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Lola 5
Winter 1999-2000

Lola 2000

Instamatic

Shinobu Akimoto, Rebecca Anweiler, Tom Bendtsen,
Matthew Evans, Nancy Friedland, Clint Griffin, Katharine
Mulherin, Paul Lamothe, and Tanya Read
Curated by Clint Griffin and Katharine Mulherin
April 29 to May 22, 1999
BUS Gallery
1237 Queen Street West

By Mia Nielsen



Katharine Mulherin, *133 Attempts at Failures* (detail), 1999. Courtesy: the artist

Instamatic was BUS Gallery's component to Contact '99, the photography event in May that virtually envelops the city with over one hundred photo exhibitions to see. This group show had the same anti-sublime appeal as the Parkdale storefront gallery itself — a trippy art experience of spatial rawness and unrestrained creative impulse.

In one corner, almost hidden by a pillar, was Katharine Mulherin's *133 Attempts at Failures*, a shoebox full of snapshots all taken in a rather bleak public dressing room. Each snapshot was a self-portrait of Mulherin posing in various outfits and states of undress.

The tricky part about taking photos in mirrors is a certain lack of control with lighting. In each shot, Mulherin's face is obscured by the camera's flash, and the tonal range is a dingy fishtank green. In its unassuming shoebox, *133 Attempts* was like a stash of dirty little secrets, a private fetish that might be hidden underneath a bed. But there is power in these secrets. Mulherin both reveals herself by exposing every part of her body, and keeps herself anonymous, too, by letting the

camera's flash block her face from view. If you've ever been to BUS, you'd know Katharine. She's the director and a constant fixture in the place. But even with her there, it was still hard to tell if these shots were really her.

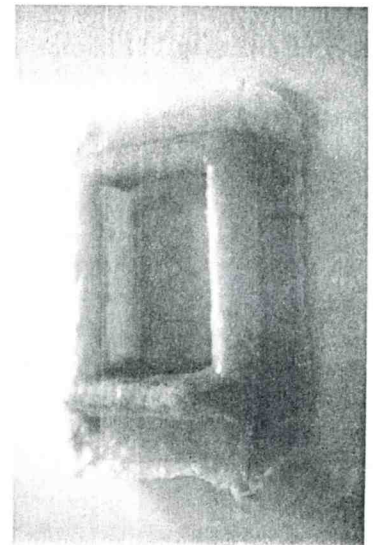
Instamatic brought to light photography's multiple functions; not just its most common use as an effective medium for representation, but its intrinsic role as an authoritative tool that plays, and often replaces, memory. When we take a picture, we generally save it, valuing it as a document. This is where Instamatic really worked, in challenging the idea that photographs are non-disposable.

Clint Griffin's snapshots were in such quantity that they blocked the route of gallery traffic with literally hundreds of snapshots piled on the floor, as if they were spilling out from the gallery's bathroom tub (yes, BUS Gallery has a tub). It was like the plumbing on photographed experiences had suddenly burst. Hundreds of generic snapshots of birthday parties, barbecues, and get-togethers were stacked, nailed together, torn, and drawn on. Like so much of Griffin's work, it was a great display of

how our compulsive documenting of events mediates so many collective experiences.

Shinobu Akimoto's small photographs, also in abundance, rescripted the idea of the personal photograph. He documented parts of a bathroom — a soap dish, plumbing fixtures, etc. — to make these innocuous details read collectively as fragments of a bigger profile. He also grouped them by subject, binding them together with rubber bands. You had to separate each bundle for a personal view, which was an effective way of violating that gallery code of handling work, as well as rewarding us with a chance to assert our own input by reassembling them.

The crux of Contact '99 was the reminder that the photographic image is everywhere, not just in galleries and museums, but everywhere you look — billboards, magazines, television screens, newspapers, family albums. This year, Contact had exhibition locations everywhere, from the Jane Corkin Gallery to Sal's Tattoo & Barber Shop. Viewing so many pictures reasserted how we constantly surround ourselves with our own reflections. Instamatic was the great anti-sublime experience to all that. When most galleries were hanging pristine framed photographs, the artists at BUS were using the medium as material.



Shinobu Akimoto, *Daily Practice of Casting* (detail), 1999