

Art Now L.A.  
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Joe Rudko  
*Untitled Colors: Fascinating Composites Open to Interpretations*  
Von Lintel Gallery  
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by Jody Zellen



Joe Rudko is a Seattle, WA-based artist who cuts apart and recombines family snapshots taken by non-professionals he finds in flea markets and antique shops to create dense, visually complex collages. These works at first resemble digital collages based on algorithms that result in specific patterns, yet it is more likely that his pieces are composed spontaneously and intuitively. In previous series, Rudko often used color as an organizing principal to create gradients or images that morphed from light to dark. He also composed cut or ripped photographic fragments into large-scale installations that filled walls or created individual images that coalesced into something recognizable like a silhouette or face. In his current exhibition, *Untitled Colors*, Rudko cuts the photographs culled from different authors and sources into precise rectangles and organizes them by color to create nine monochrome collages, as well as additional collages comprising geometric patterns that oscillate like Op Art.

More formal than conceptually based, Rudko's photographic composites are intricate puzzles that bring together image fragments from different eras and places to transcend the boundaries of time and call attention to the way photography depict the world. These pieces removed from their original context become building blocks used to create something new. In these works, Rudko also explores the relationship between past and present, analogue and digital and what is evoked by the layering of multiple photographs. To create his yellow, orange, red, blue, purple, green, white, gray and black collages, Rudko amassed hundreds of image fragments to fashion compositions based on specific colors: green landscapes, yellow flowers, blue skies, etc. He cuts the original images into square and rectangular pieces that are then methodically organized to become the finished work. Abstract as well as representational snippets featuring people of all ages, building facades, road signs and streets are combined. Any attempt to construct something other than a visual narrative is futile as Rudko includes hundreds of disparate pieces in each large assemblage.

While *White* (all works 2021) appears to be a gridded collage of rectangles and squares akin to an abstract Mondrian painting, upon close viewing the imagery is revealed to be hazy skies, clouds and light colored facades. *Black*, on the other hand is comprised of fragments of photographs taken at night— star filled skies, head and tail lights, shadows and sidewalks as well as rectangular bits of black and gray tones. Yellow features drapes, sunflowers, lemons, a VW bug: any and everything with a degree of yellow.

In addition to the monochromes, Rudko also exhibits smaller collages (some hanging in a separate room) that are more elaborately patterned. *B/W* is comprised of small black and white fragments devoid of imagery that are combined to create a composition of interlocking concentric rectangles of all shapes and sizes. *Blue Scrap* juxtaposes small photographs of water cut into horizontal strips that are interspersed with blank or white photographs. Similarly, in *Flower Scrap*, Rudko combines the blank white edges of the photographs with snippets from gardens and flowers. The title of the exhibition, *Untitled Colors* could be a play on the *United Colors of Benetton* (1984) advertising campaign that dealt with issues ranging from race, culture and HIV to hunger. While Rudko's collages have no central subject, they are fascinating composites that are open to numerous interpretations. He states, "*By combining all of these single perspectives together, you get a collective viewpoint or an averaging of a particular subject. It's about recognizing how the camera can lie, and trying to bring it closer to the experience of really looking.*" Rudko's collages beg for close scrutiny and reward those who chose to spend time studying with aesthetic satisfaction and an inkling of something more.

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