

KAHN & SELESNICK

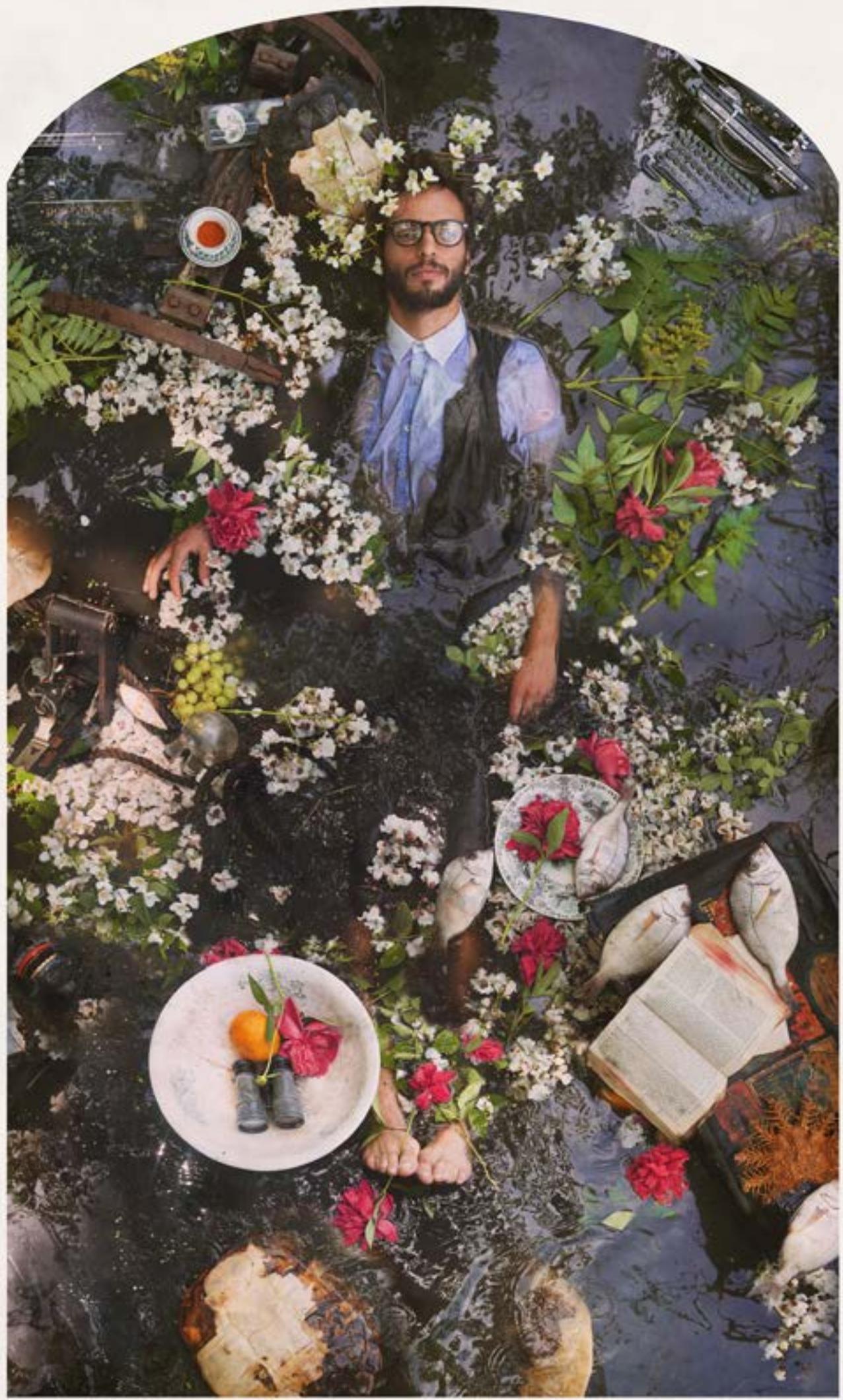
TRUPPE FLEDERMAUS

 AND

The logo consists of the word "AND" in a bold, sans-serif font. The letter "A" has a diagonal line through it, and the letter "N" has a horizontal line through it.

THE CARNIVAL AT THE END OF THE WORLD

CATHY AND JESSE MARION ART GALLERY
SUNY FREDONIA





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INTRODUCTION

I've always believed—and I think I still do—that art makes sense of the world in ways that explanations can't. An image, a sound, a movement, a word helps us understand a moment of pain or joy, bewilderment or enlightenment even if we might not be able to explain how, or why.

What to make, then, of Nicholas Kahn and Richard Selesnick's quasi-narrative historical-apocalyptic staged photo-documentary fantasias? Instead of guiding us to a response, they come at us all at once: mystifying stories alongside perfectly crafted, disorienting images. The mundane intermingles with the fantastic. I don't have a framework for it. It's completely foreign and also entirely familiar. It's Hieronymus Bosch meets Reality TV.

