



The Bridge

JASON COVERT

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many thanks to those who helped make this body of work a reality:
justin wolf, nicole defino, jake sullivan, timothy briner, matt stacey,
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robyn newhouse, and peter and maria hionas

the Bridge is dedicated to my grandmother, marion little, and to my
great-great-grandfather, robert veitch, without whom none of this would
have been possible. literally.

Artist Statement: The Bridge

In 2004 I was approached by my mother and handed a small leather case, worn but sturdy, containing more than 100 antique glass negatives, taken by my great-great-grandfather, Robert Veitch. Veitch operated a grocery store in the Washington Heights section of Manhattan, and on the side produced and sold photographic post cards, a trade both niche and lucrative in the latter part of the 19th century. I was instantly taken aback; not just by the uniqueness of these negatives, but by the fact that I was being handed a never-before-seen (outside of a few family members) chronicle of New York City history, and one that just happened to double as a 100+ year-old family album. "Maybe you can do something with this," my mother remarked.

More than 8 years later The Bridge has emerged: an offering to a lost generation, an homage to the experiences of those who have come before, and an attempt to communicate with the dead by way of a deeply personal visual love letter. Through my work I ask the viewer to listen for the words of my relatives. Can the dead speak through the living? In the spaces between the photographs of then and now there exists a temporal void that bears witness to a startling amount of change, and yet, the differences between us are both great and small. It is in that space that comfort lies, proving once again that we are never as far from the source as we might think.

Jason Covert

Essay: Every Mystery Needs Its Image

A photograph is a story relayed by a stranger who, possibly out of sheer self-preservation, is embellishing a number of details for dramatic effect, until what you're left with is a combination of truths, half-truths and fiction. Perhaps this doesn't make it unique among art forms, but unlike a painting or even a film, the deception we incur from a single static exposure is subtle, so subtle in fact that our greatest friend and enemy in this journey is memory itself. It's the subversive nature of a photograph we experience upon viewing, because deep down we know the photographer's own account of things is suspect at best. The only truth present is the image itself. It can be a profound truth, indeed, but doesn't offer much in the way of concrete detail.

So what happens when a memory or the particulars of a family saga are presented, wholesale, as some pre-constructed tale, littered with subjective detail? How are we then to comprehend something as simple as the "Then and Now"? Robert Veitch, Covert's great-great-grandfather, is the man we have to thank for the former. A green grocer and amateur photographer living in Washington Heights, Veitch devoted his spare time to producing and selling post cards, but also to documenting slivers of history that are ineffable, yet manage to avoid a nostalgic sentimentality in their execution.

Coupled with each of Veitch's photographs, Covert presents a "Now" to complete the equation. But it's not that simple. Each new image is a moment, a feat, a staged scene that does anything but coddle our expectations. He too does not fall victim to sentimentality or antics. Instead, what he delivers is something dark and equally ineffable, but never without a breath of levity. Covert is scripting a new chapter for his family; he is performing a séance with his camera.

In one of Veitch's photos, eight family members—infant to elder—hold position in a parlor, each set of eyes looking off to the side, begging viewers to wonder just what other than Veitch's camera could capture such attention. Covert, in turn, has gathered various family members, as well as multiple incarnations of himself, to pose in similar fashion for a present-day parlor shot. What began as a simple (presumably) documenting of family history has culminated, over a century later, into something resembling ritual-meets-science fiction. I cannot imagine a more personal body of work.

The Bridge brings to the fore a truth that most of us wish never to face: although we define ourselves by our memories, which often come from photographs, the truths we locate and settle upon are utterly relative. What makes Covert's work such a treat is that he understands this, perhaps better than most. So he creates a fiction to complement the memory. This is not his memory, or that of a family member or friend. It's just a memory to which the truth we can assign it is wholly limited by our access to archives and historical research. But what fun would that be?

Covert is not only bridging generations of the same family, he is bridging fiction and truth, and in this process blurring (or flat out erasing) the line that divides the two. When excavating a family history, it's been my experience that every mystery needs a corresponding image. Jason Covert coyly applies this rule in reverse.

Justin Wolf
Hionas Gallery

Essay: Every Memory Needs Its Image

A photograph is a story relayed by an individual unknown to us, embellishing the details of his single static exposure with seeming abandon, until our outlook is a sullied amalgam of truth and fiction, and all ineffable qualities that reside between these substantial bookends. A painting can achieve this just as easily, yet the photographic medium realizes a subtlety unlike any other art form. Photography relies on memory, and memory in this particular journey is our friend and enemy in the same turn. The photographer is both storyteller and documentarian; perhaps we believe what we see, but we must take care.

What are we to believe when a memory is presented to us as subjective tale, sans any firm reliance on the actuality of events? Mr. Robert Veitch is a teller of such tales. A green grocer in Washington Heights in the latter part of the nineteenth century, Veitch supplemented his time with the production of post-cards, which provide an uncanny window into New York City history. Yet Veitch remains a mere one-half of this mystery called *The Bridge*.

Mr. Jason Covert, Veitch's great-great-grandson, has orchestrated a provocative and likewise poignant counterpart to his ancestor's photographs. The younger's camera captures elusive moments, staged scenes that do not coddle our expectations. Covert locates something dark and equally ineffable, but never without a breath of levity. The artist is scripting a new chapter in his family's history; he is performing a séance with each exposure.

