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Silvio Wolf

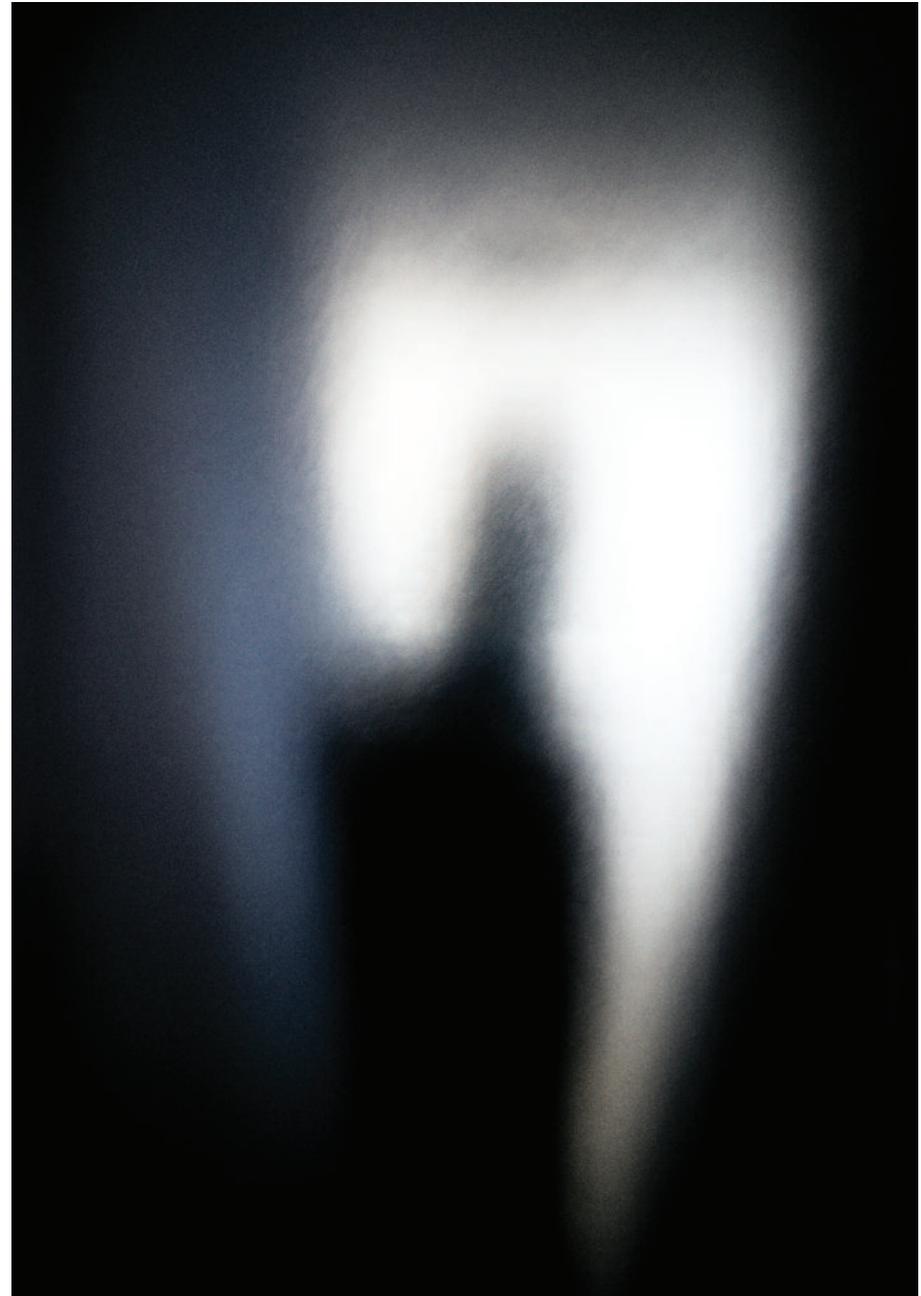
Bruce Silverstein Gallery, New York

By **Joel Simpson**

Milan-based photographic artist Silvio Wolf celebrates the photographic process on the far side of representation. He famously exhibited a series of works made from the end of a film leader, *Horizons*, where complete overexposure resulting in yellow-tinted transparency transitions to the opacity of unexposed film via a gradient band of deepening orange that retains a trace of the felt that seals the cassette against light. He has also shown images of architectural abstracts, geometrical forms produced by the way light falls on skylights or sections of mosques or Romanesque churches. His subject has been light in its purity, and he has found some of his best locations for this subject in sacred spaces.