Marion Gallery Director Barbara Räcker told me a year ago, excitedly, that we had scheduled Kahn and Selesnick and that they were working on something called "Truppe Fledermaus." Learning more about it, I wondered whether these darkly absurdist, carnivalesque meditations on a troupe of actors journeying in an unfamiliar landscape would resonate with our students and our community. A year ago: before San Bernardino, Falcon Heights Minnesota, Orlando, Paris, Dallas, Nice, Baton Rouge, Munich. Before the performances

in Cleveland and Philadelphia. Before whatever else I will have tried to make sense of between now as I write this and now as you read it. Kahn and Selesnick's work is more clear to me now than it was a year ago not because they've changed but because the world has. Their dystopian vision is, sadly, more familiar.

Truppe Fledermaus' desperate but hopeful search for an audience is a search we all know, because we understand that an actor without an audience is an existence without purpose. Because we, also, need someone to acknowledge that we are here, are seen, are heard. Perhaps the play we're performing doesn't make sense. Perhaps the audience seems to be just the trees and rocks, the water and the moss. It doesn't matter. You are here as well: reading, seeing, sensing. "Listening to the sound of my voice," the artists write, "you realize that with every story I have told, I have been saying goodbye to you, and that I love you beyond measure."

My thanks and acknowledgment to Cathy and Jesse Marion, Barbara Räcker, Anthony Leone, Jason Dilworth, and the Marion Art Gallery Committee, to Nicholas Kahn, Richard Selesnick and Sarah Falkner, and to you, our companions on the journey.

Ralph J. Blasting

Dean, College of Visual and Performing Arts
State University of New York at Fredonia



Vladimir and Estragon, 2012-13, archival pigment print on Hahnemühle paper



Nicholas Kahn and Richard Selesnick are a collaborative artist team who have been working together since they met while attending art school at Washington University in St. Louis in the early 1980s. Both were born in 1964, in New York City and London respectively. They work primarily in the fields of photography and installation art, specializing in fictitious histories set in the past or future. Kahn & Selesnick have participated in over one hundred solo and group exhibitions worldwide and have work in over twenty public collections, including the Brooklyn Museum of Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Houston Museum of Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and Smithsonian Institution. In addition, they have published three books with Aperture Press—*Scotlandfuturebog*, *City of Salt*, and *Apollo Prophecies*.



Cart Pullers, 2012-13, archival pigment print on Hahnemühle paper









The Prophet of the Ditch, 2013, archival pigment print on Hahnemühle paper



AN ORACULAR OPERATION

A Concert for the Ghosts, 2012-13, archival pigment print on Hahnemühle paper



**POSITION I: the material basis of the problem; what could be said to be the beginning
of the querent's path, or simply the peculiarities of the querent's current situation**

In a divination when this is indicating a personage, this represents the Hungry Ghost type, the presence of endless desire beyond an already-present luxury and excess, and little care for the proportionate or just distribution of what is desired. As an event, this indicates a farce of supply and demand, characterized by gross imbalance and inequity. The querent may be facing covert and clandestine maneuvers by unsavoury colleagues or acquaintances, or in industry or the government. A dispenser of resources may be untrustworthy, or providing tainted or adulterated supplies, or in smaller amounts than has been compensated for; or may have acquired the resources unlawfully, or promised more than are even available. The designated arbiters of justice assessing a transaction may be grotesque, dishonest, unreliable, and inconstant; a dispute may have no chance for resolution and the wronged, no recourse to amends. Those in possession of resources may be vulgar in the flaunting of their wealth in the faces of those without, though also more blind to their own precarity than are those with nothing much further to lose, and it is solely that avenue of diminished perception through which the disenfranchised should seek to gain advantage over their oppressors. Also: scarcity, a struggle for resources involving trickery or deceit; hidden strife; waste, neglect.

Cartesian Theatre, 2012-13, archival pigment print on Hahnemühle paper



POSITION 2: the obstacles that hinder the querent's progress

Can refer to an internal or external authority figure—if internal, a deeply subconscious or fragmented self; if external, an authority figure somehow disguised or speaking through others. A general state of restraint or imprisonment, a lack of freedom despite an apparent autonomy, a mysterious force of control. As an event, frequently indicates the implementation of propaganda, or the enacting of laws created to taunt the citizen-spectator by simultaneously illustrating the existence of a thing or act and its prohibition: the subject first recognizes and articulates their desire at the very same time they discover they cannot have or be it, or will be punished, and thus is forced to internalize a dialectical monster of desire braided with fear of punishment that once installed will make the heartbeat seem a tin cup banged against the cell bars of the ribs. Also: unjust imprisonment and punishment, subjugation through psychological influence or mesmerism, discomfort with a prescribed or imposed binary (particularly the performance of gender), a tyrannical boss.

