

Josh Brand began creating abstract photographs in 2002, printing in a friend's darkroom in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Brand had returned to Pittsburgh following four years studying film and photography in Chicago. The Art Institute of Chicago has an exceptional photography collection where visitors can view and handle selected works without the barrier of a frame. Such encounters led Brand to understand photographs “as objects and images simultaneously.” This mode of viewing, and the luxury of physical access, directly influenced the scale of his photographs. “I like to make pictures that are not too big to think of holding in your hands; that are near to the size of a face -- always vertical like a standing or sitting person’s face.”

Brand's photograms (unique photographs) are similar to drawings, not only in the intimacy of their scale, but in the quality of their marks and color. Their typically negativeless production highlights the subtle and numerous ways that light has been filtered through photographic paper, Xeroxes (images whose production merges the actions of photographing and printing), punctured plastic, and other materials to create photographs that echo the meditative space of the darkroom. Brand's pictures are maps of the physical shifts, marks, arrangements, and alterations that occur to (and above) their surfaces. It is important to clarify that Brand’s work is not invested in the spiritual or the sublime. His art is anchored in the interactions and spaces of the everyday, and informed by his employment as a commercial photo printer in New York.

When discussing the starting point for his own picture making, Brand begins with the materials, apparatuses, and chemistry regularly considered while at work. “In a darkroom you can see no space, or you see dark monochromatic space; a room with tables, paper, and projections of light. Working all day in the dark to print pictures for

magazines and advertisements, I always want to leave these materials alone -- to let them be themselves as objects, or to use them to record the kind of space that surrounds them: a possible dream space." An emphasis on the idea of photography as an analog process -- and a simultaneous distancing from post-production -- aligns Brand's work with contemporaries such as Eileen Quinlan and Markus Amm, as well as predecessors like Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and Man Ray. Like Quinlan and Amm, Brand is engaged in creating photographs that mine spaces and forms which are both ethereal and concrete.

Regarding his material decisions and working process, Brand states "I am always thinking of the sort of simultaneously crude and magical process of analog photography, and of the physical, chemical, and optical connection of these photographs to the world -- light touching negative, through chemicals to picture. I am making a kind of feedback loop in the darkroom -- as when one holds a microphone to an amplifier, and these two objects make sound from what seems to be silence -- to make pictures only by drawing and recording and redrawing with light."

A connection here to the spirit evoked in John Cage's texts about his own approach to art and music is no mere coincidence. Brand's system of picture making is arranged around the various chance occurrences that the darkroom and analog photography have to offer. As Cage wrote regarding his compositions for prepared piano: "Instead of the possibility of repetition, we are faced in life with the unique qualities and characteristics of each occasion." Brand's work, with its varied forms of abstraction, results in thoughtfully open-ended images, "short-circuiting the process of knowing and naming" to create pictures that play with perception and slow down time.