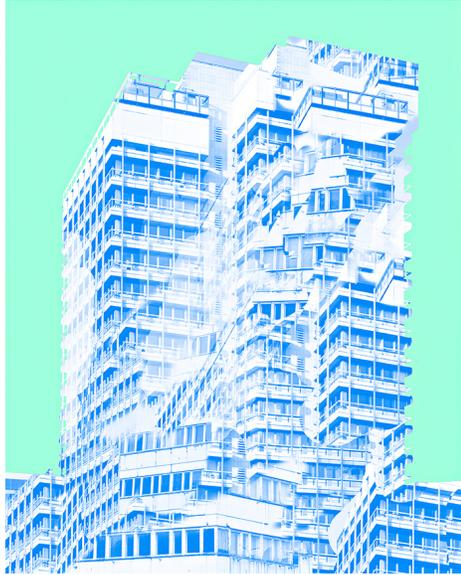


PAPER JOURNAL

In Conversation: Daniel Everett and John Houck

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Study III, from the series *New Existence*, Daniel Everett



John Houck

Daniel Everett (DE): Hi John, are you around?

John Houck (JH): Hi Daniel, how are you?

DE: I'm doing alright. Feeling unproductive, but alright. Do you have a little bit of time?

JH: I do, let's do it

DE: Ok great! So a few months ago I met [Lucas Blalock](#) and you came up in the conversation. I was trying to put together how I first met you, but for some reason I couldn't remember. I knew that I had seen your work around back during the I Heart Photograph days and had been impressed with it. I was also really interested in the Loosee project you were running. I guess I just emailed you. Is that right?

JH: That's right, you were visiting NY and didn't we go to that [bar](#) where the bartender shushes the crowd and you aren't supposed to talk over a whisper?

DE: Yes! I had forgotten about the shushing. I don't think we ever got shushed, but I remember a lot of it going on. I also remember drinking a lot of cranberry juice and talking about architecture.

JH: And your experience working with Walead Beshty. Was that near the end of I Heart Photograph?

DE: I think I had been working on those colour fold pieces with Walead around that time and yes, this was near the end of the I Heart Photograph era. Speaking of, I also ran into [Laurel Ptak](#) when I was out in Amsterdam in November. We talked about I Heart Photograph and how she still regularly gets invited to lecture about it.

JH: In some ways the end of I Heart Photograph was the start of my career. I was the last post on the blog when she stopped posting. In fact I just looked now, and it's still that same post of my *Aggregates* from Nov. 26, 2011

DE: Look at that! You are still sitting at the top.

JH: Because it was the last post on the blog, so many people saw that work. I feel like it really started something.

DE: That's great, in a morbid sort of way – you were her dying post.

JH: When I taught at Parsons I was surprised that all my students used I Heart Photograph as a kind of textbook. They would continually refer to photographers featured on the blog and knew it inside and out; it was the centre of something quite important.

DE: Yeah, I don't know that I fully recognised the significance at the time, but looking back I can certainly see the impact. I know it helped me quite a bit personally and ended up getting me in a bunch of exhibitions. Also, it really enlarged my sense of possibility within photography and exposed me to a ton of artists I still really admire. Do you feel like we are living through a turning point in photography, or is this something every generation goes through?

JH: I do think every generation goes through some fundamental shifts in perception, but each one is similar yet different. The shift the internet has brought about is quite different from broadcast television. Of course there is a continuum there, but they are different models and encourage a different sense of the world. Our metaphors are different than the prior generations. It seems the platform of I Heart Photograph and the internet allowed us to connect.

DE: Yeah, so connectivity has changed and interaction with art has changed. Certainly the way people utilise photography has changed.

JH: What do you make of that shift? It must be helpful in terms of staying in touch with what's happening in NY.

DE: Definitely, for one, it has made living in Utah and still participating in the art world more feasible. I think it has decentralised things in part.



Aggregates Series, 2014 (installation view), John Houck

JH: Has making books also been part of that? Last time I was in Portland I was excited to see your book in two different bookstores. Like the internet, it seems to keep you visible and a part of the conversation; the art world now seems to have many centres and not all of them are physical.

