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## GALLERIES



### Still Revolution: Suspended in Time

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BY DAVID BALZER May 06, 2009 21:05

#### EDITORIAL RATING:

To Jun 14, Tue-Sun 11am-6pm.  
Museum of Contemporary  
Canadian Art, 952 Queen W.  
416-395-0067, [www.mocca.ca](http://www.mocca.ca).

What is “still revolution”? It’s the subtitle of this year’s CONTACT, the annual photography festival that, in the style of large academic conferences, uses such themes to give general shape to its content, but enough leeway to allow for a diversity of approaches. “Still revolution” is indeed vague, and seems intended foremost as a pun, “still” denoting both the image photography produces – and thus the ironic notion of photos, frozen moments in time, inspiring change –

as well as continuance: even after all these years, photos keep on signifying revolution, be it social or technological.

These loose and even contestable ideas find an accordingly shaky home at the festival’s titular group show at MOCCA, which, as in previous years, brings together many respected international names in the medium. At the very least, in terms of the lengths to which curators David Liss and Bonnie Rubenstein have gone to secure these names, the show gives an intriguing window into the ambivalent place photography now holds in contemporary art. Brit Idris Khan, for instance, begins the show with his unimaginative cubist renderings of Eadweard Muybridge’s figure studies, and continues it with two large-format structuralist works, in which every page of, respectively, the Qur’an and Bach’s suites are superimposed on top of each other. Khan demonstrates how young conceptualists are using analog photography as a way to symbolize artistic and scientific process. The connection to revolution is unclear, even comical, given the inward-looking nature of the work, a condition that characterizes other participating artists like Walead Beshty and, to a lesser extent, Trevor Paglen.

Leave it to a Magnum photographer to address the true nature of photography’s revolution, which in large part remains unchanged. Mikhael Subotzky is from South Africa, and takes pictures of Apartheid’s ugly legacy. His work here concentrates on prisons, one series pertaining to the isolated town of Beaufort West, which has a prison at its centre, and another—the exhibit’s most remarkable effort—an overcrowded roomful of inmates at Johannesburg’s Pollsmoor Maximum Security Prison, taken in a stunning panoramic view. The trick here is both the documentary and metaphorical function of the images – not a novel combination, to be sure, but the balance of which takes a great deal of labour and sensitivity. One doesn’t see the inmates as objects, but one sees their situation as a kind of body, one that speaks confrontationally but remains, disturbingly, still.

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