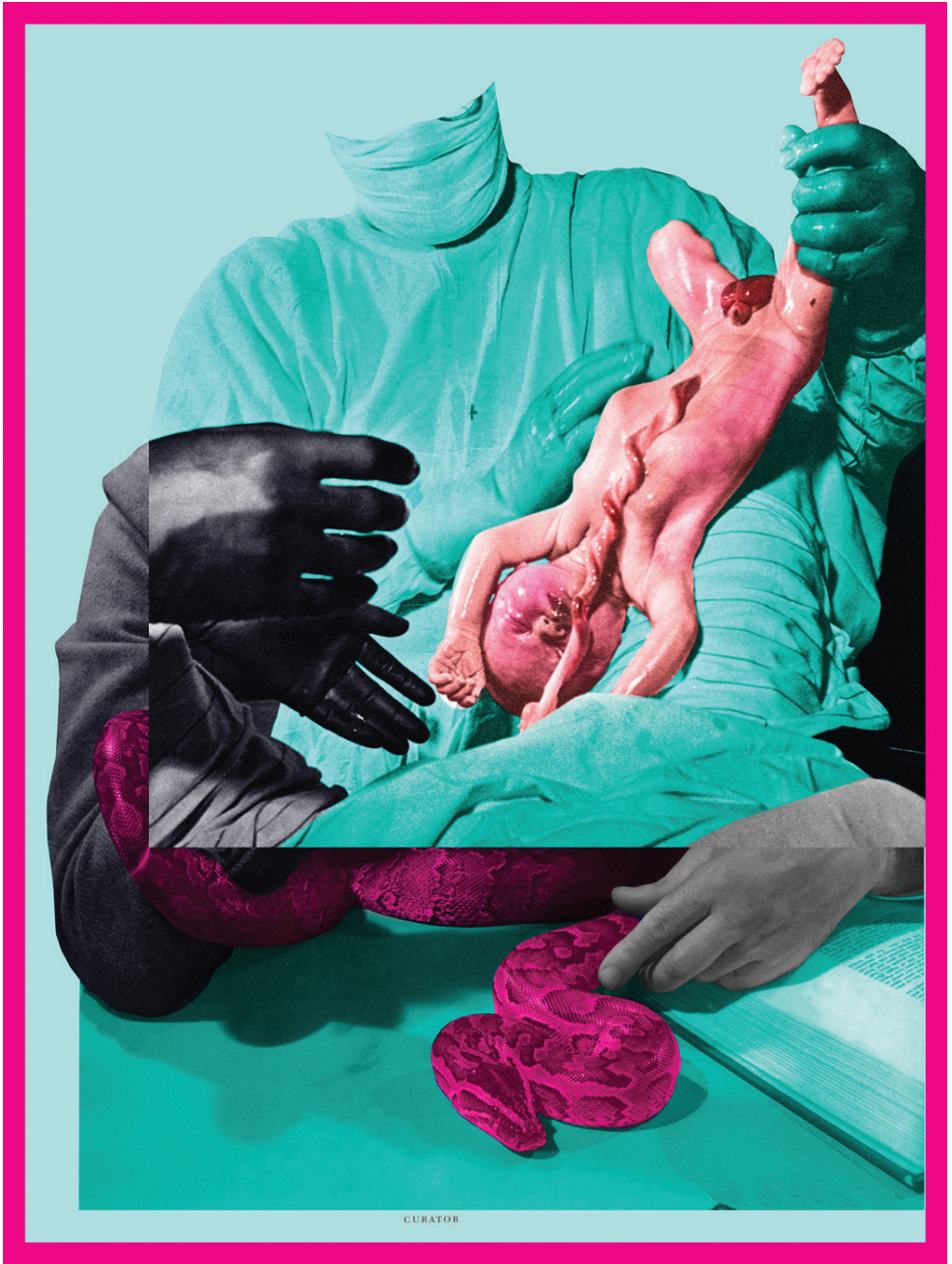
Ashley Cecil reflects on *Curator*, 2021

Like static shock catching you off guard, this image jolted me. Immediately, a surge of mixed feelings bubbled up—maternal worry, awe, appreciation, and a touch of agitation. The latter, I realized after thinking about it all day, arose from the open-ended relationships between the visual elements. I was forced to sit with the artists' jarring presentation of things that are hot topics in my own art practice—birth, motherhood, symbols of folklore, and modern sterile care.

This high-stakes situation leaves its ending to our imaginations. Is the medical worker who's wearing a cross condemning this newborn as a sinner? Maybe it's not a cross. Maybe it's a spot of blood on their scrubs. Is that a religious text in the bottom right corner or a medical journal? Is the snake a harbinger visiting from Eden? Maybe the baby is a convincing medical manikin in this scene of latex. If not, when will it cry?

I could stare at this image for hours, drawn in by its stunning aesthetics and all the tender and thorny things it stirs in me.

