

DECEMBER 2013

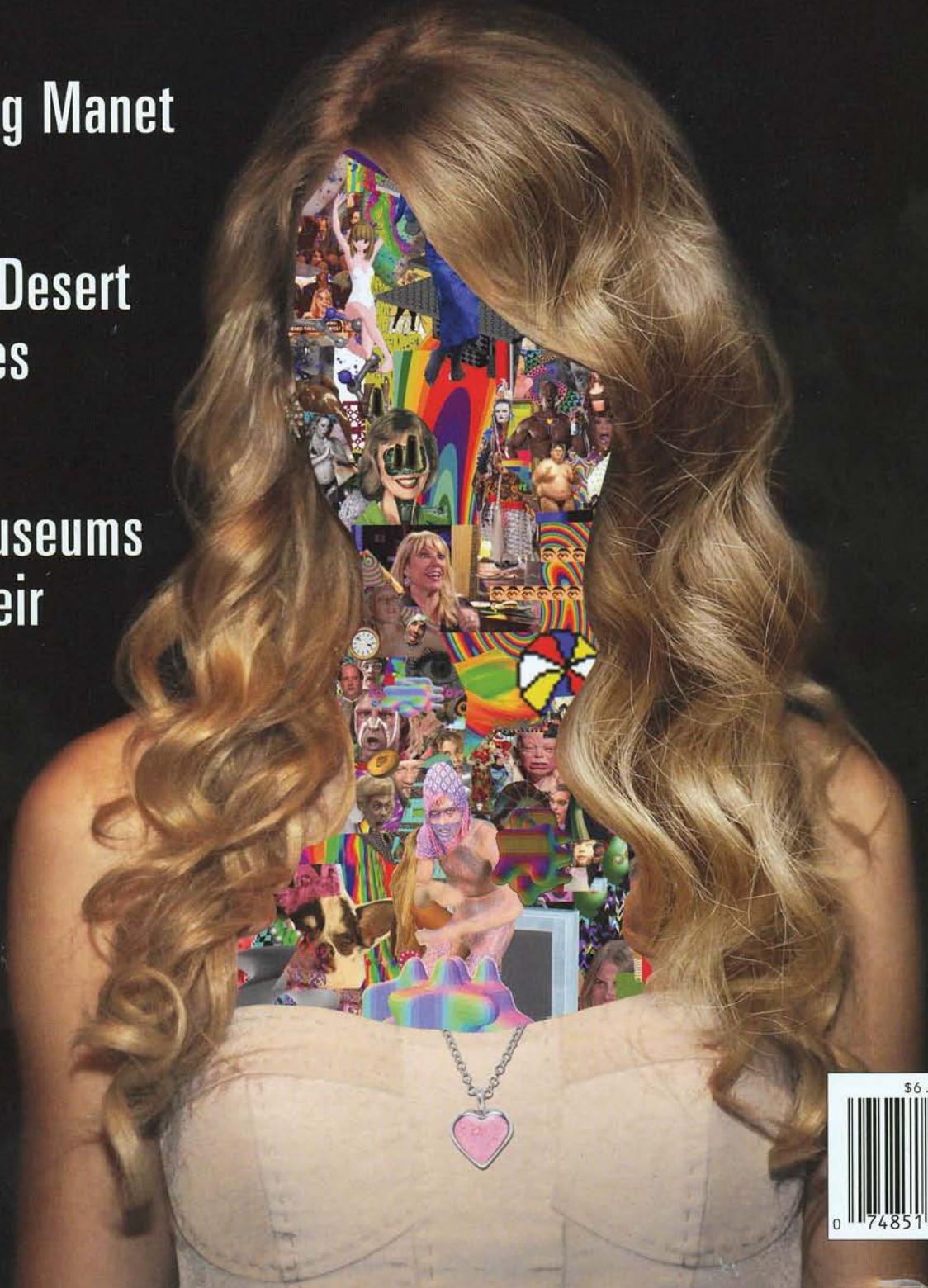
ARTnews

The New Collage

Remixing Manet

China's Desert Treasures

How Museums Title Their Shows



\$6.00



inhabitants in grids that flicker with innuendos of life in urban ruins. One breathtaking work, *Cleaning the Core, Ponte City, Johannesburg* (2008), depicts ant-like workers on a mountain of rubble from gutted apartments.

In another gallery, Mary Sibande's installation, *Wish you were here* (2010), transformed a domestic servant into a personification of female power. The black mannequin in the center of the red, white, and blue tableau wears a drop-dead gorgeous reinvention of a maid's uniform with a voluminous skirt swirling around her on the floor.

