



The crowd gathers for opening night outside Musée de l'Elysée, Lausanne. All photos in this story are by Geoffrey H. Short

Anatomy of an explosion

After exhibiting his work at a prestigious photography museum in Lausanne, Switzerland, Kiwi artist Geoffrey H. Short visited nearby Art Basel.

In 1983, after three years of study towards a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at the Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland, I took what was intended to be a year off. Twenty-six years later, after a varied career including working in the lab and then in the gallery of Real Pictures, being a photography assistant, wedding photographer, door to door market researcher, bicycle courier, commercial photographer and motion picture stills photographer, I finally returned to Elam and graduated BFA (Hons) in 2010.

In 2009 the Musée de l'Elysée photography museum in Lausanne, Switzerland, invited 120 art schools around the world to nominate photography students and recent graduates to submit portfolios of their work to be considered for inclusion in *reGeneration2 - Tomorrow's Photographers Today*, a large group show opening in Lausanne and touring internationally. Elam was one of the schools invited, and I was the sole New Zealander amongst the 80 artists finally selected from a total of 720 candidates. The works of mine selected for the show were from the series "Towards Another Big Bang Theory" in

which I photographed explosions in an exploration of terror and the sublime.

The Musée de l'Elysée is a prestigious museum, entirely devoted to photography, that has extensive archives of 19th and 20th century works, as well as a commitment to showing and acquiring the work of both well-established and emerging photographers. As an example of its commitment to emerging photographers, all the artists in *reGeneration2* were flown to Lausanne for the opening of the show on 18 June 2010, and treated to a programme of talks and panel discussions with curators, editors, gallerists and critics from around the world over the weekend. The *reGeneration2* show will tour internationally for the next few years, and the venues so far confirmed include Arles, Milan, Norway, Budapest, Miami, New York, Pingyao and Cape Town. When they have finished touring, the prints will go into the museum's permanent collection. The exhibition printing was done in Lausanne from digital files and reference prints that I'd supplied. This was my first experience of printing-from-a-distance and it was good to see that it

Geoffrey H. Short, *Untitled Explosion*
#CFX18, 2007/2009. From the series
“Towards Another Big Bang Theory”

had worked well. Interestingly, the *reGeneration2* book, published by Thames & Hudson to coincide with the Lausanne opening, was not an exact reproduction of the show. For example, the image of mine used on the book’s back cover is not one of the images included in the exhibition.

The Musée de l’Elysée is a beautiful 18th-century mansion on a hillside overlooking Lake Geneva and the *reGeneration2* show was spread over all four floors. The show is understandably an eclectic mix of styles and approaches, ranging from traditional documentary to completely computer-generated imagery. As exhibitors gathered on the day of the official opening, an impromptu portfolio viewing session between exhibitors developed on the lawn in front of the museum while we waited for the dinner and grand opening event in the evening. Everyone had a book or a box of prints to share, which helped give some context to what could be seen in the exhibition, which only had room for a few works from each person. At the grand opening the outgoing director of the musée, and the driving force behind the *reGeneration* project, William Ewing, introduced fellow curator Nathalie Herschdorfer, new director Sam Stourdzé, and the *reGeneration2* exhibitors to the



assembled throng. After an evening of presentations, wine, film and jazz, Sam Stourdzé announced the 12 nominees for the inaugural Lacoste/Elysee photography prize, and I was one of them. The nominees were awarded a scholarship of Chf 3000 and commissioned to produce three photographs in the next three months. The winner of the prize will be selected by jury at Paris Photo, announced in December 2010, and then awarded Chf 20,000. Celebrations continued into the night, and luckily seminars the next day didn’t start early.

Art Basel, the world-renowned international art fair, now in its 41st year, opened in the same week as *reGeneration2*, and was only a two-hour journey from Lausanne, so equipped with a press accreditation (courtesy of *Art News New Zealand*) I was allowed early access on the VIP day, before the fair was opened to the public. The show is huge, and divided into different sectors. With over 300 of the top dealer galleries all gathered in one place, there was a cornucopia of art available, mostly contemporary, but many galleries (mostly the ones with “Fine Arts” in their names) also had a range of modernist masters and were continually buzzing with the sort of people who might be inclined to buy a Picasso, Matisse or Warhol if they were in the right mood. In the Art Galleries sector, the White Cube booth had the 2008 Damien Hirst sculpture *Anatomy of an Angel*, which caught my eye, and I spotted a 1963 Billy Apple piece in the Mayor Gallery booth.