Action Painter, 2013, archival pigment print on Hahnemühle paper



POSITION 3: the past that is behind the querent or, what is lost

Generally represents a harmonious place or era of pleasant pastimes, mild weather, abundant crops, and peaceful relations. The Woodwose, a hybrid ambassador between the realms having arisen from a happy conjunction between the human and the vegetal, like the cycle of the agricultural year refreshes the world in its reproduction in both form and image; verdant fertility reigns over the environment, renewal can be expected. Can also indicate the querent's well-landed social standing and a positive public image; a convivial atmosphere to friendship and camaraderie; a meeting of soulmates. Also: freedom of self-expression.

City and Iceberg, 2008, archival pigment print on Hahnemühle paper



POSITION 4: what stands before the querent or, the near future

An adversary or problem that the querent would tragically underestimate; a problem of great magnitude; the arrival of a rival that seeks to replace or destroy its opponents; a new world that can only be born having obliterated the one that came before it. The imposition of a new government by force. Displacement, migration, exile. A long winter, famine, hardship. A time of muted sensations, inability to express emotions, inability to remember troubling nightmares upon awakening. Imminent danger, but with chance of escape. Also: an unstoppable force, an uninhabitable place.

Charlotte, Apricot, Thrush, 2015, archival pigment print on Hahnemühle paper



POSITION 5: the querent's subconscious fears

Can refer to literal or figurative drowning; a situation once beautiful has become menacing, pleasure becomes overwhelming to the point of discomfort, an excess becomes pathological. Inability to differentiate between dreaming and waking. Confusion, psychological mixed-states, sorrow, the shedding of tears. The desire to escape through fantasy, intoxication, or suicide. Also: an excess of water in the body or the environment; diseases of the kidneys; flooding.

Ghosts of the Shipwreck, 2012-13, archival pigment print on Hahnemühle paper



**POSITION 6: a warning! or, the worst possible outcome of the
factors in play which the querent presently faces**

A wasteland, a ruined landscape overrun with macabre figures who would profit from destruction and death; piracy and mayhem squander the few remaining artifacts left in sight. Where there once was a coast and then there was a sea that overran its shores to swallow up the villages, the waves retracted and there is now a desert: nothing can be taken for granted, impermanence, certain change. Total reversal of fortune. Calamitous ruin. In the event this should come to pass, there is nothing the querent can plan for. Also: shipwreck, danger at sea, a theft by an organized gang.

The Bridge, 2012, archival pigment print on Hahnemühle paper



POSITION 7: advice for the querent

Suggests the querent would do best to accept assistance from others, even surprising or forgotten allies. As an event, signifies an accompanied journey, either internal or external, along the lines of a pilgrimage; the travelers pass through a lush and abundant land wealthy in green and calm water and the man would do well to shed his boots and find the sure and graceful footing the Woodwoose enjoys. A slow pace and a circuitous route as a deliberate escape from the modern world and its machines of death. Can indicate the use of traditional herbal medicines; a meditation on the past, a return to old ways, or the use of wandering, dreaming, and visions to gain knowledge and guidance. Also: the querent should take caution to prevent foot problems which may become serious if unattended.



POSITION 8: the probable outcome

Signifies an ambivalent figure, or an uncertain, undecided future; fate has not been decided. The querent faces a Death wielding and adorned with fresh vegetation: but which Death is it? We cannot know if it is Death sporting a ghastly counterfeit costume of a Woodwose as it is about to devour the last living things it has encountered in its path, the wake of which we see to be a swath of debris and detritus; or if it is a Death that has finished its role in a transforming cycle, rupturing with the past and making humus of its decay, and now issues forth from itself a sprouting regeneration, a yearning to become a Woodwose and refresh the wasted world with green and growth.



Sarah Falkner

Sarah Falkner is a multimedia, transdisciplinary artist whose practices include occurrent arts, healing arts, and text-based forms. She is both a New York state licensed and lineage-apprenticed/initiated healthcare practitioner. Her first novel *Animal Sanctuary* won the Starcherone Prize for Innovative Fiction in 2011, and that same year she was a MacDowell fellow in residence. Since 2010, she has co-produced and hosted a monthly Hudson Valley community radio program, *Roots, Runners, Rhizomes: Radical Health and Healing from the Underground*. She is currently at work on a third novel and collaborating on a series of video installations with Brooklyn-based artist Anna Ehrsam.

The Lonely Word, 2012-13, archival pigment print on Hahnemühle paper



**SO THAT WE DON'T FALL OFF
THE EDGE OF THE WORLD**



We go through a day picking up the fragments everywhere and somehow patching them together so that we don't fall off the edge of the world, or through a hole in the story.