Ashley Cecil is a visual artist specializing in multimedia artworks of flora, fauna, and feminine forms that illustrate connections between the natural world and its human inhabitants. Her work includes collaborations close to home with several beloved Pittsburgh institutions such as the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, as well as far-flung research adventures to biological oases including the Amazon rainforest.



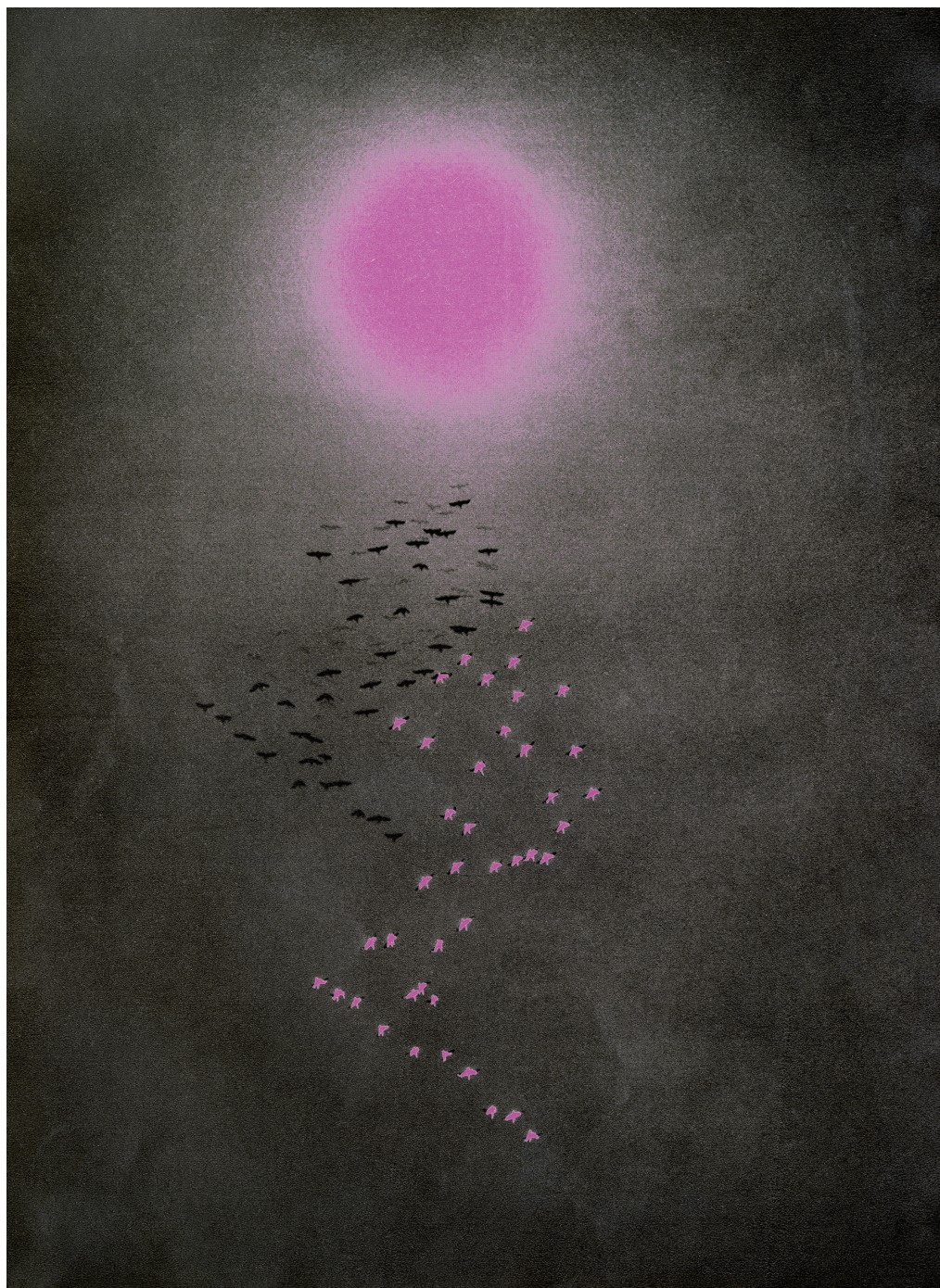
Christine Lorenz reflects on *Pink Sun*, 2024

There aren't many photographs of the more-than-human world in *The Family of Man*. Here is one: a pattern of birds, a moment of peace, a breath of fresh air. At first glance, the photograph looks like something we might see from far below. We crane our necks up to watch a migrating flock in formation. Maybe two flocks? We squint as their flight path crosses the sun.

This piece is after a photograph called *Snow Geese in Flight with Reflection of the Sun over Buena Vista Lake, California*, and when William Garnett took the original picture in 1953, he was flying above them. Snow geese are known to stay together in family units through the migrations of the offspring's first year. Maybe we're glimpsing a family of bird.

