

# The 2012 Baum Award

for Emerging American Photographers



ERIC WILLIAM CARROLL

MAY 4 – JUNE 30, 2012

**Sean McFarland:** You make photographs. Did you choose photography as a medium to make art because you can't draw or paint?

**Eric William Carroll:** Honestly, drawing and painting weren't even options for me, as I assumed I'd be terrible at them, so my attraction to photography was pretty strong from the start. However, I did start deconstructing the photographic form pretty early due to my struggles in making a nice 'straight' photograph. Sculpture, collage, and appropriation were all strategies I employed partially because I felt I had more room for error and exploration.

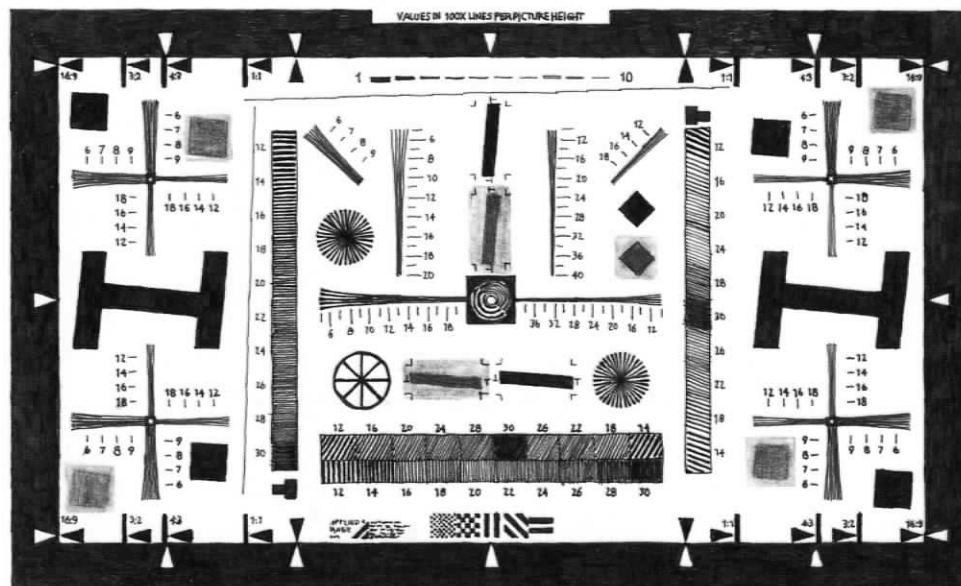
**SM:** Photography has been around for close to 200 years. In that time it's gone through many changes; technological, its role as an art, its role in making record of history. How do the changes in how pictures are made inform your work?

**EWC:** Because it's such a technologically driven medium, the photographic process has always played a big role in pretty much any discussion on the topic. That said, I desperately avoid the conventional discussions, like film vs. digital, that seem to dominate the arena. Instead, I try to pick and choose small but specific examples of the process that seem metaphorically rich and can be applied to bigger questions like, what do we expect from photography, and why is its use so widespread? Whenever a big change such as the transition from film to digital happens within the medium—it's not the change that is important, but rather the act of transition—it opens up a small window for these larger questions to be asked. It's like when there is a shift change with the security guards at the bank—that's the best time to rob the bank. I'm sure the transition from unique Daguerreotypes to the unlimited copies of Calotypes was an equally important sea change, but the medium was so young at that point it would've been absurd to ask if it was already dead.

**SM:** In *On Photography* (1977), Susan Sontag states, "Recently, photography has become almost as widely practiced an amusement as sex and dancing—which means that, like every mass art form, photography is not practiced by most people as art. It is mainly a social rite, a defense against anxiety, and a tool of power". This reminds me that really everyone makes pictures now, but where do they end up? What is their purpose? It makes me wonder how these changes will affect one of the most universal places where pictures end up—the family album.

**EWC:** It's a great paradox, because at this moment we're generating more pictures, more memories, and more information than ever before—and supposedly saving it all on our computers or trusting it with corporations such as Facebook and Google. The problem is, we're generating so much information that it becomes nearly impossible

to go back and search for something specific. The importance of the family album was not the preservation it offered, but rather the editing. In the album's case, these images were most likely pulled from a shoebox packed with photographs, and a select few were separated and elevated above all the rest. And in the end, those are the images we tend to remember most. For me, it's not the amount of pictures that are being made, but the lack of thoughtful curating and editing that will prove most problematic for the future of the family album. The irony reminds me of Borges' story about a map made at a 1:1 scale—saving everything is just as effective as saving nothing.



