

Karen Stentafor: Harvesting Images

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[See table of contents](#)

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KAREN STENTAFORD

Harvesting Images

By Lori Beaman

It's HARVEST TIME, so KAREN STENTAFORD'S PHOTOGRAPHIC STUDIES OF CARROTS SEEM PARTICULARLY À PROPOS. THE SUBJECTS IN *CARROT STUDY* ARE NOT THE STRAIGHT-BODIED CARROTS THAT COME FROM THE MASS-PRODUCED, GENETICALLY MODIFIED, CHEMICALLY ENHANCED VERSIONS FOUND IN PLASTIC BAGS IN GROCERY STORES. THE LIMBED, HAIRY, CURVACEOUS PARTS OF STENTAFORD'S CARROTS INTERTWINE AND OVERLAP, EVOKING INTERESTING ASSOCIATIONS RATHER LIKE A VEGGIE RORSCHACH INK BLOT TEST. WHAT THE VIEWER SEES IN THIS WORK MAY REVEAL A GREAT DEAL ABOUT HIS OR HER SOCIALIZATION AND STATE OF MIND. THESE IMAGES SPAN A RANGE OF EROTIC, BAWDY, WEIRD, SENSUAL AND FUN.



Carrot study #7

Stentaford was inspired to create this series when she began frequenting the organic vegetable stand at her local market. The series numbers about 30, although it is still growing (while I was writing this review Stentaford had found 3 more subjects). All of the works are Polaroid emulsion transfers and are approximately 3.5 x 4.5". The emulsion transfer process lends an (appropriately) organic and unpredictable element to the final image.

There is a more serious side to this series too, in its reminder that normative standards about what counts as perfection and beauty are most definitely socially constructed. The work

situates the viewer at the heart of consumer society by posing a confrontation between the organic "imperfect" and the fabricated perfection which is in part driven by consumer demand. Stentaford's work presses us to reflect on our own participation in that process and in the creation of normative standards that are based on superficial characteristics. We pay for glossy versions of perfection in much that we consume, which is revealed by Stentaford's work to be much less interesting than the complexity of the organic counterpart.

Stentaford's larger body of work, mostly in black and white, focuses on structural decay,

primarily of abandoned buildings (one series focuses on Maritime schools built at the beginning of the 20th century). Her most recent work continues to focus on this theme, but she has added a more visceral element by introducing emulsion transfer techniques, which import the randomness and irregularity of disintegration into the work as well as giving the viewer the sense of acting as witness to the process. The result is fresh and dynamic with a wonderful balance of subject and technique that lacks the overproduced feeling of some work of this genre.

Trained at Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Mount Saint Vincent and Mount Allison

Universities, Stentaford is an emerging artist who has exhibited at the Owens Art Gallery, Gallery 44 and was included in the prestigious Marian McCain Atlantic Art Exhibition at the Beaverbrook Art Gallery. She is also a member of the Struts Gallery, one of Canada's oldest and best-known artists' cooperatives, where she regularly shows her work. □

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