

MARIAH ROBERTSON

b.1975

Using a variety of experimental darkroom techniques and antiquated processes, Mariah Robertson creates unique prints that are impossible to replicate. Upending notions of representation, documentation, and reproducibility in photography, Robertson's work results in what she describes as "impossible images", created from colored filters, dusty negatives, photograms, photo collage, and unusual chemical processes. Treating the medium itself as a complex system with its own internal logic, Robertson attempts to violate the rules of photography through technical manipulations, conceptually probing the inner workings of the image-making process. Rejecting the meticulousness of typical darkroom printing processes, her photographs are unstable, messy, and kaleidoscopic, combining abstract shapes, patterns, and areas of bright color with representational imagery.

Robertson's work is inherently unpredictable, relying on chance and spontaneous decisions; because of the precarious nature of her process, she never knows what the final product will be before she begins. Haphazardly cutting from a large roll of photographic paper, Robertson's prints maintain rough edges and irregular shapes and sizes, giving them a sculptural dimension that emphasizes their status as unique objects rather than simply photographic images. Moreover, in using analog film and paper, outdated chemicals, and processes that have been marginalized in the wake of digital photography, Robertson further highlights the inability to re-create these prints, as the means to do so become increasingly rare.

When she does include representational content, it is often domestic in nature, including recurring images of interior scenes, house plants, and nude figures. Adopting and deconstructing the photographic still life as a template, Robertson inverts and playfully critiques these canonical subjects through technical processes such as solarization, as well as jarring, disjointed juxtapositions. Employing imagery often associated with suburban kitsch, such as palm trees, chintzy florals, and mass-market how-to books, her work uses the most banal of sources to create bizarre, uncanny compositions. Further, her conspicuous use of male nudes, whose faces are never shown, modifies the association of the nude portrait with the female subject. Intentionally disregarding the tenets of "good" photographic practice, Robertson embraces mistakes and experimentation, creating images that attempt to test the boundaries and possibilities of the medium.