

A woman with short brown hair, wearing a pink and black geometric patterned dress, stands in a vast, flat, sandy landscape under a bright sky. She is holding a prosthetic eye in her hands. The eye is light green with a blue iris and a black pupil, and it is mounted on a dark, textured base. The woman has a serious expression and is looking off to the side. In the distance, a small figure of a person is visible on the horizon.

The
College
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Museum

Ebert Art Center

Marcella Hackbardt

STORY OF KNOWLEDGES

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This series of photographs is a meditation on knowledge, the power of its study and pursuit, and the strength and determination involved in the ways of learning. Instead of a body that functions in opposition to the mind, here the body acts in alignment with notions of thought or mindful purpose. People pay attention to the details of the world around them, even while this world of experience is limited to a small interior, a backyard, or the backdrop of a sand dune. Their perception is often guided by the senses of sight and touch, emphasizing the corporeal nature of knowledge. However, reality is not automatic or clear-cut. Rather, it is in question; and each character attempts to have an experience that will engender meaning.



Practical Knowledge, 2006
Digital chromogenic print
24 x 36 inches

Cover: **Objectivity**, 2008 (detail)
Digital chromogenic print
24 x 48 inches

My storytelling is staged, with figures and objects set into spaces where they never existed. The places, people, and objects in the photographs were chosen for their symbolic potential as well as for their aesthetic resonance. The final, digitally constructed photographs offer an opportunity for empirical investigation, as it is the viewer's experiences that shape the final interpretation of each.

The wide, horizontal framing of these images is intentionally filmic, and this proportional reference adds to the feeling that the narrative continues. However, in photography, the camera isolates one moment—embarking on storytelling while disrupting narrative—permanently leaving us in suspense. Like finding a page torn from a book, beginnings and endings go undocumented; and without a basis or outcome, the logic of the action remains unclear, complex, and shifting.

Throughout human history, light has been a symbol of knowledge in artistic production. In these images, people personify concepts such as knowledge, wonder, thought, learning, ways of understanding information; and, as such, the works become contemporary allegorical photographs. People turn toward the light, carry light sources, or are offered various light sources that beckon them. The tableaux include nighttime interiors and backyards where the light is breaching the darkness, and daytime gardens and glades where light is rarefied and fulfilling. Sometimes the photograph intentionally does not adhere to the laws of nature, and instead, suggests light that purposefully transcends them.



In addition to light being symbolically associated with knowledge, it is also intrinsically associated with the medium of photography. And like knowledge, which is not static (it is continually updated—and then yesterday's knowledge is outdated and shown to be either incomplete or fully wrong), light is hard to pin down. Nearly immaterial, but suddenly and magically recordable since the mid-nineteenth century, light defies scientific categories by being both and neither, wave nor particle. Likewise, photography is infamous for its many binary indiscretions, including its ability to be both and therefore neither, truth nor fiction. In photography's wave-like rendering of the past into the present, and the present into the past, the fixing of light into silver and dye transfers its paradoxical quality to paper.

The camera itself—a dark chamber with a minimal amount of light entering through the lens—is a metaphor for the human experience. Like its correlation with the eye, the camera's chamber offers a correlation with the brain, taking in information in sometimes abstract and sometimes concrete bits. In our day-to-day existence of questioning, choosing, understanding,

objective measuring, subjective deciding, and divining details with a kind of vigilant awareness, we often suddenly “see the light.” To this extent, the private rooms and darkened interiors that comprise *Stories of Knowledges* conjure the intimacy of the mind and the limited way we must interpret input through what is fundamentally a self-centered mechanism—ourselves. In *Self-Knowledge*, two women sit on the



Reflection, 2008
Digital chromogenic print
22 x 40 inches

Above: **Objectivity**, 2008
Digital chromogenic print
24 x 48 inches

carpet in a room undergoing a wallpaper remodeling. The two women may represent the multiple debating voices of an internalized conversation, or they may indicate a singular knowledge formulated at various points in a lifetime.

All of these images contain self-consciously manipulated figures that embody ideas. In *Reflection*, a man wields a heavy hammer in a glass room that reflects his every action. His bodily strength visually symbolizes the strength of mind required to negotiate his situation. In *Phases*, another man holds an extraordinarily large book in his arms, open to a page of shadows. With him in this brick-walled room is a boy in sandals, sitting at a library-style desk. On the desk is a model of the earth and the moon, with the ivory moon casting an eclipse. The boy studies this object via an interaction with its shadow. While strength represents knowing and discipline, youth offers readings of potential and becoming. Likewise, the various life-stages of adolescence, middle age, and maturity have their own cultural inscriptions regarding self-awareness, perspective, and wisdom.

