The eye is quicker than the hand

Through October 7, you'll have the chance to see the photographic works of Michael Bishop and Mark McFadden. I went to a deserted reception, but I hope more people will get to see it. The Creative Photography Gallery, where these two men's works are being shown, (120 Mass Ave, 3rd floor, philistine's) is a neglected hotspot.

Our exhibit is appropriately entitled Sleight of Eye, an exploration of two photographers' work in the realm of "slavery photography." Both men work in colour, using photographic images to push the definitive limits of reality as perceived through "concrete" means, such as photography. Presuming that the photographer is the ultimate artist, these artists proceed to suspend the reality that the camera perceives actualities, fully McFadden and Bishop photograph real images so contrived that our definition of reality is undermined. Only through the photographic medium, which is monitored so "familiar," the photographer can bring reality to life. We are given an intimate picture of what is going on, not what is said. The images are so real, that one is able to feel the emotions of the subject.

Bishop's work is more direct, less subtle. His images suggest by snapshots from a photo album, but his subjects are revealing, as are his use of intense, heavy colour. Bishop probes manufactured, enveloping, and man-made "control" over the environment: roads, cars, signs. These photos are beyond more recording -- the images are lurid and expressive, the colours modified to produce a feeling of heat and density, of the intensity of the object itself as it is photographed, of the omnipresence of the photographic object. Bishop does not disturb the environment, but he alters areas of colour and concentration in order to focus our attention. While the pictures are "aranged," they radiate a sense of super- realism, purposing more than their lurid form than their offbeat content. McFadden's work pushes the form-content question even further. He constructs bizarre "environments" using dimensional distortion, depth of field rearrangements, and illusions contrived with colour. He pairs all his images, yet neither image in any pair establishes a base-line for comparison with reality. While Bishop creates the photographs equivalent of painting's "photorealism," McFadden sets up such disconcerting sequences that one is left wondering in being photographed. Both artists suspend their subjects (the term is loosely applicable) from any context, thereby rendering the photographs even more "illusive."

Sleight of Eye is a challenging approach to fine arts photography and a directive which may prove more important in the future, after the exhaustion of the realistic inquiry and the "treated" image indulgences of the last decade. These photographs admit that we do not see in a completely rational way, and that the record of the photographer is filtered through his own intellect. The photographic direction represented is toward a more painterly phase, and yet there is no loss of photographs form through abstraction.

Mr. Bishop is a visiting lecturer at the MIT Creative Photography Gallery this term. He will be working with both undergraduate and graduate students. The Gallery is open from 12-5pm weekdays, 10am to 6pm on Saturday, and noon to 6pm on Sundays. Admission is free.