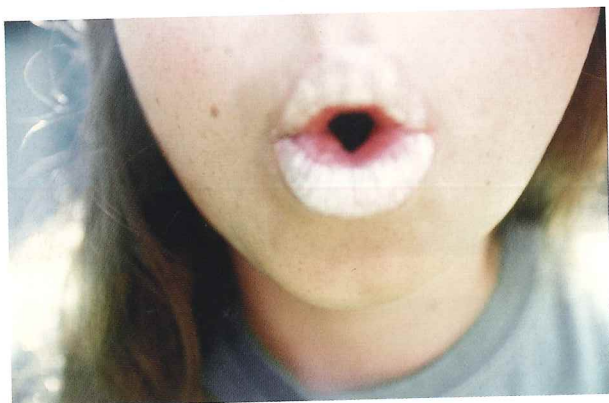


◀ **T**he primary way that seeing with the aid of photographs and ordinary seeing are *supposed* to differ is that eyes have irremediable “blind spots,” lending photographs greater authority. A hole in each retina literally produces incomplete images, which our brains routinely “fill in,” forming complete pictures that leave us totally unaware of how impoverished our sight actually is. Unless one has smudged the camera lens, scratched a negative, or let in too much light due to overexposure or a cracked camera



box, one anticipates totally “transparent” photographs. Philosopher Kendall Walton’s “transparency thesis,” which regards photographs as immediate, automatic and truthful, captures viewers’ expectations concerning the capacity of cameras to depict scenes as they really are, availing greater accuracy than “ordinary seeing.” One could say that Frank Stella’s claim concerning his paintings, “What you see is what you get,” better characterizes photography’s transparency, since paintings are rarely so immediate.

By contrast, the photographs in Liza Ryan’s “Exploded Moment” exhibition at William Griffin were anything but transparent. They blend the constructed status of drawing with professional errors and imperfections of ordinary seeing. Strangely, our brains emit the bits of imagery her photographs omit, as if we are experiencing ordinary seeing, instead of photographically seeing. For *She could barely contain herself* (all work 2010), she blasts a glass pitcher holding cut flowers with light, thus transforming the classic, still-life setup into an ethereal scene whose lower, right-hand quadrant vanishes. The brain somehow recognizes that the whole pitcher remains, despite its being disguised by light. Likewise, we see the light in *It’s only light* as a human figure, perhaps a ghost or a spirit, lurking in a forest glade. As these examples demonstrate, this filling-in effect occurs no less during photographic than ordinary seeing. If our brains readily add in missing pieces during photographic seeing, Walton’s transparency thesis is doomed. Perhaps “filling in” occurs naturally. Human beings have learned how to “make do,” because our visually complete world is actually filled with holes.

Unlike “still-life” setups, several images here incite action. Accentuating the sensuality of the “Got milk?” TV ad campaign, *Moon Mouth*’s milk-ring lips invite the viewer’s kiss. *Hover* displays a magnifying glass’s unidentifiable content, while *Pulse*’s hand-cupped milk awaits a slurping tongue. Eager to push the concept of “incomplete” photographs even further, Ryan produced unique pictures using spliced photographic strips. For *Exploded Moment*, she literally wove photographic ribbons to produce a graspable grid that conveys the beaming sun’s streaming rays bursting against the night sky. Unlike ordinary photography’s seamless, flat surfaces, her woven pictures ripple and swell. Another woven photograph, *Separate Sun*, conveys the sun’s form, though its washed-out look conveys its absence, as if it were a mote of light, a super-bright sunburst, or the afterimage we project after staring too long at a fluorescent sign. *Six Suns* is not woven, yet it also addresses the sun’s whitened-out reflection, when the sun’s extreme brightness makes its presence noticeable.

For *EKG Ocean*, she pairs the image of her brother’s EKG graph with a Vija Celmins-like image of a serene seascape, whose horizon line feels endless. *Examine my stare* juxtaposes five images of sunbursts in which parts of a boy’s body are eclipsed by the moon. Ryan’s title begs the question, who or what does the staring—the camera, photographer, or subject? For Walton, only the first fulfils this role. By contrast, Ryan’s work navigates an indeterminate course between her abilities, equipment, and setup.

~Sue Spaid

LIZA RYAN (TOP TO BOTTOM), *EXPLODED MOMENT*, 2010, HAND-CUT PIGMENT PRINTS WITH INK & GRAPHITE, 24.5 X 93 IN. *MOON MOUTH*, 2010, C-PRINT, 43.5 X 28.5 IN. *IT’S ONLY LIGHT*, 2010, C-PRINT, 31 X 35.5 IN.