

# JANE HAMMOND, CURATED BY CYDNEY PAYTON

By Ashley Mask Harris

The Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA DENVER) in Denver re-opened in a new location just over a year ago, in October 2007. Designed by architect David Adjaye, the new building creates a unique and signature atmosphere for the museum. The 27,000 square foot space, encased in gray glass and created using sustainable materials and eco-design, provides a beautifully minimal and functional palette to support a wide variety of contemporary art installation concepts, including large-scale sculpture, video and audio technologies, and multimedia environments. While the building itself is worth the trip, I have now seen multiple art shows in the new space, and Adjaye's design does not distract from the artwork inside; instead, it enhances visitors' ability to interact and engage with its contents, unlike another recent, well-known building addition to the Denver art museum scene.

It is within this clean construct that I recently viewed an exhibition of artist Jane Hammond's photographs. Late one afternoon, I stepped through the museum's entrance and after being greeted at the visitor services desk, I continued walking into the heart of the building and immediately came upon the Photography Gallery. The walls of the gallery were painted a rich, dark purple gray, drawing me in with its stark visual contrast compared to the rest of the museum's white walls. The Photography Gallery is smaller than other galleries in the museum, with limited square footage and relatively low ceilings. The other galleries offer space for larger-than-life



JANE HAMMOND, *ZWEI FRAUEN MIT STREIFEN*, 2006,  
SELENIUM TONED SILVER GELATIN PRINT, PAPER: 14 X 11  
INCHES. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND GALERIE LELONG,  
NEW YORK.

sculpture and installation, and subsequently, an easy opportunity for visitors to stay a good distance apart from the artwork (physically and otherwise). The Photography Gallery, on the other hand, requires an intimacy between the artwork and its viewers, as well as between visitors themselves. The Jane Hammond exhibition consisted of 30 black & white photographs, hanging in linear formation along three walls, and one large piece, *Album (Betty Broadbent)*, a collection of small, individual photographs framed together, hanging on the fourth wall. While the exhibition installation style was fairly traditional, it was cleanly executed and allowed easy access and immediacy in viewing Hammond's work.

In another gesture toward immediate access to the artwork, and one that was refreshing and surprising for me, I found that the gallery was entirely free of signage. A small visitor's guide was given to me upon entering the museum, and one page of the guide was dedicated to the Jane Hammond exhibit. A list of artwork titles, dimensions, and media, in a typical exhibition checklist format, was also available just outside the gallery. However, once inside, there were no didactic wall labels or title labels at all. Instead, visitors were left to engage with the artwork alone. The cleanliness of the framing, simplicity of lighting, and straightforward approach of Cydney Payton's curatorial style was apparent in the exhibit, and luckily, the work itself offered ample access points for any viewer. Jane Hammond's photographs are collaged, imagined narratives created from found images that have been re-contextualized in new worlds, where pelicans and elephants find themselves conversing in an east Asian street

scene, accompanied by various accordion players and out-of-place onlookers (*Ghat Music*, 2008), as one example. While I was in the gallery, I overheard groups of people discussing individual pieces, as they recognized images from old magazines or exotic locations of vacations past (One advantage of such a close space, in my opinion, is the running commentary from visitors all around, at no extra charge). Hammond's artistic process, like collecting select pieces of a puzzle, then using and reusing the pieces in multiple collages and in varying ways, suggests that the viewer can participate by developing appropriate narratives for themselves. There is clearly no right or wrong story for each image. The stories are unique to the viewer, and the possibilities for each piece are as varied as the people that stand before it. Though the photographs are not technically "perfect," according to traditional standards of black & white photography, they are set perfectly in the space, well lit, and cleanly framed, with no distractions otherwise. We are able to see the essence of each piece. The choices made by the artist are clear and purposeful.

I spent a good deal of time inspecting each photograph, in the dark stillness of the gallery, as night fell outside a window visible from my vantage point. Each photograph and its white matte pierced brightly into my visual plane, allowing my thoughts to fully focus on the stories I was creating. It was comfortable to be in the gallery, even though there were no benches or chairs. At times, I could hear the cushioned sound of street traffic just outside. The building acted as a soft barrier between me in the physical space with the photographs, along with the mental space of my stories, and the big, bustling "real" world outside the museum's walls.