

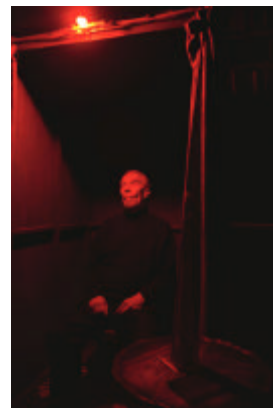
## Concerning the Spiritual in Photography January 23-March 14, 2004

Opening reception: Thursday, January 22, 5:30-7:30 pm  
Gallery talk by Leslie K. Brown, PRC Curator, Thursday, February 19, 6 pm

The PRC is pleased to host a group show featuring the contemporary photographic work of • **Bill Armstrong** • **Carol Golemboski** • **Jane Marsching & Deb Todd Wheeler** • **Lauren O'Neal** • **Daniel Ranalli** • **Jo Sandman** • **Chrysanne Stathacos** • **Shannon Taggart** along with historical spirit photographs and ephemera from the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin and Boston University's Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center

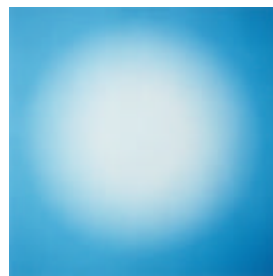
Approaching photography and photographer literally as a "medium," this exhibition considers how historical and present-day practitioners utilize and reference intrinsic mechanics of light-sensitive media to achieve spiritual allusions and illusions. The title of this exhibition is a nod to the early-twentieth century painter Wassily Kandinsky's landmark book, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1911), which heralded artists as the leaders of a new spiritual age. Many of the makers are from New England or have ties to Boston, an area that gave rise to spirit photography itself as well as one of the most notable mediums. A selection of vintage photographs of purported otherworldly phenomena traces and illuminates a specific episode in cultural history (the case of the Boston medium "Margery") while the contemporary work illustrates that such concerns still haunt our minds.

Playing upon the idea of the psychic and the séance, the modern manifestation highlights what has been unique to photography since its invention: its simultaneous straddling of science, magic, and art. Today, as many photographers are moving from the darkroom to the "lightroom," a new beginning for the medium is heralded. The contemporary artists in this exhibition reset the clock, playing with some of photography's most essential qualities at a time when they are being radically redefined. Each artist represents a different angle and approach to articulating the illusive concept of the spiritual. This gathering, itself in a "dark room," conjures a chorus of voices, reminding us again of photography's—and by extension our own—ongoing relation to the unknown.



Shannon Taggart, *Brian in the Medium's Cabinet*, Arthur Findlay College at Stansted, 2003, C-Print, 18 x 12 inches, Courtesy of the artist

**Bill Armstrong** (New York, NY) creates colorful collages and then focuses his camera on infinity, resulting in abstract fuzzy pulsating spheres of pure color. Featured here will be selections from his *Infinity* series, specifically a suite of glowing blue globes. (Kandinsky, in fact, named blue as the most spiritual color.) The idea of infinity has long been associated with the sublime and the spiritual. Armstrong's choice of the orb relates to the shape of mandalas and the spiritual connotations of the circle. A native of the Boston area, Armstrong studied art history at Boston University and teaches at the International Center of Photography.



Bill Armstrong, *Untitled, #423* from the *Infinity Series*, 2002, C-print, 20 x 20 inches, Courtesy of the artist



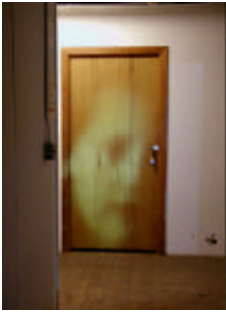
**Carol Golemboski** (Denver, CO) has been working on a series named after the Victorian concept of "Psychometry" – the belief that mediums can psychically "read" objects and their history. In her artistic recreation of this concept, Golemboski collects old objects and then invents new environments for them. The beautifully toned photos are often highly manipulated as well, creating literal and symbolic layers of meaning and memory. The markings on the pieces recall spirit writing, almost as if another presence is attempting to come through to "the other side." Her most recent images deal with specific psychic abilities such as Cheiromancy (palm reading), Tasseography (tea leave reading), and Numerology. Golemboski is an Assistant Professor of Photography at the University of Colorado at Denver.

Carol Golemboski, *Cheiromancy (Palm Reading)*, from the *Psychometry* series, 2003, toned gelatin silver print, 17 1/2 x 17 1/2 inches, Courtesy of the Robert Klein Gallery

**Jane Marsching and Deb Todd Wheeler** (Boston, MA) have collaborated to create *Stain*, a new media piece in response to the recent "apparition" of the Virgin Mary in the window of a Milton Hospital. Since its first sighting this past June, tens of thousands of spectators have flocked to the site on the outskirts of Boston. Extremely close-up footage of the third floor window's patterns and colors is combined with a soundtrack of ambient conversations and interviews with onlookers. Experienced using special glasses, the virtual projection is seen by the current viewer only, appearing as if large screen is hovering in front of one's eyes. This multivalent work addresses issues of belief and representation; some will see a chemical reaction from a broken window seal, others an aesthetic miracle. Marsching teaches at the Art Institute of Boston and Wheeler teaches at Massachusetts College of Art.



Jane Marsching and Deb Todd Wheeler, *Stain*, 2003, digital video still, Courtesy of the artists



**Lauren O'Neal** (Somerville, MA) creates haunting site-specific pieces by projecting blurred bodies and faces onto various household objects, chairs, walls, and doors. The source material for her images are in fact photographs that she took as a small child. O'Neal's method and the subject recall one of the earliest forms of "ghost entertainment"—the magic lantern phantasmagoria show. O'Neal will also be creating a site-specific installation in the PRC library. Printed on velum, a grouping of homunculi will be inserted into various books, relating to a specific image or page, to be discovered by chance much like an old keepsake tucked into a tome. Currently a candidate in Maine College of Art's MFA program, O'Neal is active in the local art and non-profit scene.