Objectivity features a woman holding a medical model of the human eye. She steadfastly gazes up and to the right, while her disembodied third eye looks down and to the left. In spite of the oversized anatomical model, we escape the preoccupied stares. Instead of the distant vision available only to her, we see the horizon of the dune behind her and a handful of people who have climbed the ridge to see the sunset. It is a wind-swept, harsh, and demanding place, and between



Phases, 2008
Digital chromogenic print
25 x 40 inches

the larger-than-life-sized woman and the diminutively scaled people in the distance are countless footsteps in the sand. As a depiction of the mind in contemplation, this scene is intended to suggest a range of feelings and emotions that make up the experience of learning.

Rather than suggesting specific disciplines, such as science or history, *Story of Knowledges* tells of struggle, longing, and resolution. Here, illumination is mixed and precious, and the figures' imagination and creativity are key components in these stories of progress, success, and broader perspectives. No particular person is cast to impress us with sheer intellectual force. Instead, their curiosity and determination are what write their stories.

Marcella Hackbardt
September 2008



Subjectivity, 2008
Digital chromogenic print
25 x 48 inches

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Marcella Hackbardt lives and works in Mt. Vernon, OH. She has taught at Kenyon College, Gambier, OH, since 2000, where she is currently an associate professor of art. She received a BA in art from the University of Alaska Anchorage in 1993, and an MFA from the University of New Mexico, in 2000.

Hackbardt's one-person exhibitions include those at the Schremschock Gallery, Columbus, OH, 2005; the Peeler Art Galleries, DePauw University, Greencastle, IN, and Grant Hall Gallery, Alaska Pacific University, Anchorage, both in 2002; and the Photography Gallery, The University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN, in 2001.

Her work was recently included in *Light +Lens: Photography in the Digital Age*, a book by Robert Hirsch. Selected group exhibitions include those at The Center for Fine Art Photography, Fort Collins, CO, 2007; The College of Wooster Art Museum, Wooster, OH, and the Ohio Arts Council's Riffe Gallery, Columbus, OH, both in 2006; and SPACES Gallery, Cleveland, OH, 2005.

Selected projects produced in collaboration with choreographers and theatre directors include those screened at the Ingenuity Festival of Art and Technology, Cleveland, OH, and the Attic Rep, San Antonio, TX, both in 2007; and Cleveland Public Theatre, Cleveland, OH, and the Ingenuity Festival of Art and Technology, Cleveland, OH, both in 2006.

CHECKLIST (h x w inches)

1. **Practical Knowledge**, 2006, 24 x 36
2. **Story of Knowledges I**, 2007, 24 x 34
3. **Story of Knowledges II**, 2007, 24 x 36
4. **Yesterday and Today**, 2007, 23 x 40
5. **Practice**, 2008, 24 x 32
6. **Momentum**, 2008, 30 x 40
7. **Somewhere**, 2008, 30 x 37
8. **Questions**, 2008, 30 x 34
9. **Spin**, 2008, 30 x 40
10. **Right and Wrong**, 2008, 28 x 40
11. **Self-Knowledge**, 2008, 30 x 40
12. **Agency**, 2008, 30 x 40
13. **August**, 2008, 30 x 37
14. **Reflection**, 2008, 22 x 40
15. **Phases**, 2008, 25 x 40
16. **Disobedient**, 2008, 24 x 40
17. **Ideas**, 2008, 22 x 40
18. **Rewards**, 2008, 24 x 40
19. **Rearrangements**, 2008, 22 x 40
20. **Wonderland**, 2008, 25 x 48
21. **Understanding Science**, 2008, 25 x 48
22. **Objectivity**, 2008, 24 x 48
23. **Abstract and Concrete**, 2008, 24 x 48
24. **Winter Water**, 2008, 24 x 48
25. **Subjectivity**, 2008, 25 x 48

All works are digital chromogenic prints, courtesy of the artist.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

With its wealth of higher education institutions, a myriad of superb visual art organizations, and an outstanding state arts council, Ohio produces and nurtures remarkably strong visual artists.

In 2006, Wooster organized its second regional juried exhibition titled *convergence*. Although there were many excellent artists in that exhibition, Marcella Hackbardt and Carrie Olson stood out as two who merge the conceptual with the visceral in unique and compelling ways.

I thank both Marcella and Carrie for agreeing to show at Wooster, and for their thoughtful contributions throughout the production of each exhibition. I am also grateful to Marcella Hackbardt for her extended artist statement included in this brochure, and to guest essayist, Dana Self, for her commentary on Carrie Olson's mixed-media installation.

At Wooster, Doug McGlumphy, museum preparator, and Joyce Fuell, museum administrative coordinator, along with the museum's gallery attendants, contributed to each exhibition with tremendous professionalism and good humor.

Finally, I thank the Council for their vision in nurturing the state's valuable resource of visual artists.

Kitty McManus Zurko
Director/Curator
The College of Wooster
Art Museum

Marcella Hackbardt STORY OF KNOWLEDGES

October 17–December 7, 2008

The College of Wooster Art Museum
Sussel Gallery

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 Ohio Arts Council
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