DE: I'm glad you saw it. Making a book was strange for me, but the process was rewarding. After working in a predominantly digital way for so long, switching over to physical media comes with a bit of anxiety; there is something so permanent about it. I feel the same way outputting works for exhibition – almost that physical work can feel anachronistic. I don't think that I get lost in the rabbit hole discussion of whether or not internet viewing is somehow an equivalent for physically viewing art. I think they are both different and both pertinent. But with my work online, I will revise it over and over again and exhibit different versions. I think it infuriates curators sometimes.

JH: That endless edibility is an interesting quality of the digital. In some sense you don't have to complete things and there is a comfort in knowing that they are continually malleable. However, with your work it appears to be tightly edited. In the aesthetic control you exert there seems to be some sense of finality, whether I see your work in a book or the internet; it is quite exacting.

DE: There is an essay by Barthes called *Flaubert and the Sentence* that I really love. It talks about how writing was absolutely agonizing for Flaubert – how he would work for weeks on a single sentence. I remember talking to other artists who had read it and them not being able to relate at all. But it definitely hit home for me; finality is terrifying. Barthes describes it as “the agony of freedom.” You're right though, I think I rely on the internal logic of each image to provide some sense of closure and a delineated ending point.

JH: “The agony of freedom” is a beautiful sentiment. I feel lately that I've had weeks of that agony in the studio and then weeks of editing; the back and forth between spontaneity and editing is where it all happens.

DE: It's a lonely road in the middle there. Is making art fun for you? That probably sounds like a strange question

JH: I've heard some artists rail against the idea that making art is fun, but relative to all the other jobs that I've had it is the most fun. I'm generally surrounded by great people and work in a self directed way; I can't imagine anything better than that. Of course it's a tremendous struggle a lot of the time, but nothing is more fulfilling.

DE: Okay, yeah, I guess what I'm getting at is that art, to me, is incredibly fulfilling, but it also feels like torture at times.

JH: Yes, you could say it uses your entire being and that involves both torment and fun. It's rarely static and boring.

DE: Speaking of, what are you working on these days? Are you in your studio today?

JH: I am here and pretty much every other day of the week. I am the antithesis of post-studio.

DE: Haha, I'm here all the time as well, but usually on the computer. So maybe that halfway counts.

JH: I'm still working on the *Aggregates* and *History of Graph Paper* bodies of work and I've carved out some time to try far out stuff. The far out stuff includes painting and some sculptures I've been making with a flexible mould. Is your studio at the University?

DE: I have a smaller one at home and yes, one at school.

JH: That's a good setup. What are you working on at the moment?

DE: I'm actually doing another book, dealing primarily with architecture this time. I'm also in the final stages of building out my series *New Existence* into a solo show, incorporating a range of sculptural/installation elements – so I'm back to the torture of making things final.

I'm excited to see your new work! I actually have an older brother who is a painter. That world was my introduction to art, but paint has always intimidated me. Again, back to the agony of freedom – too many possibilities. That and too messy for my tastes

JH: Haha, you could always go the Roy Lichtenstein route, his studio looked like a laboratory.

DE: Yes! Lichtenstein's studio sounds perfect for me. I need to start from somewhere concrete and I guess that's what a camera gives me.

JH: I have always felt that too; it's not a blank canvas, you point the thing and you immediately have something to work with or against, you enter into a feedback loop from the beginning Do you think the grid or some kind of organising geometry also functions for you in that way? It almost seems like the grid is a precursor to the photographs you make.

DE: Yeah, whether incorporating a grid literally or not, I approach image making very systematically with an architectural kind of sensibility. I think it's just the way I think.



Plinth, from *Redactions*, Daniel Everett

DE: Talking about the literal, I was just talking with students about Andre Bazin's *Ontology of the Photographic Image*. In it, Bazin argues in favour of photography, not so much as art, but as a force of liberation for painting. He says that perspective was "the original sin of Western painting," and it wasn't until photography came around that painting was finally free to again pursue what he calls spiritual or aesthetic truth. In turn, photography took on the burden of replicating the world around us. When is photography going to be done carrying that weight? Or do you feel like it's already ending?