— Robert Kroetsch (Kenyon 1985, 14)

Canadian poet and novelist Robert Kroetsch refers to the fragmentariness and relativity of a postmodern vision of reality, one in which magic realism and the carnivalesque contradict “older conventions of realism” and an imposed “coherence that isn’t there” (Kenyon 1985, 14). Nicholas Kahn and Richard Selesnick use similar strategies to open up narrative possibilities. They create visual and verbal allegories, which comment on sociopolitical and ecological issues, by first picking up fragments of art history, philosophy, literature, theater, science, and shamanism.

Truppe Fledermaus is indebted, among other things, to:

- Italian philosopher Giulio Camillo’s 1550 *Theatre of Memory*
- Johann Strauss’s 1874 operetta *Die Fledermaus* (the bat’s revenge)
- Jorge Luis Borges and Italo Calvino’s magic realist stories
- Diverse artists and art movements, such as: Giuseppe Arcimboldo (Italian, 16th century witty portraits composed of fruits, vegetables, fish, and trees), 17th century Dutch vanitas (paintings which contain collections of objects symbolic of the inevitability of death), John Everett Millais’ famous Pre-Raphaelite painting *Ophelia* (1852), Caspar David Friedrich (German, 19th century Romantic landscape paintings), and Pictorialist photographs (International, 1860s-1920s) including Julia Margaret Cameron’s transcendent portraits

The disappearance of entire species of bats from a mysterious white nose syndrome, and climate change evidenced by rising sea levels and intense storms (Hurricane Katrina, tsunami in Japan) are among recent events that the artists allude to, if not directly reference, in the series. The magic realist/carnivalesque spirit serves as a ground for the confrontation of the sociopolitical/ecological discourse and the assemblage of disparate elements, which the artists use to guide and engage the viewer.

Magic realism in art was an attempt to find a new way of expressing a deeper understanding of reality. German art critic Franz Roh coined the term “magic realism” in 1925 to define a post-expressionist form of painting which is highly detailed, photograph-like, and represents the mystical non-material aspects of reality (Bowers 2004, 9). In the other realities of magic realist literature, time and narrative may not be linear, dominant cultural worldviews are questioned, and the magical and the ordinary are one and the same. Kroetsch believes the most important aspects of magic realism are “that it doesn’t ever lead you to a single answer” and “it breaks down certain very strongly-established boundaries between imagination and so-called reality which probably aren’t there. We’ve invented those boundaries and magic realism is taking out those boundaries in a certain way” (Kenyon 1985, 16, 11).

Rider of the Apocalypse, 2012-13, archival pigment print on Hahnemühle paper



David Danow (2004, 3, 22) defines the carnivalesque in comparable terms:

When a similar [Carnival] spirit permeates a work of literature, we suggest that it partakes of or promotes the Carnivalesque. That is, it supports the unsupportable, assails the unassailable, at times regards the supernatural as natural, takes fiction as truth, and makes the extraordinary or "magical" as viable a possibility as the ordinary or "real," so that no true distinction is perceived or acknowledged between the two... The carnivalesque therefore represents not so much a single literary form as a complex *form of thought*.

Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian philosopher and literary critic developed the term carnivalesque to characterize writing that depicts the de-stabilization or reversal of power structures. Bakhtin (1984, 6) based these theories on the medieval carnival, which he describes as "a second world and a second life outside of officialdom". All Medieval people participated in the carnival; in some European cities it lasted up to three months of the year. Bakhtin (1984, 7) believed the "comic rituals and spectacles" of the medieval carnival are "life itself, but shaped according to a certain pattern of play. In fact, carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators". The carnival is dualistic and ambivalent; it unites—the sacred and profane, high and low, wisdom and stupidity, old and young, birth and death. "The theme of death as renewal, the combination of death and birth, and the pictures of gay death play an important part" (Bakhtin 1984, 51).

Things in the carnival are reversed: cloths are worn upside down, household items serve as weapons, and the clown is king. Parodies of serious rituals—comic crownings and uncrownings, initiation of a knight, the transfer of feudal rights—are prominent (Bakhtin 1984, 5). Those deprived of power enact the role of those with power to challenge authority and the status quo. In the carnival, time is not absent but suspended.

All the symbols of the carnival idiom are filled with this pathos of change and renewal, with the sense of the gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities. We find here a characteristic logic of the "inside out" (*à l'envers*), of the "turnabout," of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings. A second life, a second world of folk culture is thus constructed; it is to a certain extent a parody of the extracarnival life, a "world inside out" (Bakhtin 1984, 11).

However, in rejecting the prevailing truth of the established order, folk culture does not pretend to have a finalized indisputable truth of its own. Carnival laughter is ambivalent and dialogic; "it is also directed at those who laugh" (Bakhtin 1984, 12). Laughter regenerates as it reduces; in other words, degradation in the carnival is required for rebirth and renewal. Speaking of Renaissance grotesque imagery directly related to folk carnival culture, Bakhtin (1984, 52) writes, "The last thing one can say of the real grotesque is that it is static; on the contrary it seeks to grasp in its imagery the very act of becoming and growth, the eternal incomplete unfinished nature of being".