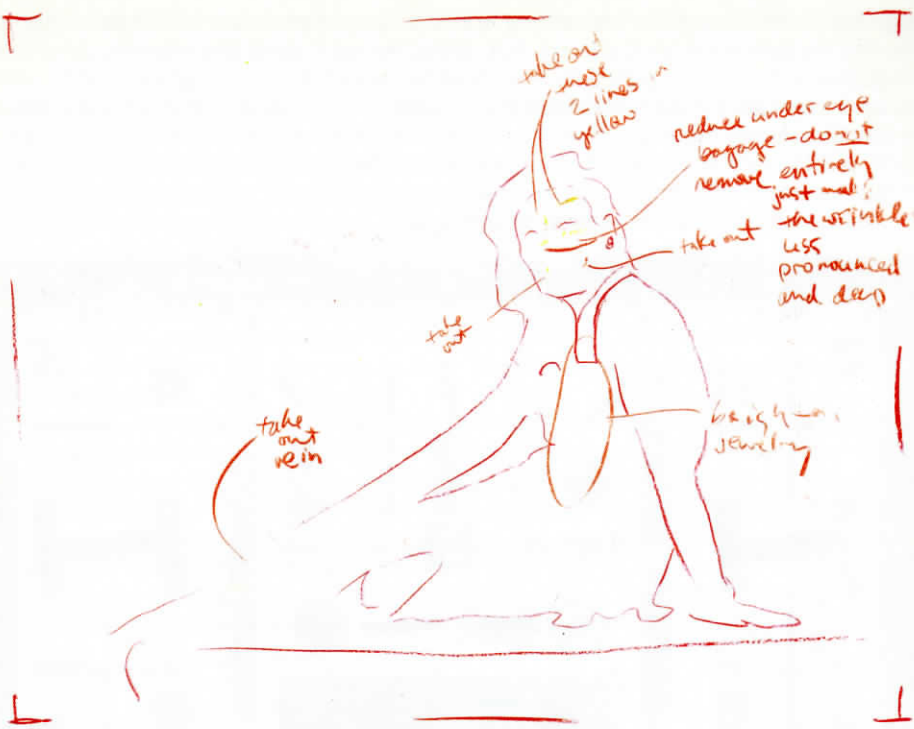
**SM:** It seems the need to document has almost taken the act of thoughtfulness out of some picture making, especially those taken of family and friends with the intention of becoming some kind of long lasting memory. This points to the human element ever present in your work—the inevitable mistakes and shortcomings of photography. It makes me wonder if we're moving farther away or getting closer to remembering and recording our lives with pictures as we tend to rarely hold them in our hands as we once did—like the first photographs made by Daguerre and Talbot.

**EWC:** Yes, I've definitely noticed the trend of 'automatic recording' on the rise. People are taking pictures of who they're with, where they're at, and what they're eating without any discretion. I think the big shift is that instead of generating pictures to save, we're making pictures to share—and I think this is a fantastic new phenomenon. But like you said, the physical photograph, the photo as a printed picture, is on the decline—and I'm worried about how that will affect our understanding of history fifty or a hundred years from now. The personal and human element of making physical photographs is in danger of disappearing, and with that, all the fantastic mistakes and happy accidents that make the medium so fantastic. We learn from our failures. If there is a computer that will automatically fix all our mistakes, what is left for us to learn?

Sean McFarland was recipient of the 2009 Baum Award and lives in San Francisco.

Front: *Fog (Erased Soth)*, 2011, pigment ink print. Opposite: *Stitches*, 2011, pigment ink print. Above: *Enhanced Digital Camera Resolution Chart*, 2011, c-print. Back: *Retouching*, 2011, pigment ink print.





**ABOUT THE BAUM AWARD**

Fifty nominees for the 2012 Baum Award were chosen by twenty-five contemporary photographers from across the U.S. Eric William Carroll was selected by a panel of jurors that included: Julian Cox, Founding Curator of Photography and Chief Curator at the de Young Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; Sean McFarland, artist, educator, and recipient of the 2009 Baum Award; Chuck Mobley, Director, SF Camerawork; Abigail Solomon-Godeau, Professor Emeritus, Department of the History of Art and Architecture, UC Santa Barbara; and Hulleah Tsinnahjinnie, Associate Professor, Department of Native American Studies and Director C.N. Gorman Museum at UC Davis. The award and selection process is in keeping with the overall conviction of The Baum Foundation: a belief that artists contribute in powerful ways to the health and vitality of our society, and that artists who have the support and resources necessary to pursue their creative work are essential for a dynamic cultural life. For more information, visit: [www.thebaumfoundation.org](http://www.thebaumfoundation.org) and [www.ericwilliamcarroll.com](http://www.ericwilliamcarroll.com). Special thanks to Glenn and April Bucksbaum and Jen Melcon at The Baum Foundation.



**THE BAUM FOUNDATION**

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