



STUDIOVISITS BY ALA GLASNER
UND JULIA ROSENBAUM

5 QUESTIONS
FOR CHRIS
ENGMAN

FOTOS: CHRIS ENGMAN

CHRIS ENGMAN IS A PHOTOGRAPHER BASED IN LOS ANGELES. HE HAS BEEN IN BERLIN ON A RESIDENCY BY 68PROJECT IN SUMMER 2015, FOLLOWED BY A SOLO SHOW IN FALL/WINTER OF 2015. HIS WORK IS PLAYING WITH ILLUSIONS AND OUR CONVENTIONAL SEEING HABITS. THEMES IMMANENT TO PHOTOGRAPHY, SUCH AS TIME, TRANSIENCE, LIGHT AND THE

QUESTION CONCERNING THE POSSIBILITY OF REPRODUCING REALITY, ARE CENTRAL TO HIS WORK.

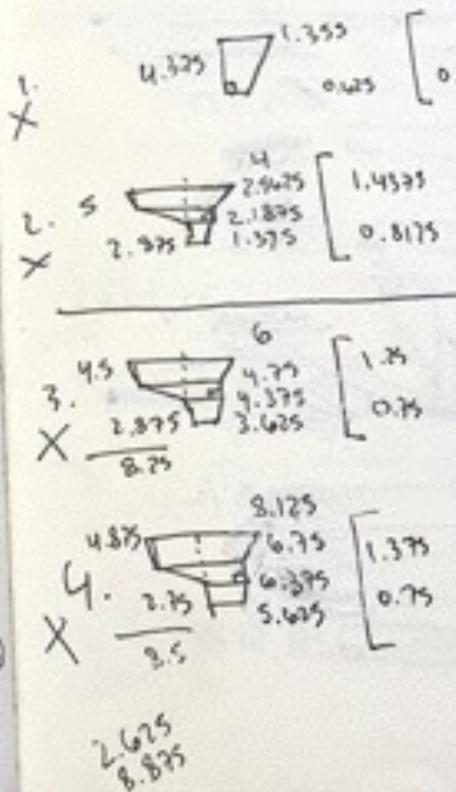
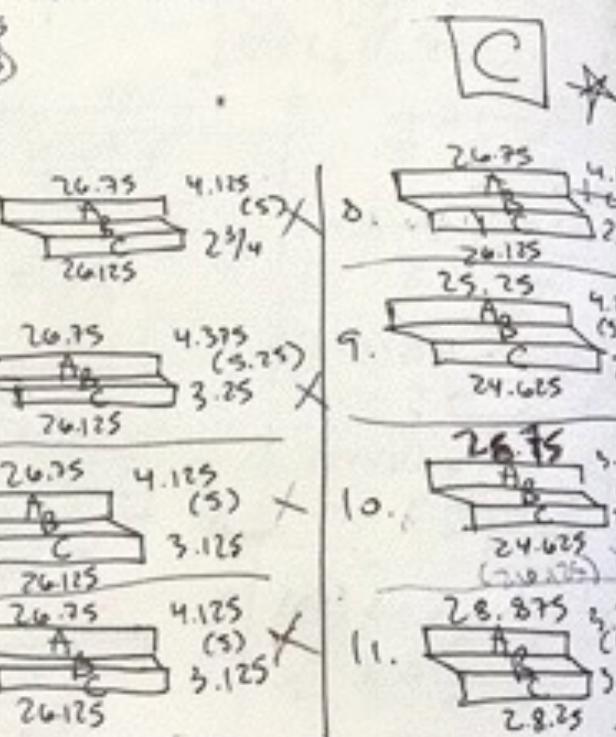
Many of us might be surprised at the amount of preparation, calculation and determination required to create one of your photographs. Can you walk us through a piece like this, from conception to completion?
Can you explain us your working process?

Containment began with a desire to construct a landscape inside my studio that was way too large for my studio. I wanted to juxtapose the natural with the built, the real with the artificial, the sublime with the contained- and then see what those juxtapositions would look and feel like. Making the piece began with a long road trip in search of a landscape that would have some kind of resonance with the corner of my studio. Eventually I settled on the canyon seen here, with six hundred meter high walls and a sky above and a river at the bottom.