Truppe Fledermaus embodies Bakhtin's carnivalesque spirit and represents imagined carnivals. A troupe of actors, dressed as bats, greenmen and death dancers, roam the countryside performing only for animals. Wearing death masks and top hats, the actors pull striped carnival carts filled with death masks, blank mannequin heads, and ceramic monster heads. A carnival booth on antlers houses the upper half of a fortuneteller dressed in a bat costume. The actors perform puppet shows and concerts for ghosts using crystal glasses. They levitate upside down, ride crude unicycles, and perform rituals around a bonfire. Death dancers in Japanese yukatas, hakamas, and kasa hats jump out of the bog flinging their shoes; their ghosts dance on the wet sand. A masked death figure hitches a ride on the back of a giant flying bat, clearly a person wearing a makeshift bat costume. Kahn &



Selesnick's work, like the medieval carnival, is "life itself, but shaped according to a certain pattern of play."

Kahn & Selesnick mix characters, time periods, and genres in their parables and parodies to create ambiguity and allow for suspension of disbelief. When not in bat, weed or death dancer costumes, the actors wear Victorian clothing. The backdrop of *Truppe Fledermaus* is often the endangered wetlands of Cape Cod, although it could be any number of places around the world. In this suspended time and place they are able to address societal issues, but they do not tell the viewer specifically what to think because "no truth is ever *the* truth" (Danow 2004, 24).

Kahn & Selesnick's world is inside out. The disempowered artists become King of Weeds, King of Birds, Prophet of the Ditch, and Reginald Perrin (a character from a subversive 1970s British sitcom who is driven to bizarre behavior by a pointless job). Empowered humans dress as bats on the verge of extinction, to warn us of our shortsightedness. The troupe performs only for the animals, because those ultimately in power are not listening. In *The Lonely Word* Richard Selesnick awkwardly jumps into the sky on a deserted beach shouting into a primitive megaphone.

Kahn & Selesnick's "pathos of change and renewal" includes images that are sometimes humorous, occasionally disturbing, and often apocalyptic. Laughter regenerates and death is gestation. Nothing is fixed in the carnival world; everything is in a state of becoming. In *Dreams of a Drowning World*, the epilogue to *Truppe Fledermaus*, the troupe of actors seemingly lie in repose; they are floating in water surrounded by flora, fauna, and fragments of humankind (musical instruments, books, toys, a typewriter, plates of food, masks, mirrors, and wooden trunks.) Is this the end of the troupe who's performances, it turns out, were tales of environmental devastation and warnings of a rising tide? Are the animals taxidermy specimens of

