



i



Dennis Letbetter

















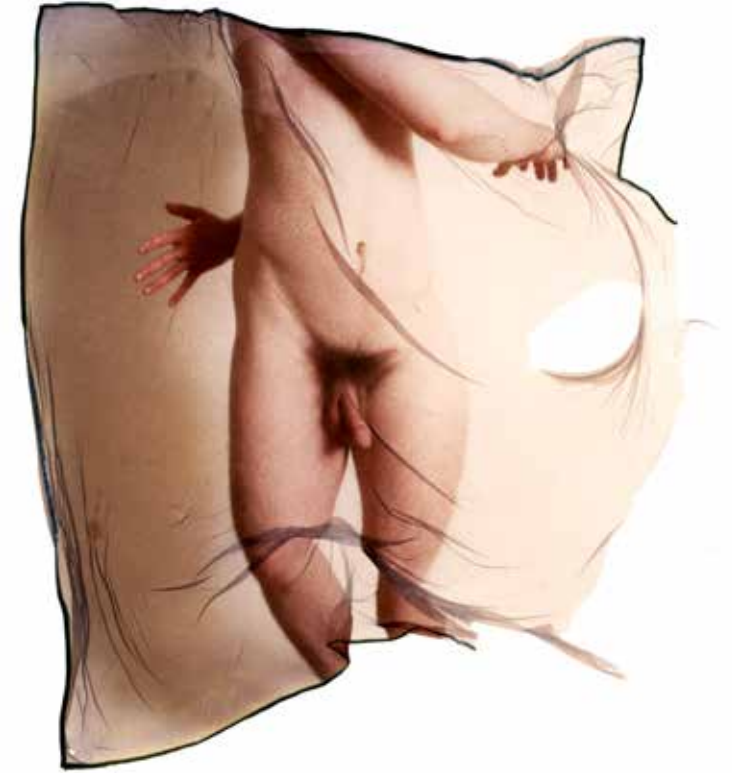








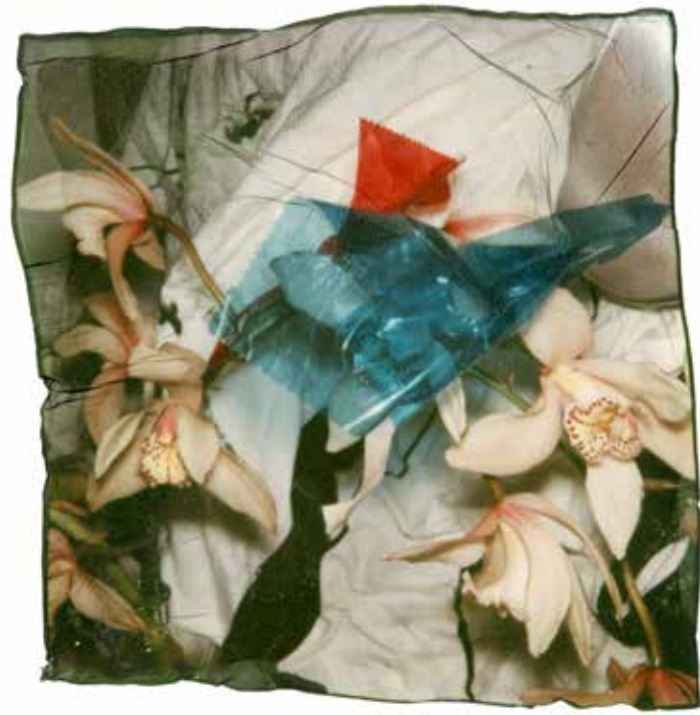












































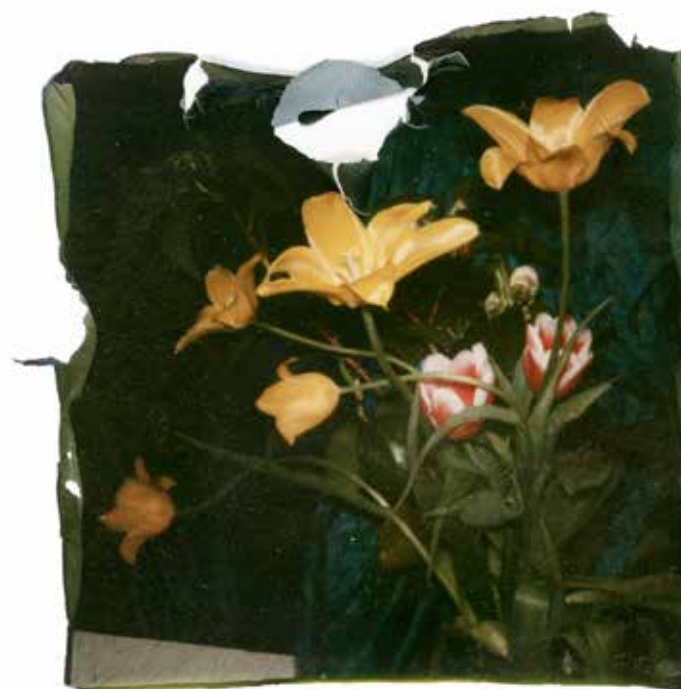














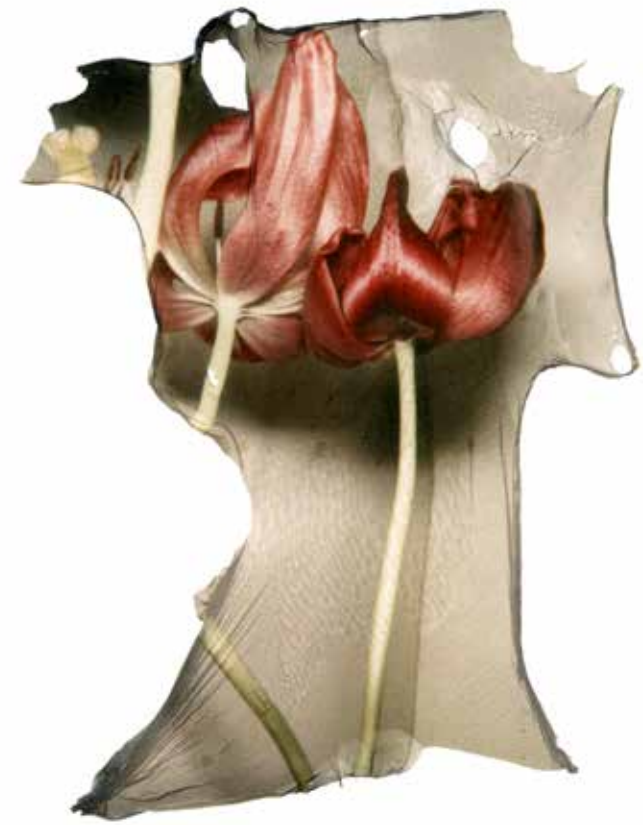


























*Laughing Woman (large version) ca.1891*  
Medardo Rosso *sculpture and photograph*

## The Hand in the Image

*We are incidents of light. Everything has only one day and can only be seen from the point of view of a single day. You cannot go around it.*

Medardo Rosso

Who of a certain age cannot recall the seductive frisson in pressing the red shutter button of a Polaroid SX70, hearing the camera groan and whir before spitting out a perfectly framed print? The SX70 camera was introduced in 1972. Though offering none of the instant gratification of a digital image, it proffered something far more enticing; anticipation. Waiting for the image to develop allowed for a creative suspense. People tinker, change and destroy most everything in search of new exhilarations, insights and kicks. Someone had the temerity to cut into the plastic of the image and tamper with the emulsion. I thought it likely a too toxic adventure, but nonetheless began to tinker with them myself. It was exciting to pursue the accidental, cutting into the image, rinsing off the chemicals and floating the delicate emulsion onto a sheet of paper. Dipping the paper into water, the image remained uniquely distorted, a wonderful play resulting in unimagined configurations.

A great frustration, perhaps an inferiority complex in photographers, is that the hand cannot have the same influence in their work as with other artistic media. This is somewhat relieved with analog photography, given its developing requirements. Transfer images have a tactility that is nearly coequal to their visual aspect. Though SX70 film was marketed as instant photography, when transformed it afforded a suspended instant.