Ogden Nash, the American humorist and poet of many an audacious verse, once wrote: "One would be in less danger from the wiles of a stranger if one's own kin and kith were more fun to be with." From this passage Covert discovers the title for a coupling of photos, one by himself and the other by Veitch. In the latter's, eight family members pose in a parlor, all eyes affixed to the side, making the viewer wonder what element or elements other than Veitch's camera could capture such attention. Covert, in turn, has gathered his own kin and kith, as well as multiple incarnations of himself, for a present-day parlor photograph. Thus what began as a simple (presumably) documenting of family history has culminated, some one-hundred years later, into something resembling ritual-meets-science fiction.

The Bridge brings to the fore a truth that most of us wish never to face: although we define ourselves by our memories, which often come from photographs, the truths we locate and settle upon are utterly relative. What makes Covert's work such a treat is that he understands this, perhaps better than most. So he creates a fiction to complement the memory. This is not his memory, or that of a family member or friend. It is simply a memory to which the truth we can assign it is wholly limited by our access to archives and historical research. But what fun would that be?

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Justin Wolf
Hionas Gallery

From the sun that round me rolled, In its autumn tint of gold
archival inkjet print
limited edition
24 x 20"



From the sun that round me rolled, In its autumn tint of gold
digital c-print
limited edition
30 x 24"



How shall my animal
archival inkjet print
limited edition
24 x 20"



How shall my animal
digital c-print
limited edition
30 x 24"



In less danger from the wiles of a stranger
archival inkjet print
limited edition
20 x 16"



In less danger from the wiles of a stranger
digital c-print
limited edition
30 x 24"



Not his body only
archival inkjet print
limited edition
17 x 14"



Not his body only
digital c-print
limited edition
30 x 24"



Twixt tiny tots and hottentots
archival inkjet print
limited edition
22 x 18"

R. VEITCH,
GROCCER.



Twixt tiny tots and hottentots
digital c-print
limited edition
30 x 24"



J. COVERT
ARTIST

Dust the only secret
archival inkjet print
limited edition
20 x 16"



Dust the only secret
digital c-print
limited edition
30 x 24"



When I spread out my hand here today
archival inkjet print
limited edition
20 x 16"



When I spread out my hand here today
digital c-print
limited edition
30 x 24"



Humble, idle, futile peaks are we
archival inkjet print
limited edition
20 x 16"



Humble, idle, futile peaks are we
digital c-print
limited edition
30 x 24"



For ye are living poems, and all the rest are dead
archival inkjet print
limited edition
15 x 20"



For ye are living poems, and all the rest are dead
digital c-print
limited edition
30 x 24"

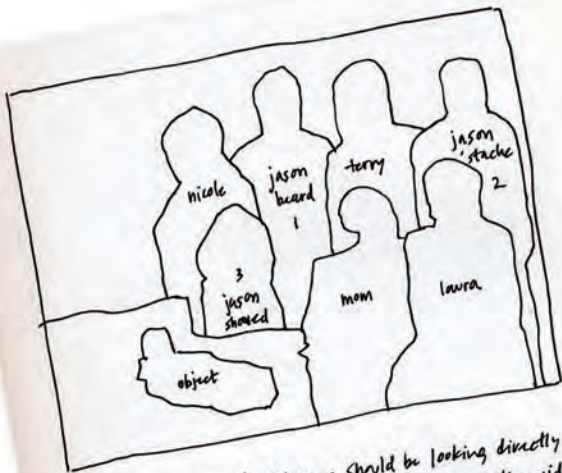


And so men compromise
archival inkjet print
limited edition
20 x 16"

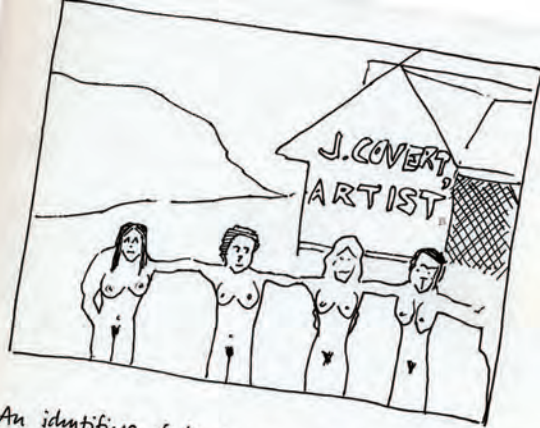


And so men compromise
digital c-print
limited edition
30 x 24"





A family portrait! All eyes should be looking directly at the camera with deep intent - perhaps with wide smiles? I will play several roles, shot on separate sheets and composed in. My facial hair will change for each character. The child should be replaced by an object of significance - something reminiscent of gram? of family? a simple doll?



An identifier of the times and the artist: there is a decided lack of innocence in the nudity of the women and yet the landscape is as barren as ever. All of the women are looking directly at the camera.



The previous image was perceived ~~as~~ as being too laid, obvious and over the top, which, in hindsight I have to agree with. In the image proposed above the much more simple portrait would feature "the artist" seated at a table, lit from the side. He would be surrounded by surgical tools and a collection of my oddities (i.e. DNA signature supplies, hair sculpture, fake teeth etc.)



excerpts from the artist's sketchbook

