

## **Everything here is not what it seems**

By Alice Thorson The Kansas City Star

*Constructed Realities*, a group show of contemporary photography at Grand Arts, is a gathering of seductive fictions.

Curated by Barbara Bloemink, director of the Guggenheim, Las Vegas, and a former director of the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, the exhibit joins a growing list of thought-provoking shows by invited curators at Grand Arts, including David Pagel's 1997 "Spot Making Sense" and Bill Arning's 1999 "Neither/Nor."

Nothing in *Constructed Realities* -- from James Casebere's haunting interior shot of a flooded Monticello, to David Levinthal's blurred color image of a galloping cowboy -- is what it seems.

Levinthal's cowboy is actually a toy figurine, rendered real-looking by the artifice of the photographer. Casebere's watery Monticello is really a small model, built from cardboard and Styrofoam and flooded with resin.

Landscape is another genre in which this international assembly of photographers practice their deceptions. The ethereal clouds that waft through a blue sky in Oliver Boberg's *Himmel IV* are in truth made of common cotton. Yet, like French artist Didier Massard's shot of a cascading waterfall framed by craggy green cliffs -- a handmade production involving moss and white powder -- it produces the same feeling of romantic grandeur as the real thing.

It's scary, how easily one can be deceived, which is what makes this work so relevant. Governments, the military and the mass media all have access to tools that can make ostensibly truthful images lie in an age of digital manipulation.

Bloemink's *Constructed Realities* is hardly a new idea -- Casebere has been making models for many years; Levinthal began making Wild West images in the mid-1980s; Tracey Moffatt's *Something More, 1*, part of an enigmatic narrative cycle of staged photographs starring herself, was made in 1989. But Bloemink has refreshed the idea with a good sampling of new practitioners of the art of photographic deceit, including Anthony Goicolea and Catherine Chalmers.

In his *Last Supper*, Goicolea digitally collages multiple images of himself acting the delinquent schoolboy. Chalmers' large color photograph *Aloesaurus* centers on an "invented" insect.

The *Aloesaurus*, which blends in with the spiky green leaves of the plant it occupies, is, in fact, a cockroach. The artist refrigerated it to slow it down, then painted it and affixed spiky little protrusions to its back. In the last half-decade Chalmers has become increasingly well known for her seductive color photographs of insects, rodents and

reptiles mating or eating each other in violent Darwinian encounters. In fall 2003 she will do a sculpture and video project at Grand Arts.

Another relative newcomer is Craig Kalpakjian, whose spooky computer renderings of duct system interiors were a highlight of the Whitney Museum of American Art's *2001 Bitstreams* exhibition. Kalpakjian is represented in *Constructed Realities* by photographs of virtual HVAC systems, created on the computer. The real genius to these, however, is the way the artist manages to create quite striking industrial abstractions out of such a dry, non-visual subject.

Viewers who saw Bloemink's *Tokyo Pop* exhibit at the Gallery at Village Shalom last fall will remember Japanese artists Yoshio Itagaki and Izima Kaoru.

Itagaki's *Tourists on the Moon* reiterates his futuristic vision of the moon as a commercialized vacation destination for camera-toting tourists. Kaoru's *Matsuda Jun Wears Marni 271* is part of his series of photographs portraying Japanese celebrities in designer outfits posed in soap-operatic death scenarios. Matsuda Jun's "body" is all but hidden within the field of burgeoning yellow sunflowers in which she has expired.

This exhibit reprises Hiroshi Sugimoto's elegant black-and-white portrait of artist Piet Mondrian, seen at Dolphin and purchased by the Hallmark Photographic Collection earlier this year. Viewers may be surprised to learn that the figure in the photograph is not the artist at all but a wax museum effigy of him.

Nor is Vic Muniz's photograph of a Richard Serra sculpture in the Whitney Museum what it appears. The real subject of the photograph is dust. Muniz gathered the dust from the Whitney Museum and then used it, rather like powdered charcoal, to reproduce an installation shot of the Serra piece.

The exhibit's accompanying brochure provides a long shot of the model created by Dutch artist Edwin Zwakman for his photograph *Fly Over*. Its aerial view of a highway cloverleaf seen through wispy (cotton) clouds has every appearance of being real -- except for the telltale coffee cup that Zwakman has included in the picture.

Gregory Crewdson's *Natural Wonder* (1994) and Florian Maier-Aichen's *Untitled* (2001) complete this intriguing exhibit.