JH: I do think it has shifted toward infographics and data. It seems like data and its representations have replaced photographs as the claim of depictive truth. If we had a WPA today, I doubt they would hire photographers, I imagine they would hire data visualisation experts to paint a picture of the present for us. Infographics have taken some of the burden off photography to depict the truth along with the malleability of photographic images.

DE: I'm going to hire you for that, you will be the Walker Evans of infographics. I also feel like social media and smartphone cameras have eased the burden. I don't feel any significant sense of urgency in regards to the literal.

JH: It's funny, I have a friend who photographed the various uses of the economic stimulus money that the government funded since the great recession and the way the government depicts that project is entirely through a website with data. Photography is quite secondary in that WPA like project.

DE: Seems a bit less romantic.

JH: I'm afraid my photos tell us little about data.

DE: Probably better that way.

JH: Where does this predilection for the architectural and organised come from? It's certainly something that struck me immediately when I first saw your work and something that I very much identified with.

DE: Maybe a longing for clarity. In certain ways, I feel like a modernism apologist. I find myself wanting to believe in that kind of manifesto-drive, utopian thinking, despite clearly sitting on the other side of history. A control complex maybe? What about you? I've always been drawn to the organisation in your work. In my work though, parallel to that drive is a need to undermine the order that I've built up. I see that in your series *Aggregates* as well.

JH: That is a complicated set of factors, but I think it has something to do with feelings of precariousness as a child and looking for some way of controlling my environment, an environment that was often out of control. Not surprisingly, I played with legos a lot and found them to be so satisfying in that they always snapped together, but afforded a kind of creativity. Such freedom in the constraints of those little plastic bricks.

DE: That makes sense to me. I obsessively beat nintendo games as a way of feeling in control.

JH: Exactly! I almost see the arc of my career and adult life as a continual complication and corruption of that rigid grid. For sure video gamers are also a world unto themselves where mastery and control can feel more definitive.

DE: You studied architecture as well, right?

JH: I did study it as an undergraduate and worked for Tom Mayne in Los Angeles for a year. It seemed like the perfect major for someone interested in both art and engineering, and as a field of study that was correct, but as a career I didn't see it playing out that way. I forget, did you study it as well?

DE: No, my undergrad university didn't have an architecture program or I may have. I have always been fascinated by city planning and architectural theory – Le Corbusier, Buckminster Fuller, Bauhaus. I did work briefly as an assistant architectural photographer with Hedrich Blessing in Chicago. Ultimately though, I think my relationship to architecture was a bit more complicated than what the clients were after; namely all aestheticising and no undermining.

JH: Do you think about Thomas Demand's work? On first glance, some of your work looks fake, as if it were entirely constructed out of paper, but then this strange feeling occurs when you realise that it is a real space.

DE: Yeah, Thomas Demand was a big influence for me early on and is still an artist I think about quite a bit. Did you see the Dailies show?

JH: I did! I visited that show three times, it was so good.

DE: Yeah! I kept going back over and over. I like the initial period of mis-recognition that occurs while interacting with his work – and the fact that a good number of people may never reach the other side of it. I also love the banality.

JH: I think that is an architectural sensibility there, to construct a version of the world and to not let the model of its construction be too apparent at first. I like that your work has that element, but it's less in the construction of the subject and more in the construction of this tremendously lucid photograph.

DE: It's something that I aim for, but I don't know that it always gets there. From the beginning I think I'm drawn to subjects that lend themselves to a heightened sense of artificiality, either in their cleanliness or structure. I had a similar moment looking at one of your *Aggregates* pieces a few months ago. I think I mentioned it to you, but I got to see both of your group shows with Max Hetzler in Paris and Berlin last summer. I have to say, it took me a long time to distinguish the photographed folds from the actual ones.

JH: It still takes me a while too and it's always funny to take them to the framer and watch the framer gently trace their hand across the surface of the print to verify which fold is real. They beg to be touched or rather, touch is a way for us to verify what we see.