Length	v. # gap	h. gap offset	adj. v. gap	h. gap offset	Slot offset
	4 3/4	5/8	4.125	3	5/8
26	4 1/2	5/8	3.875	3	
6 1/4	5	5/8	4.375		
6 7/8	4 3/8	5/8	3.75		
6 1/2	4 7/8	5/8	4.125	3	
6 1/2	5		4.375		
6 7/8	4 3/4		4.125		
6 1/2	4 3/4	5/8	4.125		
6 1/2	4 3/4		4.125		
6 1/2	4 7/8		4.25		
5 1/2	4 1/4		3.625		
4 1/4	4 3/8		3.75		

E	v. # Slot	h. # Slot	h. Slot offset	Length	SP
1	2 3/8	2 7/16	1 3/8		4 1/4
2	2 3/8	4 7/8	3 5/8		5
3	2 3/4	6 3/8	5 3/8		4 1/4
4	3 1/4	8 5/8	7 1/4		4 1/4
5	3 1/8	10 3/4	9 7/8		4 1/4
6	2 7/8	12 1/4	12 1/8		4 1/4
7	2 3/8	5/8	6 3/8		

↓ Slot rise: 3/8"
 ← Slot offset: 7/8"



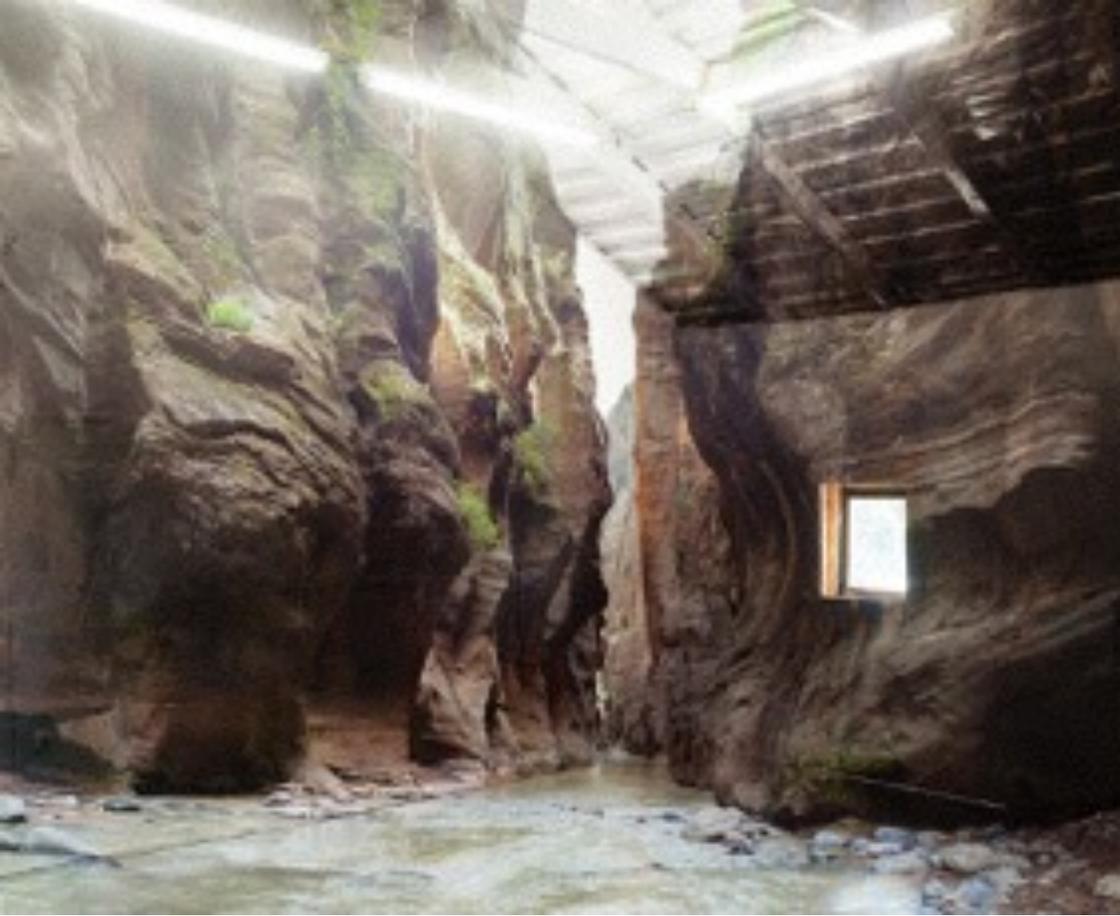
Where the studio has a corner, the canyon has an obscured opening. Returning to my studio, I took the image of the canyon, dissected it into over two hundred fragments, stretched those fragments so as to simulate perspective, and then glued and tacked the prints onto the corresponding surfaces of my studio. The river on the floor, for example, has been elaborately skewed such that its perspective seems "correct" only when seen from the vantage point of the camera, which is also the vantage point of you the viewer.





A concept and in-depth research are very important in your work. Would you say that the preparation are part of your work or is it the final work that counts? In other words: What purpose serves photography here: documentation or final photo?