In the original exhibition design of *The Family of Man*, Edward Steichen turned the tables by installing Garnett's photograph horizontally, just above ankle height. This gave every visitor the view from the cockpit: far above the birds and the water, "where never lark, nor even eagle flew." The power of this perspective was dear to Steichen, who had put his photographic skills to work in air reconnaissance during the first World War.

Christine Lorenz is an artist who teaches the history of photography at Point Park University, Duquesne University, and the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, University of Pittsburgh. Her father was an airman.



Darrin Milliner reflects on *Suits*, 2022

Clean, Confident, Stylish, Rugged, and not easily impressed.

You can tell a lot by the way a man holds his hands, and where his hands are placed when in the presence of others. Is it calmness? A sense of pride? Gang signs? Signs of stress? Openness? A gesture of adventure?

Now that I look further, it's clear it is just another act of trying to find space with others. Trying to fit in. Attempts of belonging? Don't forget it's how you can show dominance, no one is more successful than a man who knows what to do with his hands.

Firm handshake, but no jazz hands? Who makes the rules? (People in other suits?)

A combination of men who want to be seen, striking a pose just to blend in.

At first look, I wasn't sure why I was so pulled in by this image. While the suits blend in with one another there is still a hint of distinction in each subject that allows this image to feel the perfect amount of crowded. The composition gives a sense of a bigger figure made from the smaller individuals, still with the same pseudo-confidence you would find in the separate suits. Giving an aesthetic of an uncertain retro era with modern qualities, this could be from years past or the present moment, maybe a near future. Some things are timeless. You should buy a suit.

Darrin Milliner is an self-taught artist, designer, and archivist of printed materials based in Pittsburgh, PA. Milliner is the founder & creative director of Social Living, an artistic lifestyle brand that offers art for a new perspective. Milliner creates objects and images that distort and combine recognizable elements of commercial imagery to highlight the importance of the separate worlds that empower or limit each of us. Milliner's work has been exhibited throughout Pennsylvania and in Louisville, KY, including the 2020 solo exhibition, Interlude, at CDCP Project Space in Pittsburgh.



Glossary

Extended Field of Vision

Herbert Bayer (1900-1985) developed a close collaboration with Edward Steichen at the Museum of Modern Art. Bayer was originally from Europe, where he was an influential member of the Bauhaus art movement. Bayer advocated for presenting photographs beyond a limited horizontal and linear plane, instead encouraging an immersive 360-degree extended field of vision. This approach enabled each visitor to discover their own agency and find subjective meanings from image patterns and sequences.

Patriarchal

Relates to structural systems in society where men hold and maintain all or most of the power, and use this to their own advantage.

Photo-Secession

The photographer Alfred Stieglitz formed the Photo-Secession in 1902, influenced greatly by the Brotherhood of the Linked Ring, an English society of Pictorialist photographers of which Stieglitz and many contemporaries were members. The Photo-Secession group emphasized photography as a mode of artistic expression rather than a mechanical process to accurately document the world. Photo-Secession artists frequently utilized soft focus, lenses, and darkroom manipulations to emulate conventions from painting.

Reappropriation

Relates to a technique in which artists intentionally use and alter existing works and recontextualize them into new works. This enables artists to create new meanings, often to critique the authorship or cultural context of the original work's creation.

Reading List

Dawn Ades and David F. Herrmann, editors,
Hannah Höch (Prestel, 2022)

Todd Brandow and William A. Ewing, editors,
In High Fashion (W. W. Norton & Company, 2008)

Patricia A. Johnson, *Real Fantasies: Edward Steichen's Advertising Photography* (University of California Press, 2000)

Gerd Hurm, Anke Reitz, Shamooun Zamir, editors, *The Family of Man Revisited: Photography in a Global Age* (Routledge, 2017)

Justine Kurland, *SCUMB Manifesto* (MACK, 2022)

Wangechi Mutu, *My Dirty Little Heaven* (Hatje Cantz, 2010)

Martha Rosler, *Irrespective* (Jewish Museum, 2018)

Lorna Simpson, *Lorna Simpson Collages* (Chronicle Books, 2018)

Abigail Solomon-Godeau, 'The Family of Man: Refurbishing Humanism for a Postmodern Age' (2004) in *Photography after Photography* (Duke University Press, 2017)

Edward Steichen, *The Family of Man: The Greatest Photographic Exhibition of All Time: 503 Pictures from 68 Countries* (New York Museum of Modern Art, 1955)

Joanna Steichen (Foreword), *Steichen in Color* (Union Square & Co., 2010)

Carmen Winant, *My Birth*, (Image Text Ithaca/SPBH Editions, 2018)

Silver Eye Center for Photography
4808 Penn Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15224

This guide serves as an education supplement to our exhibition and contains information about the works on view, questions for looking and discussion as well as room for student responses. To schedule a tour of this exhibition for students, go to silvereye.org

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