Lauren O'Neal, *Common Visions, Saint on Door*, 2002, projection, Courtesy of the artist

Daniel Ranalli, *Buddha #1*, 2002, toned gelatin silver print, photogram/ cliché verre, 16 x 16 inches, Courtesy of DNA GALLERY

**Daniel Ranalli** (Cambridge, MA) was inspired to create this spiritual series by a trip to Asia and images of the Buddha in situ. He began by making simple line drawings of seated Buddha figures on paper, which he then used to make photographic prints using a combination of early photographic processes—the cliché verre (drawing on a surface which is then printed) and photogram (made with no camera and directly with light). His luminous Buddha figures hover in space while emerging and retreating into their heavily toned background. The repeated similar, but unique Buddha images speak to the role of meditation in spiritual concerns as well as to spiritualism's interest in Eastern religions. Founder of Boston University's graduate arts administration program, Ranalli divides his time between Cambridge and Cape Cod.

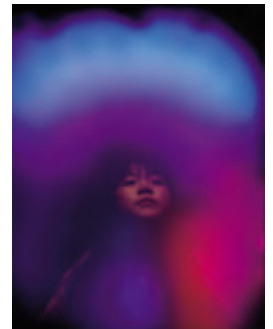


**Jo Sandman** (Somerville, MA) uses altered and found x-rays to plumb the inner psyche. These mysterious images, which are sepia toned, to inner realms and other dimensions. Invented in 1895, the x-ray has long been a metaphor for spiritual concerns and what lies beyond our sight. Sandman has also been collecting small bits of stone that recall human faces, which she then prints using the 19<sup>th</sup> century photographic process of Van Dyke Brown. The resulting photograms are mysterious and ghost-like, recalling ethereal orbs in spirit photographs. The experimental spirit of Sandman's work is consistent with her training at Black Mountain College.

Jo Sandman, *Light Memory #1, Echo*, 1996/2003, Edition 1/5, sepia toned gelatin print, 23 x 19 inches, Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Kayafas

Chrysanne Stathacos, *Nara, Japan*, 2001, from *The Aura Project*, 2001, Polaroid, Courtesy of the artist

**Chrysanne Stathacos** (New York, NY), an internationally-exhibited artist, has been traveling the world for the past three years taking aura portraits using a "bio-feedback" camera. To date, she has taken over 700 instant images of people from a wide variety of backgrounds: Buddhist monks, Japanese pedestrians, New York artists, and Indian healers. The pictures are awash in a spectrum of colors, each corresponding to an emotion or symbolic interpretation of the person's psyche. These photographs recall interests of turn-of-the-century artists, scientists, Theosophists, and other thinkers who investigated the spiritual in science and art, including theories of color and vibrations in the ether.



**Shannon Taggart** (Rochester, NY), a MFA student at Rochester Institute of Technology, has been photographing the modern psychic communities of Lily Dale in Western New York and Arthur Findlay College in England. Her vibrant color images of séances and life in these unique communities combine the best attributes of documentary and art. Taken in available light, Taggart's glimpses often feature blurred and abstracted color and motion, mirroring the experiences and emotions occurring before her.

The exhibition is complemented by a small section of historical photographs and archival materials primarily from the Photography, Manuscript, and Performing Arts Collections of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, with a selection from the Howard Gottlieb Archival Research Center at Boston University. Featured will be photographs of spirits and séances from Texas's Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Harry Houdini Collections focusing on the case of the Boston Medium, Mina (Margery) Crandon, who in 1924 accepted *Scientific American's* and Harry Houdini's challenge to show proof of psychic ability. With the author of Sherlock Holmes on one side and the famous escape artist on the other, the heated debate over Margery's powers played out in the press and was documented photographically. Conan Doyle, a member of the Society for the Study of Supernormal Pictures, collected photographs from psychic circles and actively promoted spiritualism. Houdini, initially interested in contacting his deceased mother, realized that many mediums used the same slight of hand as he did in his magic act. He subsequently created a touring exposé and wrote several books and pamphlets debunking them. While she was never awarded the monetary prize, Margery's story continues to fascinate and brings to light cultural and philosophical issues surrounding spiritualism and photography.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:** Leslie K. Brown, Curator, Photographic Resource Center at Boston University, 832 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215 (617) 975-0600, (617) 975-0606 (fax), email: [lkbrown@bu.edu](mailto:lkbrown@bu.edu). An essay on the exhibition is published in the PRC's January/ February newsletter, *In the Loupe*, and also available online at [www.prcboston.org](http://www.prcboston.org). Press images can be provided digitally.

**Who and where we are:** The Photographic Resource Center is a non-profit organization that exists to facilitate the study and dissemination of information related to photography. Operating from the campus of Boston University, it provides a highly acclaimed exhibition program, a bi-monthly newsletter, lectures, workshops, special events, and a 4,000-volume resource library to our members and the general public. It is supported by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Massachusetts Cultural Council, the Boston Cultural Council, as well as by numerous private foundations, and the ongoing generosity of its members. The Photographic Resource Center is located at 832 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA, 02215. Hours are Tuesday through Friday from 10 to 6pm, Thursdays from 10 to 8pm, Saturday and Sunday 12-5pm Admission is \$3/general public, \$2/students and seniors and free to all on Thursdays and on the last weekend of every month. The PRC is always free to members, children under 18, and to school groups with appointments. For more information on exhibitions and educational programming, visit our website at [www.prcboston.org](http://www.prcboston.org). The PRC is fully accessible.