Among dozens of other compelling works, Sue Williamson's film *Better Lives* (2003), grapples with obstacles faced by newcomers from elsewhere in Africa.

All this artistic freedom is a sign of progress in Joburg, but the outspoken artists and their works leave no doubt that racism and social inequality endure in South Africa.

—**Suzanne Muchnic**

'Le Mois de la Photo Biennial'

Various venues

Montreal

The 13th edition of the Montreal photo biennial, titled "Drone: The Automated Image" (see Art Talk, page 26), showcased the many ways contemporary artists use technology to extend human vision, from a large-format camera launched 115,000 feet into the atmosphere via weather balloon to an endoscope fed into the recesses of the human body. Organized by British curator Paul Wombell, the multi-venue show comprised 25 exhibitions of video, photography, and stills from social media and webcams. By turns serious and playful, conceptual and thought provoking, the show provided a nuanced perspective on the risks and rewards of automated seeing.

Some of the most trenchant work demonstrated the unflinching vision of mechanized imaging. In Jon Rafman's ongoing photographic series "The Nine Eyes of Google Street View," begun in 2008, the artist combs Google Street View looking for bizarre, raw, or beautiful scenes that Google's cameras inadvertently captured while photographing streets for Google Maps. In one shot, two men's faces are covered bandit-style with kerchiefs, while another holds a frying pan



Jon Rafman, *3081 Valmont Road, Boulder, Colorado, USA, 2012*, from the series "The Nine Eyes of Google Street View," archival pigment print mounted on Dibond, 40" x 64".
Maison de la culture Marie-Uguay.

to his face and gives a thumbs-down. The foreboding image suggests that human life is at stake.

Elsewhere, drones provide access to ecosystems we might not see without them. For Jana Sterbak's six-channel video installation *From Here To There* (2003), the artist attached a video camera to Stanley, a Jack Russell terrier. The film takes viewers on his canine journey to the icy north, where, romping in the snow, he encounters a marmot and frolics with other dogs, the screen shaking as he barks. Other views of the natural world emerged in Véronique Ducharme's 2012–13 series "Encounters," for which she set up a hunting camera in the woods and programmed its shutter to be triggered by movement and heat. Displayed as slides projected on the wall, the images show various wild animals blithely unaware of the camera, or sometimes inspecting it closely. In shots where the flash failed, deep darkness and a time-stamp leave viewers to wonder what they cannot see.

Together, the works demonstrated the capacities of technology while also affirming the wit and insight of the artist's hand and eye.

—**Rachel Somerstein**

Xie Xiaoze

Chambers Fine Art Beijing

Born in Guangdong, China, and based in California, Xie Xiaoze has long used painting to represent other means of communication, such as books, newspapers, and their printed images. He makes works of almost photographic accuracy, softened by luxuriant brushwork and surfaces that seem

too rich for the dusty dryness of the stacked archival matter they depict. Often seen on their sides—their bundled spines or paper edges tensely poised between the abstract and the real—the publications suggest geometric stripes filtered through the ambiguities of a Richter-esque lens.

Titled "Multiple Perspectives," this exhibition contrasted methods of communication with an array of signature works from the artist's "Chinese Library" and "Both Sides Now" series, as well as a new sequence based on images from Weibo,

China's most trafficked microblog website. Two grand, recent paintings from the "Chinese Library" series, both 2012, represent piles of traditionally bound, soft-cover scholarly books. In one, the subject of the painting is clear, but the other is much more abstract and lush, offering a close-up view of dense, tattered pages.

The Weibo series, painted on small aluminum panels, features many sketchy paintings of images taken off the site—from news photographs of cars in traffic to an ambiguous shot of a lone building against a hazy sky—installed together randomly in a spacious gallery. The scattering replicated the speed and unpredictability of information as it passes through the site, as well as its overwhelming accumulation—preserved, paradoxically, in the ancient art form of painting.

All of these works, in their way, are *natures mortes* that remind us that everything is in transition, soon to be revised or discarded. Xie's theme is ostensibly media and how it evolves to convey information, but he also makes work about history, painting, and the fantasy of salvaging knowledge, not just data—asking what can be saved, and what is worth saving.

—**Lilly Wei**



Xie Xiaoze, *Chinese Library No. 53, 2012*, oil on linen, 39 3/4" x 59". Chambers Fine Art.