DE: I wanted to touch the one in Berlin, but I think it was behind glass. That and the gallery attendant had her eye on me. I wanted to go back for a second to the place of photography within art today. I feel like I still constantly run into outdated arguments about what photography should or shouldn't be or how it can be implemented. I have these discussions in surprising places. I get so tired of those projected expectations, I just don't feel like I owe photography anything. To me it's just a tool, and anything that can be done with it is fair game.

JH: I agree, I'm more interested in pictures than photography and if tomorrow it made more sense to paint pictures than photograph them, then I would make that move without hesitation. And I think photography, in terms of the numerous ways it can be printed now, is a compelling addition to the story of photography.

DE: I like that and I definitely agree. I still get a bit irritated when people refer to me as a photographer. I guess because I'm only interested in photography to the extent that it can articulate what I'm dealing with, and when I bump up against its limitations, I switch to something else, except painting, haha

JH: That is even more loaded than photography. How do you feel about where we are at, I need to run and get some food.

DE: I think this is great. The only other thing I want to talk about is gardening/ bread making

JH: Nice! Haha

DE: Last thing – tell me about your sourdough starter. A few years ago, after reading *Walden*, I decided to make two loaves of bread per week. I kept it up for about 3 months, but it was terrible because I only

liked the way the bread tasted fresh so my wife and I were basically eating whole loaves of bread in single sittings.

JH: I had never made one before, but it's pretty straightforward. You start with 1/2 a cup of whole wheat flour and 1/2 a cup of filtered water. Every two to three days you compost all of the starter except for a tablespoon of it, then you add another 1/2 cup of flour and 1/2 cup of water. If all goes well in two weeks you have your own colony of sourdough yeast that can really raise some bread. That is a problem I'm running into as well! I had eight pieces of bread the other day. I'm making up for this gluten free fad.

DE: Haha! I also want to see your garden sometime soon, I've gotten really into it over the last few years. I don't know if I've already bragged to you about this, but my raspberries and blackberries are on point.

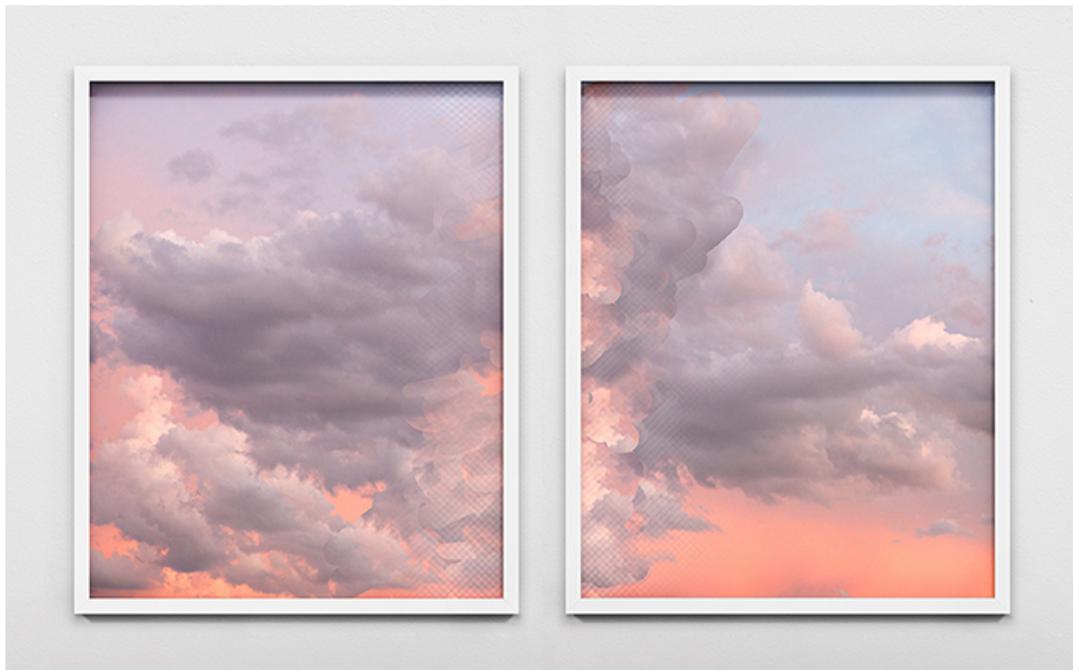
JH: Oh man! Those are the best. I have blueberries that are getting pretty good.