Hiroshi Sugimoto’s *Lightning Fields* were a highlight, and wall-sized Cindy Shermans dominated the Metro Pictures booth. Cory Arcangel’s colourful works explore the art/technology interface; he creates digital colour fields using Photoshop CS. There was Kiwi representation in Art Statements – the emerging artists sector – where Michael Lett had a booth for the sixth year running and this year he presented a new video work by Sriwhana Spong. There were also some tangential Kiwi connections in the adjacent Art Unlimited sector, where major galleries were invited to present larger scale installations. Recent Elam artists in residence, Superflex, presented a film of a meticulously reproduced McDonald’s restaurant



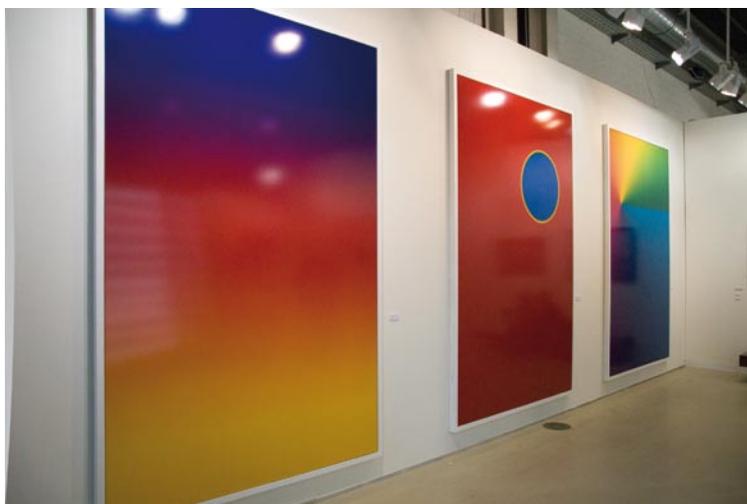
Damien Hirst’s *Anatomy of an Angel* at White Cube, Art Basel 41



Sriwhana Spong, *Lethwards*, 2010. Dual projection, digital video and 35mm film, 3.50min, edition of three. Courtesy of the artist and Michael Lett

being flooded with water. My favourite piece in the Art Unlimited sector was *Black Painted Light*, an installation of a large bank of fluorescent tubes painted with thick black paint, with only small specks of light visible through flakes in the paint. It was presented in a semi-enclosed space so the bank of fluoros generated a tremendous amount of heat, which became obvious only as one walked closer – it literally radiated energy. I initially thought I might be looking at a Bill Culbert and Ralph Hotere collaboration and was interested to see the artist was Canadian Andrew Dadson.

Before returning home I visited the Rencontres d'Arles, one of the major festivals of photography in Europe, which runs from July to September in the city of Arles in the south of France, and incorporates 50 events. The exhibitions are scattered around venues throughout Arles, and in 2010 were divided into six "Promenades" or trails, plus the "Hors Promenade" or Off-Trail section and the "Rencontres", which included evening screenings, seminars, workshops and portfolio reviews. A compact touring version of *reGeneration2* was included in the "Promenade des passages de témoins" or Changeover Trail, and *reGen2* exhibitors were given passes to the festival. In contrast to Art Basel, which has an accent on commercial galleries, the Rencontres comprise mostly curated shows.



Cory Arcangel's Photoshop CS digital constructions at Art Basel 41

The charm of Arles in summer, and a timetable measured in months rather than days, gives the Rencontres a relaxed atmosphere that contrasts with the intensity of Art Basel. One show I particularly enjoyed was Hans Peter Feldmann's *100 years*. Best known for using found imagery, here Feldmann has made a series of 101 portraits of family and friends each at a different age – from 0 to 100 years. A simple idea, with surprising impact. One of the most popular and interactive shows was *Shoot! Existential Photography*, an exhibition based around the phenomenon of the funfair photo shooting gallery, where participants shot at a target, and if they hit the bullseye, a camera was triggered that "shot" the shooter. Visitors to the show could see works by artists on this theme, then try their luck at a shooting gallery set up in the exhibition. With a bullseye on the second shot, this visitor "succeeded in combining photographic embodiment with symbolic annihilation", which seemed an appropriately existential way to conclude the trip.



Geoffrey H. Short hits the bullseye