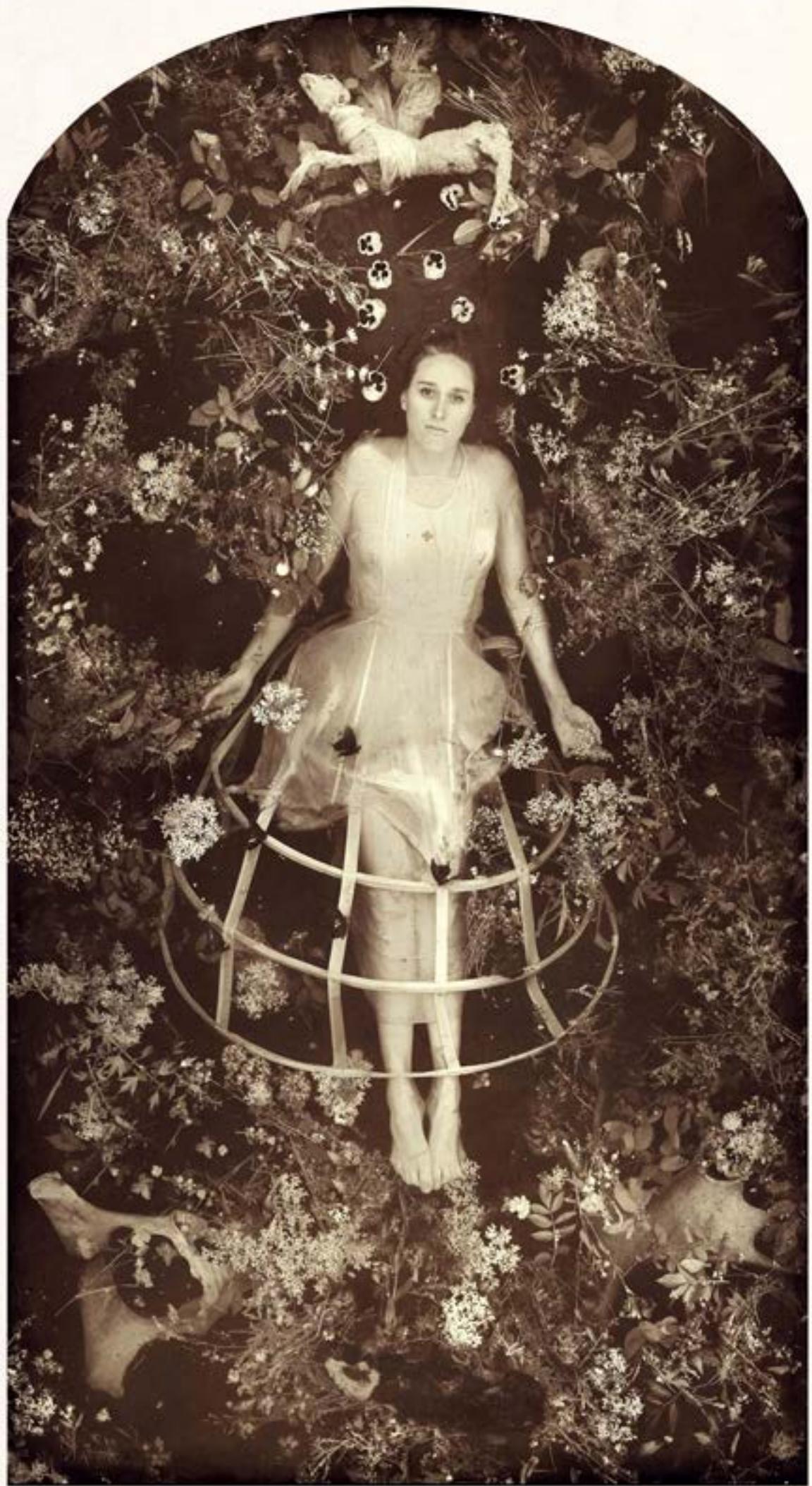
the troupe's audience or has nature won? Perhaps it is a message of consumer greed and diminishing resources.

These photographs are indebted to the famous Pre-Raphaelite painting *Ophelia* by John Everett Millais, which is based on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Out picking flowers Ophelia slips and falls into a stream; mad with grief after her father's murder by Hamlet, her lover, she allows herself to die. Like the painting, Kahn & Selesnick's photographs are visually and conceptually intense. The flowers are symbolic: the poppy means death, hydrangeas heartlessness, pansies love in vain, and clematis artifice. But there is also hope in Kahn & Selesnick's compositions. Perhaps the actors are in a transcendent or benumbed state. Many are surrounded by flowers, which represent optimism—peonies good fortune, Queen Anne's lace sanctuary, sunflowers longevity, and elderflowers zeal. Submerged just below the surface in the photograph *Alexis, Elderflower, Lamb* is a mare's pelvis, a life-affirming symbol of reproduction, which suggests an opportunity for rebirth if we awaken from our unresponsive state.