DE: I don't know if I'm ready for the responsibility of feeding/maintaining a starter yet – it seems beyond my maturity level. One day soon we'll have to make a swap.

JH: You can always put them in the fridge and they will slowdown and last for weeks in there. That would be great.

DE: Alright John, it was great talking with you.

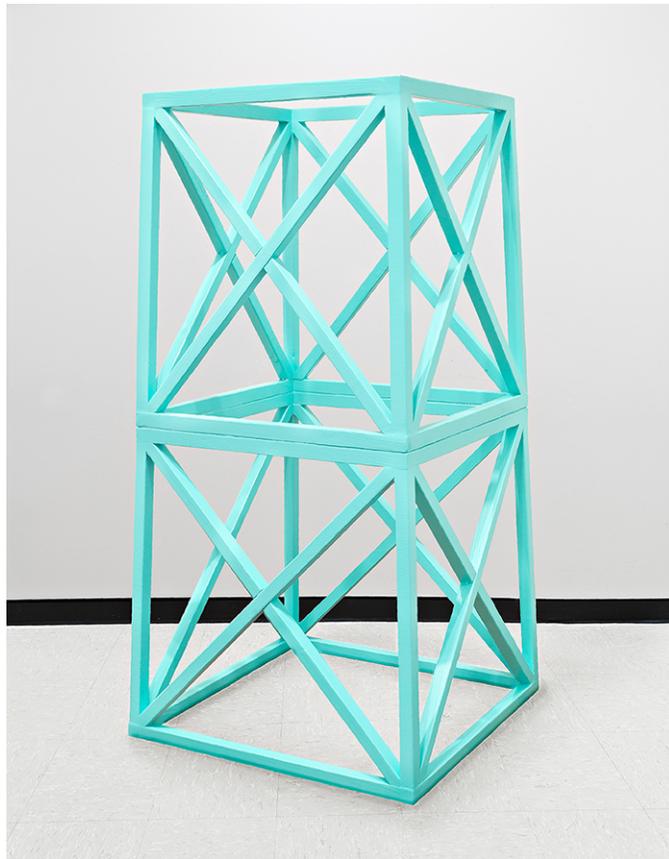
JH: Great to talk to you as well!



Sky I / Sky II, from New Existence, Daniel Everett



John Houck



Tower III, from *Standard Edition*, Daniel Everett

Jessica Silverman Gallery
488 Ellis Street, San Francisco, CA 94102
415.255.9508 • jessicasilvermangallery.com



John Houck



History of Graph Paper Series, 2014 (installation view), John Houck

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Monument I, from *Standard Edition*, Daniel Everett



John Houck

Daniel Everett is an artist and professor working across a broad range of media including photography, video, sculpture, and installation. He received his MFA from The School of The Art Institute of Chicago in 2009. Daniel currently teaches at Brigham Young University as an assistant professor of New Genres. His work has been exhibited widely in group exhibitions throughout Europe and the United States and he has had solo exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago (2010) and at the Utah Museum of Fine Arts in Salt Lake City (2012). Recent publications include a monograph, *Standard Edition*, published by Études (2012), and features in *Blind Spot* (2013), *Foam Talent* (2014), and *Granta* (2014).

John Houck received his MFA from UCLA, Los Angeles, CA (2007) and a BA in Architecture from Colorado University, Boulder, CO (2000). He participated in the Whitney Independent Study (2010) and Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture (2008) programs. Houck is interested in the dialectic between repetition and desire in contemporary technological culture. In recent years, Houck has pursued this enquiry beyond the studio through psychoanalytic therapy, an exercise in remembering, which remains one of the only acts of daily life that eschews capitalism and is a means to disrupt photographic repetition.