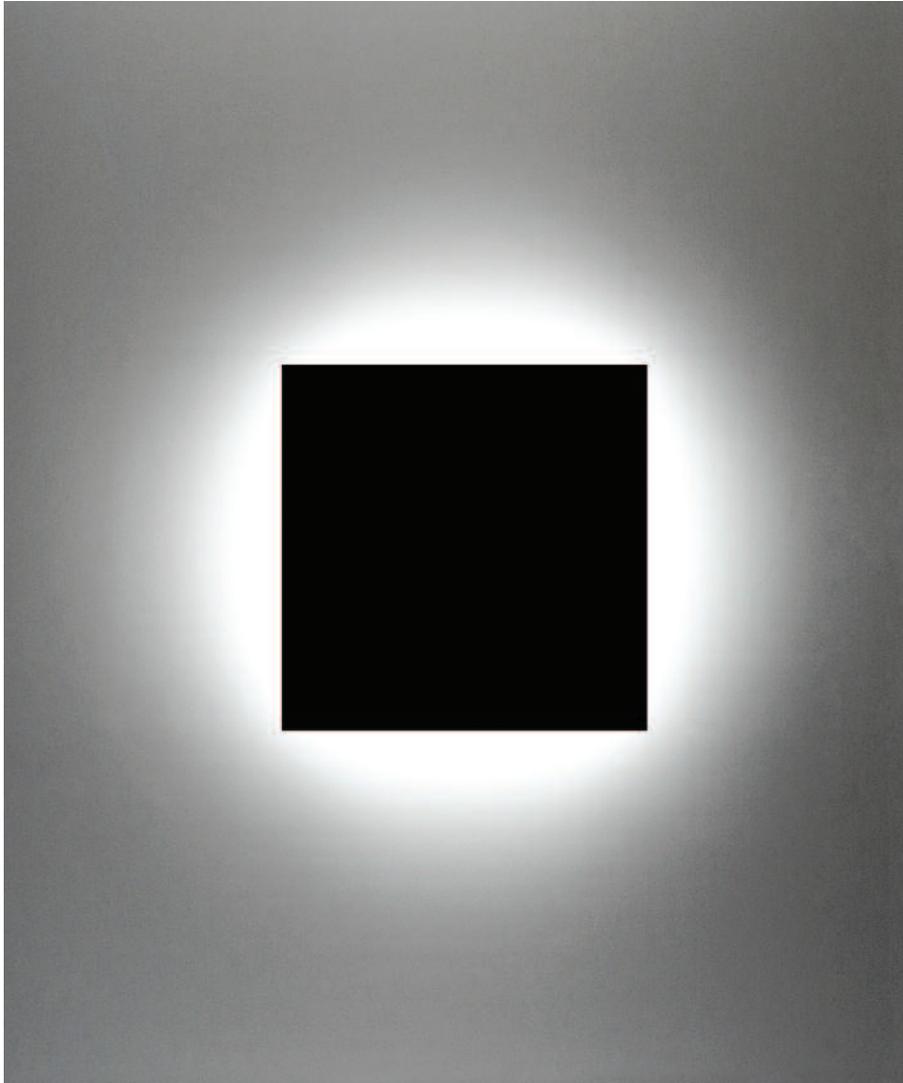
At Bruce Silverstein’s Chelsea gallery, however, Wolf’s site-specific installation creates a kind of secular sacred space using photographic means. In a succession of four chambers Wolf’s photographs, sometimes huge, sometimes large, and sometimes quite moderate in size, usher the visitor through a series of mental states, culminating in a deeply moving encounter with himself. The show is called simply, *Us*.

Entering the exhibition space one encounters, as an opening gesture, a huge high-contrast black and white photo mural showing silhouettes of two figures entering a curtained-off space. The viewer may not realize it at this point, but this is meant to



Silvio Wolf *RCA Self Portrait*, 2012. Direct inkjet print on mirrored plexiglass, aluminum, 70 5/16 x 47 1/16 inches. Courtesy: Bruce Silverstein Gallery, New York.

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Silvio Wolf *Meditations*, 2009 - 2011. Three digital c-prints face-mounted to plexiglass on light box, individual sounds, 35 1/8 x 35 1/8 inches (each). Courtesy: Bruce Silverstein Gallery, New York.

represent his own experience entering the exhibition — in invitation to enter into the viewer's own self. Once inside one faces a large vertical black surface with a long vertical slit in the middle made of a mirror. Could this be about rebirth, you wonder, as you see yourself in this stylized vagina? Then on the right is a grid of 30 different heads in the same medium, black-and-mirror. Only the hair silhouette gives us a clue to gender; the features are too indistinct for any other particularization. The mirror medium again invites us to see ourselves in one or more of these heads. Next to this is another black- and-mirror image of a line of figures: the figures are in mirror (that stands for white), and the background is black.

Then at the threshold of the next room is a very large abstract, again in black and mirror, but this time the form is quite enigmatic, and the lines are extremely soft. Is it a sexual reference, I wondered? No, I was told. It's a self-portrait of the artist, but the mirror again allows the viewer to see himself into it.

The next room is entirely surrounded by large 30 x 60 images of blurry human figures in white on blue: a sparse, anonymous crowd, but without the mirror surfaces, we're clearly in the presences of Others.

Finally, the last room, the climax of the show, offers only three perfectly square, hard glossy, entirely black squares, 36x36, set out from the wall by fluorescent panels, so that the room is completely illuminated by the white light coming from behind the black squares. These are actually prints that have been completely overexposed to the point of blackness, the symbolic tracing of myriads of

photographic images, resulting in a glossy blackness that reflects back the viewer's image. Emanating from two of these squares are the voices of children stating first names, possibly the viewer's among them. The starkness of the squares, their purity and that of the light from behind them create a solemnity that invites self-centering, even meditation. He has created the equivalent of a sacred space, a sanctum sanctorum, where one is invited to be with one's purest self. It is quite an achievement.

Wolf harnesses the Photograph, the most particularized of representational media, to welcome the viewer into a progressively deeper meditation on his own being. It is not insignificant that the mirror substrate so essential to Wolf's process at the front end of the show, was also the medium of the first photographs, the daguerreotype; while at the end the black squares stand for the accumulated layering of images: chemical photographic materials based in silver salts turn black when exposed to light. So besides the progressively deeper encounter with self, there is also an implicit history of photography being propagated here.

The visitor expecting a conventional photography show will be frustrated, but this is the norm for conceptual art, and especially for the art of Silvio Wolf. But if we place ourselves trustingly in Wolf's hands, he can take us through an experience much more profound, in which we stay safely on one side of the picture surface, while the depicted virtual world of the image extends on the other. Wolf actually invites us to penetrate his surfaces and contrives, if we let them, to have them penetrate into our deepest, stillest experience of ourselves. **M**



Silvio Wolf (Exhibition view). Digital c-prints mounted to dibond. Courtesy: Bruce Silverstein Gallery, New York.