Photography is imprisoned in a specific time. Looking at almost any image can cause in me a sadness. Certainly older photographs contain images of long departed people but even a recent photograph describes in excruciating detail a moment which has passed, even if only seconds ago. The manipulation of the image proposes a fragile, displaced materiality.

Photography reinforces our limited notion of time: that everything has only one moment. It is not available to the feelings of the photographer, but only vicariously seems to exhibit an emotional moment in a subject. Manipulating these images to such an extent allows a near equal emotional response to my

visual one. These images are of shadows cast and light reflected from objects and subjects. The objects are gone. I have no access to most of the locations, situations or people, but something about the transfer process gives me a satisfying connection with an eternal present that images from a negative don't provide. Contributing to this notion is that they are unique images. In this volume they are reproduced in actual size.

One cannot stop time. A photograph doesn't either. That it might is simply one of the delusions that most of us live with. Too often it has happened to me seconds after making an exposure, that I will launch myself into an imagined future, projecting that I will then look at the image and think back on what is lost. It is perhaps like when one invites a lively puppy into one's life while simultaneously foreseeing the day when it will be infirm, struggling to walk while heroically smiling.

Photography has a hypnotic ability to explicitly record detail, preserving things visually that we are incapable of, a surrogate memory. When we casually notice someone of interest in a café, we may later recall certain aspects of them, but not the whole that a detail a photograph can recall for us: that the foam of their cappuccino has flowed over the edge of their cup, that the scarf they were wearing had nearly fallen off of their shoulder, that their socks didn't match. I don't take photographs to bolster my sieve-like memory, but I suspect that most people do, with their endless litany of selfies and holiday snaps. Anthony Bourdain once said that people should stop taking pictures of their food and have more sex.

These Polaroid transfers are inviting the uncontrollable and the unseen into photography.

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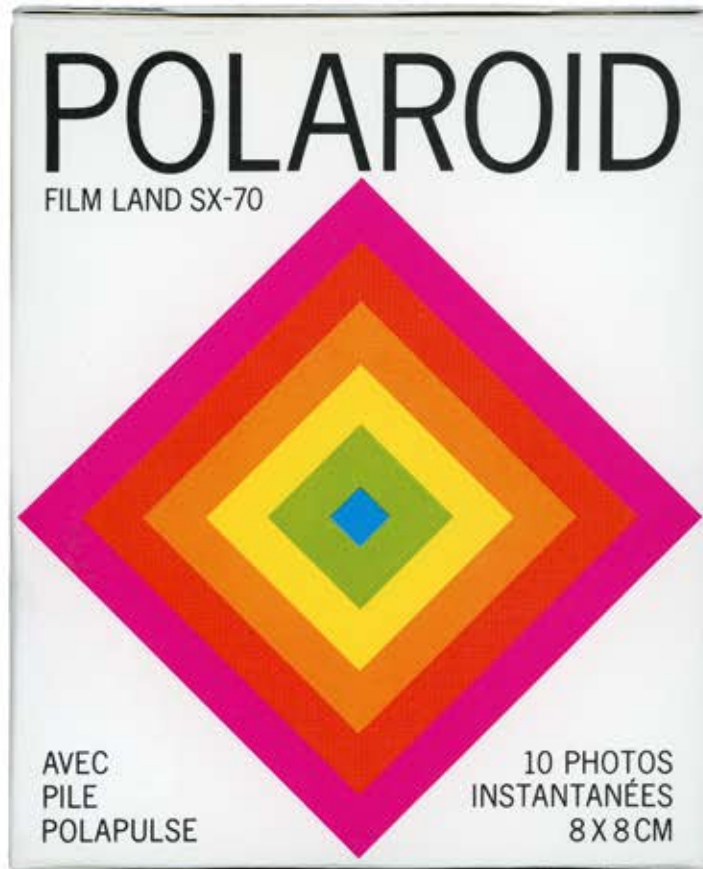
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Creativity is the sudden cessation of stupidity

*Edwin Land*