I hope that my artworks serve both the functions of photographic result and of the documentation of a process. Certainly, the reduction in scale of these installations into photographs is practical in the sense that they become transportable and many can be viewed at the same time and in the same place. More importantly, the fact that they are photographs puts the work into dialogue and context with other photographs and photographic theory and the many questions raised there- questions about memory and time and subjectivity that are central to my practice. They also serve to document a process, as you suggest. For reasons that are not entirely clear to me, I seem to be fixated on the notion of labor as integral both to myself and to my expression. To this end my works tend to be labor intensive, and I tend to want to leave evidence of that labor in my photographs as if to justify them. The encoding of my photographs with process also expands them in relation to time and place and is a means by which to make the viewer- and myself- more conscious of the mechanics of the acts of decoding and perception.



Certainly you are a photographer, however one could questions if you are more a conceptual artist, a sculptor or a land artist. What would you say?

I think that the labels Conceptual Art and Land Art belong appropriately to a historical period to which my work does not belong. However, both movements have and do inform my work. For me the concept is the most important thing, but I am less ready than the conceptual artists to disavow the art object or the visual. Similarly, as

a whole I think the land artists recognized less of an affirmative role for photography than I do. We experience their works primarily as photographs, and they must have been aware of that, and yet for them photography seems to have been relegated strictly the role of documentation. With few exceptions photography was not a subject of Land Art, whereas in my work it definitely is.

Am I a sculptor? I would say yes, in the sense that I do consider some of my works to be simultaneously photographs and sculptures. I am thinking of my works from the Ink on Paper series such as Vanishing Point. In this piece I printed an image of the ocean on a piece of paper, pinned the paper to the wall, hung an empty frame around it, and made a new photograph of the whole. Works like this relate directly and consciously to the space around them and the viewer is meant to consider his/her physical relation to the piece. They are photographs, but as much as anything else their objectness is their subject.

What is the connection between your photography and your video works?

The piece Long Day is a time-lapse video of myself walking on a trail on a hill near my house. In the video, the day moves from sunrise to sunset in just a few minutes, while I alone move in 1/240th time so as to appear in

the video to be in “real time.” Every action I took, whether adjusting my hat or drinking a glass of water, had to be calculated to take 240 times longer than it should. It was a pretty exhausting but ultimately meditative and serene experience, as though I had somehow slipped into a different register of time for one day. My works, whether photographs or video, have a kind of logic that is internally consistent but very often at odds with the ordinary logic of their medium. This is done in order to upend expectations, not as a trick, but in order to cause the viewer (and myself) to reconsider perception and other kinds of structures: of thought, of oppositions, of boundaries, for example. This might happen consciously but it might also happen unconsciously. I think not only my photographs but a lot of the interesting photographs being made today do this.

What have your experiences in Berlin been like while you were on the residency?

CE: I was once featured in an article about two artists titled “The Zen Monk and the German Engineer.” I am not German or an engineer, but anyway that was the writer’s impression.

While in Berlin, I was deeply fascinated by a particular sense of order that I have experienced nowhere but in Germany, and to which I feel an affinity. (I apologize if

the generalization offends). I experienced this in the architecture, in the organization of the city, and in many insightful conversations. In the US many in the art community think of me as uncommonly mathematical or scientific for an artist. For me the sense of a larger order-whether built, or thought, or observed in nature- is very much an emotional and aesthetic pursuit. I often feel when in Germany that I don't need to explain this.

During my residency in Berlin I produced the work Landscape for Candace. The tree in the photograph is at Tempelhof Airport. This piece was a stretch into new territory for me, formally and conceptually, and I hope to mine that territory fruitfully for the next year or two. I am deeply grateful to 68 Projects for hosting my residency and introducing me to the city of Berlin.

Berlin versus LA: The contemporary art scene in Los Angeles has grown and expanded over the last years.

Very important artists such as Johan Baldessari or Ed Ruscha, powerful galleries like Spruethmagers or huge art spaces such as the private collection "The Broad" just opened their doors in LA. How does these changes transform the city and influence your work?

Los Angeles is an amazing place to be an artist right now, no question. And so is Berlin, it seems to me. With respect to art and being an artist, Los Angeles is to New

York as Berlin is to London. Or at least, that is my impression.

I am not somebody who is always out on the scene, but I appreciate that in Los Angeles there is never a shortage of good art to see or good artists with whom to meet and interact. The city itself is an inspiring place to live: it is inconceivably huge, horizontal, incredibly diverse, and you are likely to see at least one strange and unexpected thing every day, if you are paying attention. Los Angeles is inexhaustible. It is cheaper to live here than in New York, and there is a lot more space.

Los Angeles is also the best art capital with great surfing beaches.

www.chrisengman.com