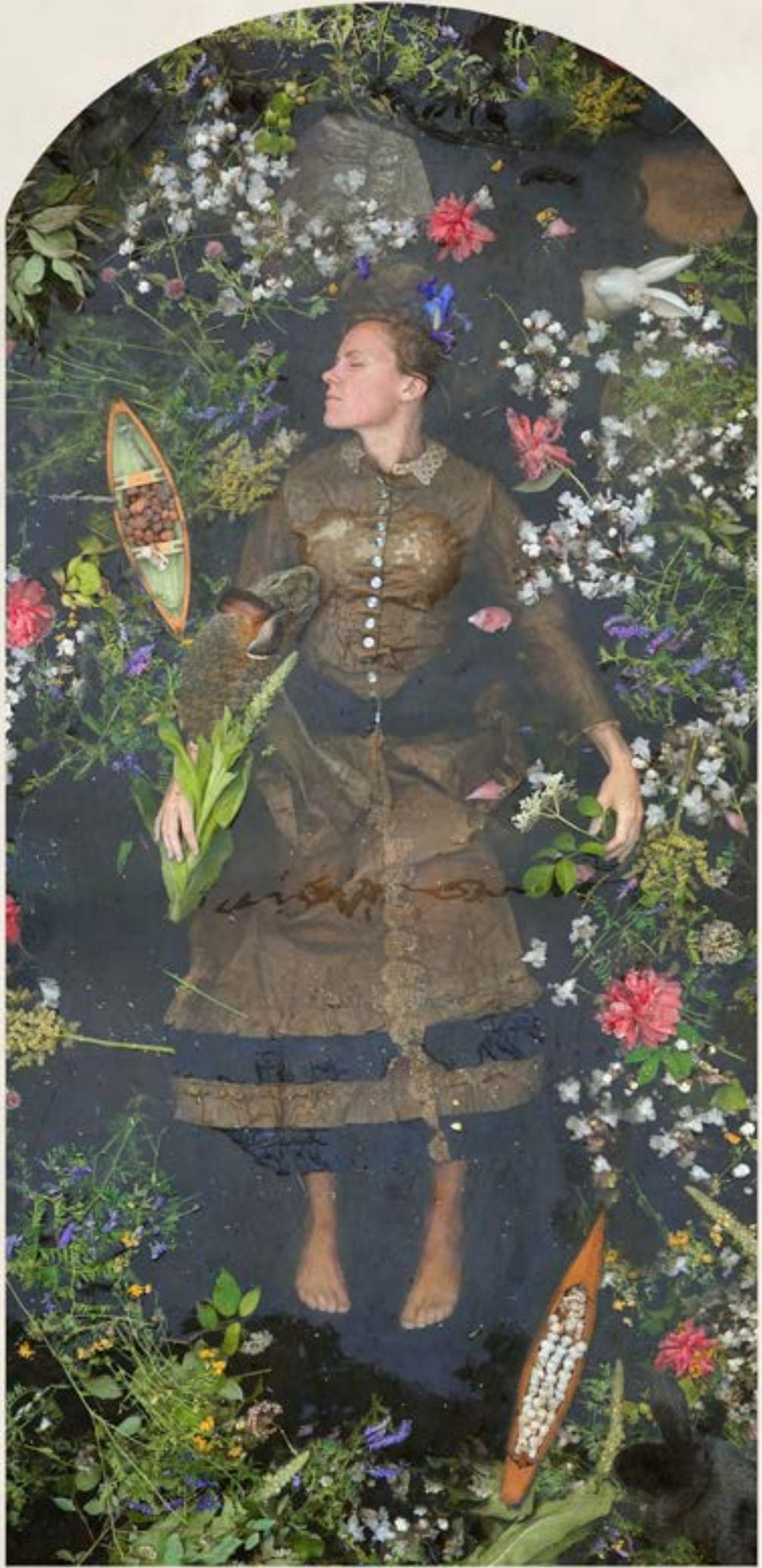
The end must contain the potentialities of the new beginning, just as death leads to a new birth.

— Mikhail Bakhtin (1984, 283)

Barbara Räcker
Director, Marion Art Gallery
State University of New York at Fredonia



Alexis, Elderflower, Lamb, 2015, archival pigment print



Christina, Mullein, and Rabbit, 2015, archival pigment print



The Dark Puppeteer, 2012-13, archival pigment print on Hahnemühle paper



Lillian, Sunflower, Apple, Bat, 2015, archival pigment print



Hazel, Sunflower, Clematis, Salamander, 2015, archival pigment print



Samurai Mask, Peony, Porgy, 2015, archival pigment print on Hahnemühle paper

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Voyage of Greenman, 2012-13, archival pigment print on Hahnemühle paper









A Ship of Fools, 2012-13, archival pigment print on Hahnemühle paper



from

**ONE HUNDRED VIEWS OF
THE DROWNING WORLD**

a Memoir by

**DR. FALKE OF HIS DAYS WITH ORLOFSKY
AND THE TRUPPE FLEDERMAUS**



Baba Yaga's House, 2012-13, archival pigment print on Hahnemühle paper

BABA YAGA

FROM OUR VANTAGE POINT ON THE SANDS AT BREAN, we could see the island of Steep Holm rising out of the brown waters of the Bristol Channel. Even though the sky was dark and obscure, the visibility was miraculously clear, and I almost felt as though we could walk across the exposed mud-flats to the island. At low tide the ocean is barely visible here, the huge tidal fluctuations being second only to the Bay of Fundy in Nova Scotia. Walkers have been known to become stranded on the flats; Orlofsky told me of a child who wandered out too far and drowned—the adults who had tried to rescue her were too heavy to reach her without sinking themselves. Now of course, in the drowning world, it seems we are all in the same predicament, the hand just out of reach, help not forthcoming. On the spine of the distant island, I could see what appeared to be a ruin. Orlofsky told me that prior to the last century ships would abandon crewmembers suspected of having cholera on the island; as the only accommodation was an old canvas tent. These men often died in abject misery. Eventually a sanatorium was built, the only Victorian isolation hospital sited on a British island. In the late 1890s, the last remaining patient died of the bubonic plague; the body was burned in the hospital yard, and the buildings abandoned shortly thereafter. These were only the most recent of a long line of mendicants to have occupied the island, the most famous being Gildas Bardonicus. According to John Rutter's *Delineations of Somerset*, published in 1832, "here it was that he composed his querimonious treatise *De Excidio Britanniae*". The Saint had hoped to enjoy uninterrupted solitude on the island, but unsurprisingly became engaged in frequent and often violent altercations with pirates and Norsemen. Orlofsky pointed towards the South; in the distance, the first of the Punch and Judy men were dragging their carts onto the sands. The beach was deserted and cold, and I struggled to imagine how there could be any audience for these performances, but Orlofsky assured me that a crowd would eventually brave the gale and form around the booths. When he was a child, he remembered his grandmother driving their old Austin 1100 onto the beach so that they could watch the puppet show from the car. The winds had been so extreme that the miniature theater blew over, leaving the puppeteer foolishly exposed, his be-puppeted paws flailing in the rain. As a student of the Italian commedia dell'arte, I had always struggled to understand this homegrown, debased version of the original: perhaps you had to be British, to have endured congealed brown sauce in place of marinara, spent afternoons shivering on the muddy sands instead of swimming in the crystal blue waters off Capri. I thought of the feast of fools, which seemed an antecedent for such pantomimes; during this festival, laymen would take over the church and burlesque sacred ceremonies for a day, free from fear of punishment and retribution for their blasphemies. During the English Restoration, the violent actions of characters such as Mr. Punch, the gilded crocodile, and Joey the Clown provided a much needed relief valve for audiences suppressed by years of Puritanism. Orlofsky described the almost orgasmic excitement of attending his first pantomime, the audience whipped into a riotous frenzy, screaming advice and abuse at the performers; he also recalled attending bonfire day in Lewes, in which giant effigies of unpopular public figures are exploded with fireworks on the hilltops surrounding town. Standing on this forlorn strip of sand, I was put in mind of a recurring dream I have had since I was young man: I stand with a large group of onlookers, either on a beach staring out to sea, or in a theater waiting for the curtain to open. Something momentous is about to happen, although it is unclear exactly what that might be. Perhaps, as in the medieval carnival, the world will be turned upside-down, and all versions of the truth will be contested and reversed, if only for a moment. Or perhaps, like the child caught in the quickening sands, a quiet tragedy, the hand just out of reach, the tide coming in, implacable. ☐

A-TO-Z

ONE EVENING after a particularly successful performance of *Die Fledermaus*, Lulu regaled the collected company with a rather unusual observation: did we know that certain towns spontaneously grow phantom streets? Predictably there were various objections, but she persisted. Under normal circumstances one might never know they existed, but in states of great duress or inebriation, one might find oneself wandering down a street one had never seen before, and that even with all the searching in the world, armed with the most recent A-to-Zs and Baedekers, one would never be able to find it again. She herself had experienced this very phenomenon in Bremen several years ago trying to return to her hotel after taking violently ill from spoiled duck. She had become lost and found herself in a narrow alleyway of peculiarly shaped brick facades intersecting and diverging at weird angles. Looking through the window of an abandoned restaurant, she had been amazed to see an entire flotilla of ships of every size and description sailing over the empty tables of the deserted dining floor. Orlofsky had chimed in about a country lane with a barrage balloon hangar that he had once seen on the Levels that he had been unable to locate again. To my not inconsiderable surprise, when pressed, everyone turned out to have a similar tale of some kind or another. "What about you, Falke?" someone had asked. I felt myself squirm in discomfort, not because I didn't have a story—I did, very much so in fact—but rather because I knew Lulu to be lying. I had been with her to the restaurant in question, which was in fact in Lubeck not Bremen, and was actually quite well known. Orlofsky had been there also and could only be humoring her. Mumbling something or other, I had taken my leave and stumbled into the night. As I walked along the canal, I turned Lulu's notion on its head: what if the place in question was real, but had withered and contorted in the mind like a dead tree limb, so inert in the brain that one could no longer recognize it, even if it was right in front of one's face. Everyone's mind no doubt contained a dead letter office of places that could no longer be reconciled with their waking lives.

Lost in thought as I was, I didn't notice that I must have strayed from my normal route home. None of the buildings seemed the least bit familiar, or even to be in the usual vernacular of stepped gables common to this area. Furthermore, the dawn light was creeping up the streets, soft yet subtly miasmic, and I wondered how long I had been wandering around, unaware of my surroundings. By now I was also feeling quite ill, having over-indulged in champagnes and brandies the previous evening. A small cobbled lane to my right, though not quite familiar, looked at least a little brighter and more cheerful, as if it might lead me out of my growing feelings of gloom and nausea. As I swayed along it, I was amazed to see the walls plastered with posters and playbills for practically every performance we'd ever talked about staging and some we had only imagined—I had often wondered where the stagehands posted them. This was the place obviously. Yet by the time I exited the lane onto the crowded main thoroughfare—now feverish and perspiring, but at least back on familiar ground—I knew that if I turned to look back it would be gone, all my projects and schemes, perhaps my entire life, just a phantom street in my own mind, unnoticed to the any of the passersby as they hurried about their business in the cold morning air, oblivious, remote. ☐



Poster Walls, 2012-13, archival pigment print on Hahnemühle paper